

Multimedia Review Multicultural Film

John Caruso, Jr.
Multimedia Review Editor

Butler, Shakti (Producer & Director). (2006). *Mirror of privilege: Making whiteness visible* [Documentary]. USA: A World Trust Educational Services Inc. (<http://www.world-trust.org/videos/index.html>)

Mirrors of Privilege is a moving call, long-overdue, coming from the heart of white people working to restore their own humanity. Undoing the false teachings of racial supremacy, which are all-pervasive and quite subtle, requires a lifetime of work.

Van Jones, Executive Director,
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

In a 50-minute documentary video, Shakti and Rick Butler, writers, producers and directors, present stories of growing up with White privilege in America. These life history monologues reveal and dissect the two-tiered social system of feeling better and right by being born White. Benefactors of privilege describe their encounters with the building blocks of systemic prejudice and discrimination. They concede that growing up White in America provided so many advantages that the fear of peer rejection placed them in a moral dilemma. Should they affirm their friends of color and thus lose their default caste and class status? Or should they turn away and seek acceptance and affiliation from White people, society's dominant group.



These voices of Americans, who are between 20 and 70 years old, explain why Whites automatically have it better in a Euro-centric society even after those values have changed from being WASP Anglo-centric. They fail to acknowledge that before the 1950s Eastern and Southern European immigrants (Slavs, Italians, and Jews) and earlier the Irish were negatively stereotyped and associated with social problems in American society. The Social Darwinists used the low scores on IQ tests administered to US military recruits during World War I as the evidence that the recent immigrants' anti-social behaviors at that time were caused by deficient mental capacity.

The video's introduction presents a snapshot of America's tainted reliance on slavery, segregation, ethnic cleansing, and exploitation of people of color. The personalized stories of this film begin with one voice explaining how growing up in California is misperceived as being accepting of diversity. Carefully articulated and interwoven voices of White males and females share episodes of benefiting from White privilege. Even in mixed race families, racial stereotyping and hate-filled epithets were the residues of *de jure* segregation, America's separate but equal version of apartheid. Race-based slavery and segregation the 350-year nightmare did not end in 1865 or 1965. White indifference reemerged in the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, in part caused by a video showing the police viciously beating Rodney King, a Black motorist arrested for speeding. The White House's delayed response to the 2006 destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina and the plight of tens of thousands of Black Americans confirmed to many an indifferent administration filled with empty promises and handpicked incompetents.

Whites explained that, during their childhood when they related to people of color as friends and family members, they faced the conflict between acceptance and truth. They sought acceptance from White friends but knew the truth that loving those who were not White could and would isolate them from access to power, prestige, and privilege. Whites faced peer rejection by accepting or affirming people of color. One episode describes how a Black female wakes up every morning and thinks about being a Black person in a white nation. The White female speaker asks "how many White people wake up every morning and reflect upon being a White person?" These emotional stories depict a national psycho-pathology in race relations where Whites as a class and caste have default access to status while compartmentalizing the dichotomies of discrimination. One voice describes this state of racist existentialism as going to church on Sunday and a lynching on Monday and never the twain shall meet.

Mirror of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible provides thoughtful transitions between each chapter, which allows educators and diversity trainers an opportunity to pause and solicit reflective comments, emotional reactions, and sustained dialogues. One of the strengths of this film is the 16-page online Heart to Heart™ conversation guide (http://www.world-trust.org/MWV_CGuide.pdf), which is based on transformational learning. Educators and diversity trainers have the option to use segments of the 50-minute video or treat it holistically in a 3-5 hour long interactive workshop. Conversational support, definitions, and suggestions for engaging viewers include dialogue, mind-body learning, silence, journaling, active listening, building community, and handling conflict. A detailed script helps educators, facilitators, viewers, and participants work through a dialogue where every statement and feeling is confidential, honored, and respected. A progressive strategy of finding stories, making personal meaning, asking new questions, and planning new steps is part of reflective journaling. Some of the essential questions for self-analysis are:

1. As a White person are you curious about race, racism, culture, and White privilege in the USA?
2. As a person of color what feelings do you have about internalized racism? Where does healing need to take place and what is your definition of justice?
3. What do these messages have to do with White systemic power exercised at cultural and institutionalized levels?

The film concludes with a unifying dance of diverse middle school students who stylistically express that what they have in common is more important than what makes them appear different. Shakti and Rick Butler's 2006 documentary of personal vignettes earns a 9.5 on a scale of 10 for meeting or exceeding multicultural educational standards in terms of expressing social conditions, engaging dialogue, self-reflection, transformational education, and the mechanics of cinematography, pacing, sound, music, and editing.

1. The following websites would help educators and diversity trainers use this video in learning environments:
 - **EdChange** (<http://www.edchange.org/index.html>): dedicated to equity and justice in schools and society.
 - **Teaching Tolerance** (<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/index.jsp>): provides educators with free educational materials that promote respect for differences and appreciation of diversity in the classroom.
2. **Photo Credits:** Cartoon from *The immigrant: The stranger at our gate*, Chicago: The Ram's Horn Press, 1899.