

# Inequity Kills: Taking the Statement to Heart in Social Medicine Practice

Amy C. Finnegan - February 8, 2023

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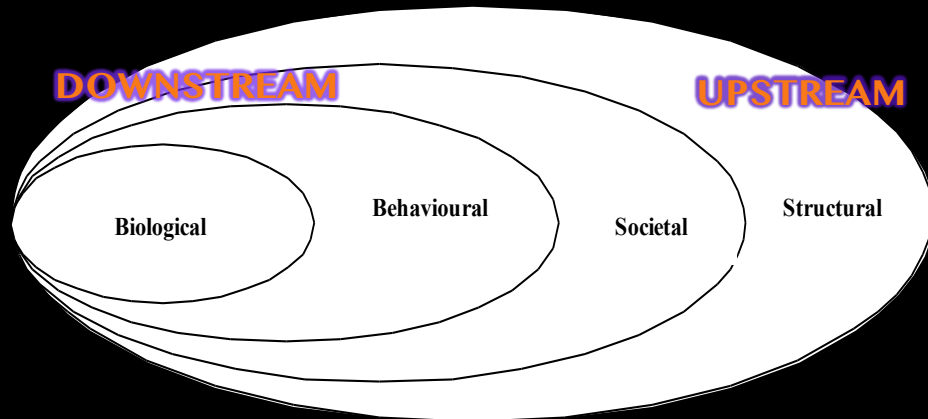
## Today's Objectives

Following this session, we will be able to:

- & Define social medicine
- & Explain the importance of praxis in social medicine
- & Interrogate the white savior complex
- & Understand why collective organizing efforts are so integral to social medicine practice

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# Determination of Health

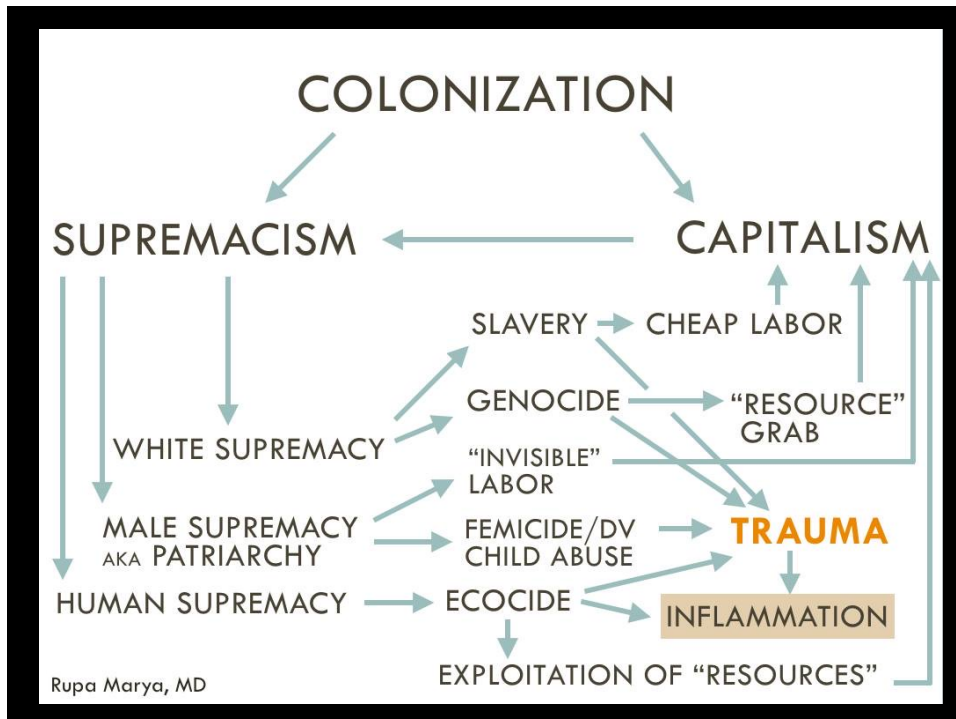


“the conditions in which people live and work that affect their opportunities to lead healthy lives”

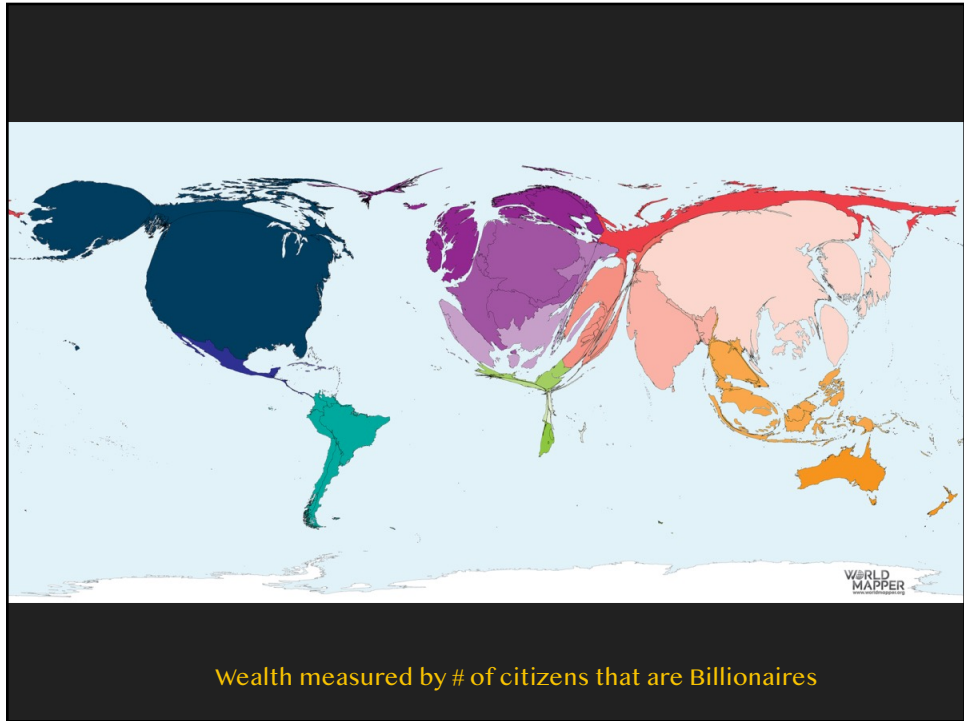
-*Labonté and Schrecker (Part I) 2007*

Source: 2007 Western Cape Burden of Disease Study

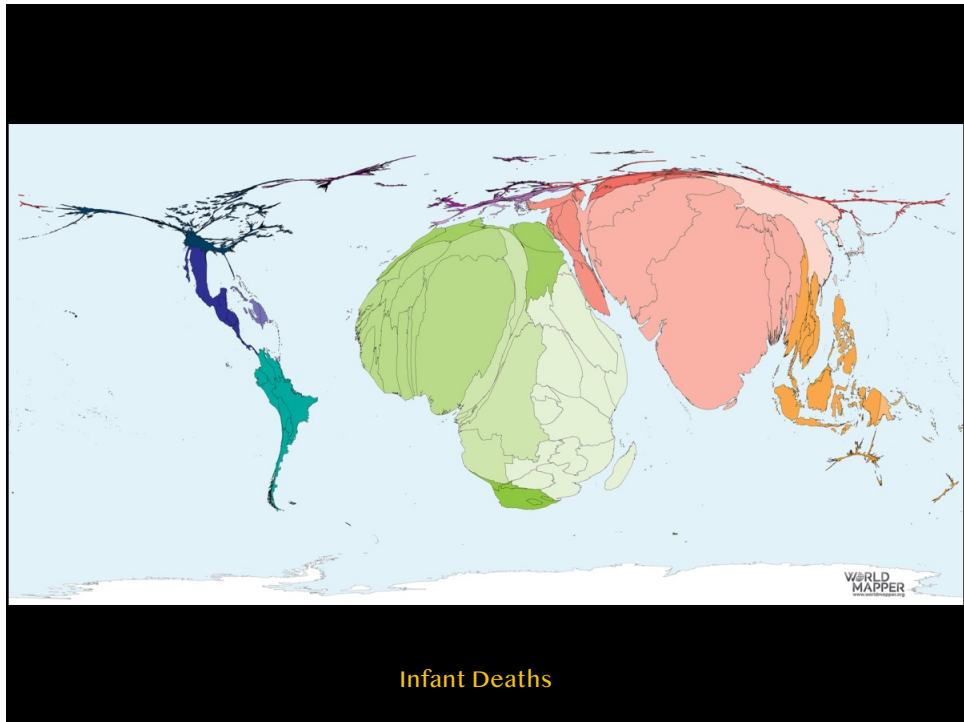
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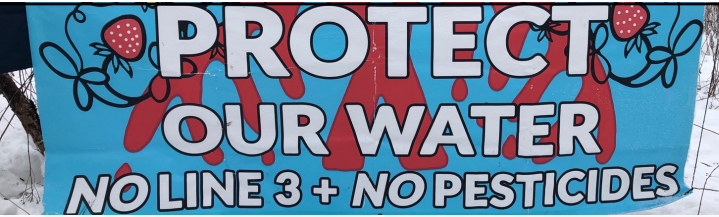
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CORRESPONDENCE | VOLUME 397, ISSUE 10287, P1803-1804, MAY 15, 2021 PDF [176 KB] Figures

## Working upstream

Mary Owen • Michael Westerhaus • Amy Finnegan • Laalitha Surapaneni • Winona LaDuke

Published: May 15, 2021 • DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00923-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00923-5)

**References**  
 Health-care workers often conceptualise addressing the social and structural determinants of health as working upstream.<sup>1</sup> In response to the racial disparities of the COVID-19 pandemic and the [Movement for Black Lives](#), health systems are acknowledging systemic racism, promoting implicit bias training, and screening for the social determinants of health. Although welcome, these changes will not achieve the social transformation necessary to eliminate health inequities. We must move even further upstream.

**Article info**

**Figures**  
 Water Protectors, working upstream on the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota, USA, provide a model of what this work entails. They are a mix of Indigenous and environmental activists who are resisting construction of the Line 3 tar sands pipeline. Line 3 will be able to move up to 915 000 barrels of tar sands oil per day across hundreds of water bodies and wild rice beds, a nutritious grain integral to the Ojibwe people (also known as the Anishinaabe people) that does not grow anywhere else in the world. The pipeline will traverse sovereign treaty territory where Ojibwe people maintain the rights to hunt, fish, gather, and practise cultural traditions.

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# It is about POWER

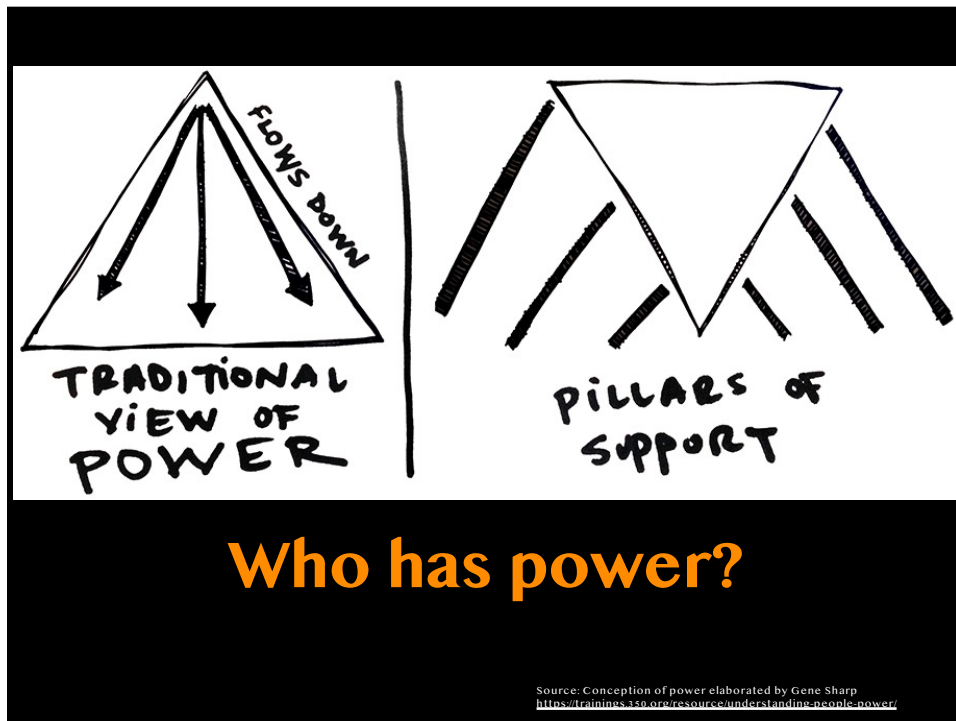
**“What [our] history also demonstrates is how a sustained imbalance in power that consistently benefits some over others can become reinforced in the systems and structures that affect decision making and resource allocation.**

**In other words, those who lack power experience inequities in opportunity and health...**

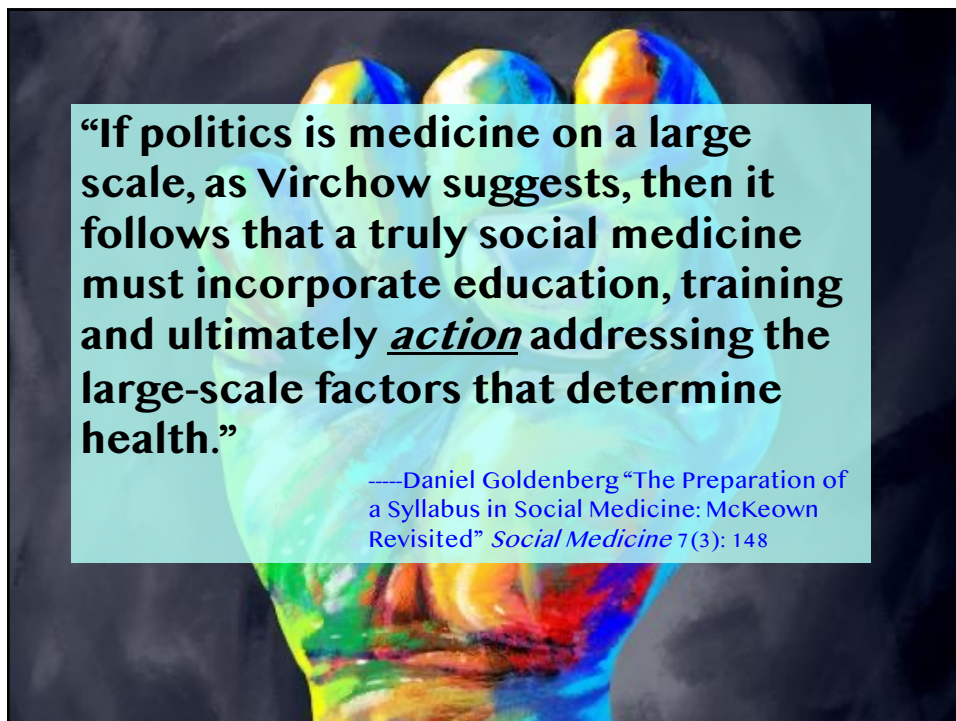
**Advancing equity, therefore, requires attention to power (as a determinant) and empowerment, or building power, as a process.”**

Givens et al. 2018 “Power: The Most Fundamental Cause of Health Inequity?” *Health Affairs*. Available online: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20180129.731387/>

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## Social Medicine

An approach to health that recognizes the centrality of the social and structural determination of health, integrates social theory to understand social forces that marginalize and harm communities, and builds collective power to challenge oppression and support the struggle for social justice.

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desire to make change  
≠  
capacity to make change

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GLOBAL

## The White-Savior Industrial Complex

TEJU COLE MAR 21, 2012

*If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement.*



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### The White Savior Industrial Complex- Teju Cole

- “The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.”
- “His good heart does not always allow him to think constellationally. He does not connect the dots or see the patterns of power behind the isolated ‘disasters.’”
- “There is much more to doing good work than “making a difference.” There is the principle of first do no harm. There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them.”

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**GLOBAL**

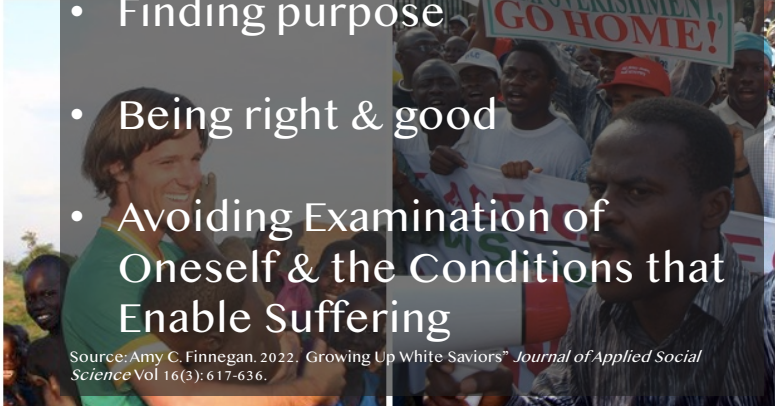
# The White-Savior Industrial Complex

TEJU COLE MAR 21, 2012

If we are going to interfere in the lives of other, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement.

- Being extraordinary
- Finding purpose
- Being right & good
- Avoiding Examination of Oneself & the Conditions that Enable Suffering

Source: Amy C. Finnegan. 2022. Growing Up White Saviors" *Journal of Applied Social Science* Vol 16(3): 617-636.



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## Antidotes to the White Savior Complex

- Lineage
- Humility
- Curiosity
- Accountability
- Invite Critical Feedback
- Purposeful Reflection on Structural Determination


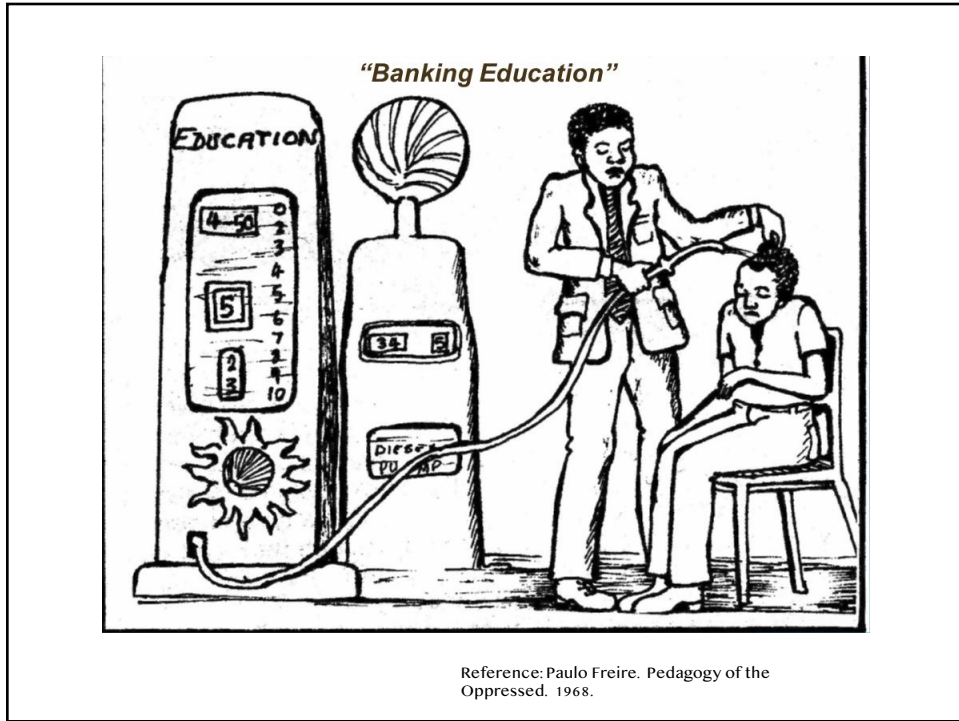


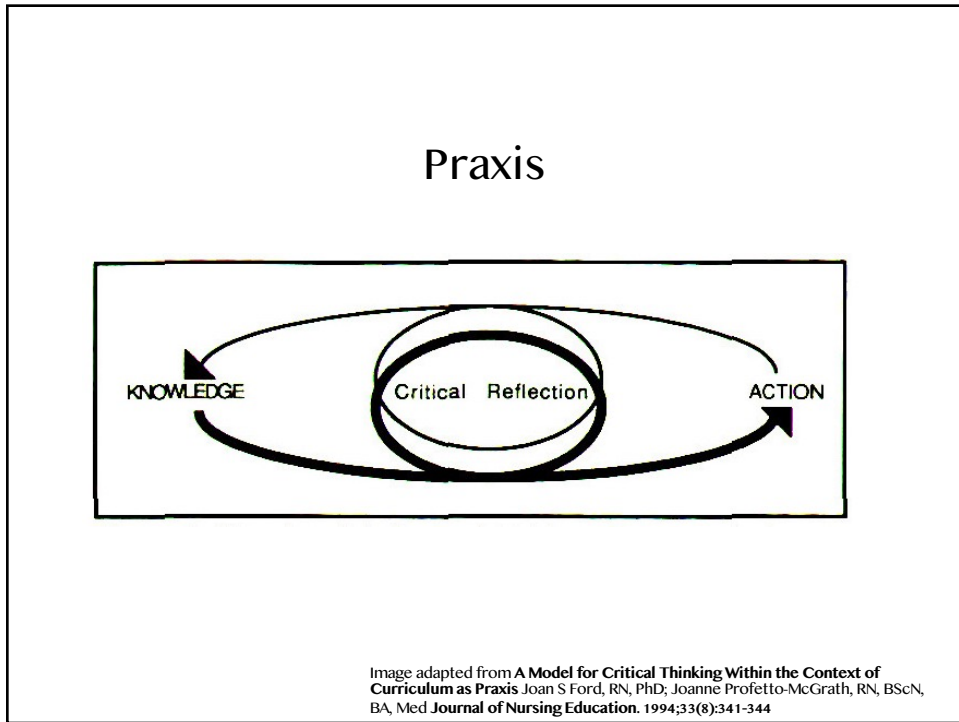
Image source: <https://twitter.com/NoCopsNoMasters/status/1366103752692924418/photo/1>

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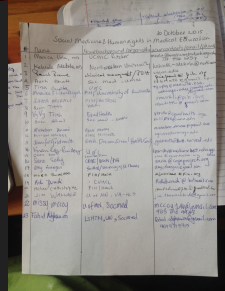


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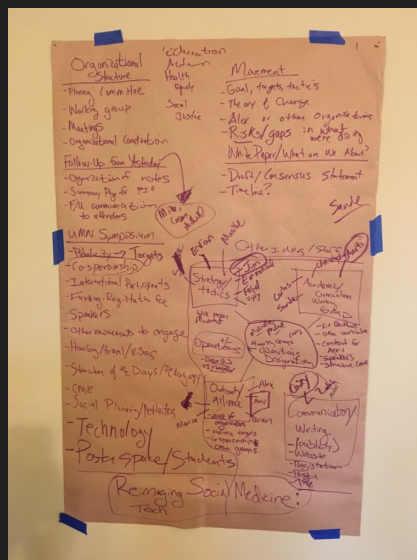
## A Living Room Conversation in Chicago October 2015



### What we had:

- Social medicine courses in Haiti (3) and Uganda (5)
- Sustained relationship with people and communities
- Shared dissatisfaction with mis-education of health professionals
- A desire to forge something different together

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**The Goal:** Drive a global transformation in health professional education that deepens engagement with social medicine as a core component of training

**The Unrefined Approach:** Foster a global community of individuals, organizations, and institutions with shared values, vision, and capacity to reach the goal

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**SOCIAL MEDICINE  
CONSORTIUM**

**Achieving Health Equity This Generation: The Case for Social Medicine**  
A Consensus Statement by the Social Medicine Consortium

**Why Raise Our Voices?**

We have participated in and been complicit with broken health systems whose principles and systems don't lead to healthier communities.

We have heard the voices of patients throughout the world whose tragic stories of sickness plead for more just, equitable health systems and care.

We have witnessed politics that tolerate xenophobia, racism, sexism, and unregulated capitalism without any accountability.

We have observed economic and social systems that routinely fail to affirm the dignity of all humans and ignore the tremendous assets of all communities.

We have trained in educational systems that acknowledge very little or none of this.

We refuse to stand by and let this happen.

Social Medicine is our response.

**What Change Do We Seek?**

Social and economic inequities are a root cause of health disparities throughout the world. These inequities drive morbidity and mortality in tragically predictable ways that preferentially afflict the poor and marginalized. They are perpetuated by factors including racism, sexism, economic policy prioritizing productivity and profit, and disregard for historical injustices. We can and must take action to address these root causes of ill health that we as a society have created and sustained.

## Consensus Statement

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017

540 signatories



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# Beyond Reimagining, Accelerating Praxis: Social Medicine in Practice Today

April 2017 at Malcolm  
X College in Chicago



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## The Gardener's Tale



- Racism
  - A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call "race") that
    - Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities
    - Unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and
    - Saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources

Camara Jones

Jones, Camara Phyllis, "Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener's Tale." *American Journal of Public Health* 2000;90(8):1212-1215.

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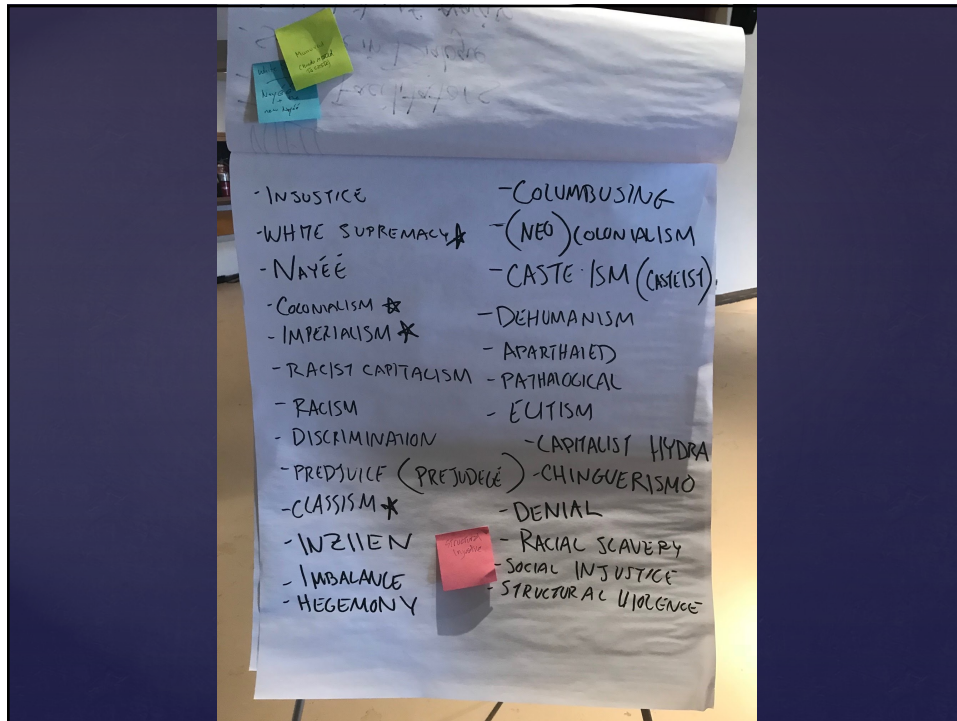
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## Creating new language ...

### What would you call this phenomenon?

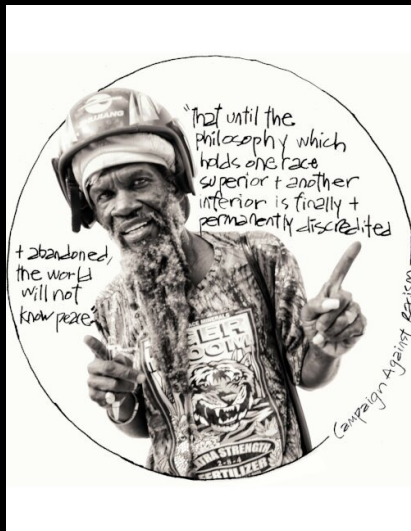
“A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and people of color for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.”

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## Campaign Against Racism

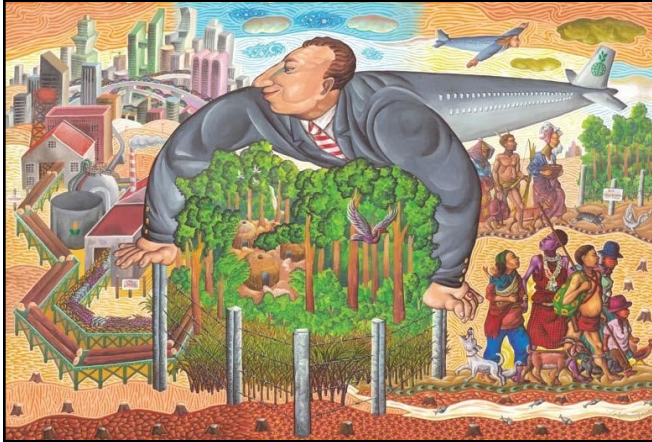


- ↳ The Campaign Against Racism works to dismantle structural racism and its effects on health around the world by supporting local actions, efforts, and networks which aim to improve the health and lives of those most affected by racism, because racism kills.
- ↳ **Program Vision** The Campaign Against Racism is organized to uncover the historical connections between racism and capitalism to radically imagine a future in which sociocultural, political and economic systems work towards health equity, rather than against it. We employ tactics of formalized reflection on the role of racial capitalism in each chapter's work and experience.

↳ <http://www.equalhealth.org/campaign-against-racism>

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# Deepening our analysis to racial capitalism



“Capitalism and racism did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of racial capitalism dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide.”

-Robin D.G. Kelley

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## Campaign Against Racism – October 2018



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## Sustaining the Global Struggle for Health Equity Locally: Building Across Difference



June 2019 in Jaltenango de la Paz, Chiapas, Mexico

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## Global Social Medicine Summit: Building Community, Critical Consciousness and a Movement for Health Equity



October 2020 online

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### CAMPAIGN AGAINST RACISM PRAXIS & POWER

- ★ GLOBAL TO LOCAL FOCUS**  
Positioning the campaign with a global to local focus. Reckoning with the commitment to the shared responsibilities of what it means to be a global community that centers health and healing.
- ★ INTERSECTIONALITY**  
Recognizing the differences as strength; reckoning with the contexts are interrelated. Shifting power by building within.
- ★ HEALING JUSTICE**  
Intentional building networks of authentic relationships, healing and safety to navigate new terrains and old messages.
- ★ COMMUNITY BUILDING**  
Building power outside of the community and letting the intersections inform the compass of where we are going.
- ★ SAFETY & SECURITY**  
Building practices and protocols to protect each other as we build, grow and learn. Making sure we're navigating the dangers together with consent and trust.



**CANCEL THE DEBT SUBGROUP**

The Global Campaign Against Racism

**PLANNING MEETING #2 GLOBAL PUBLIC TRIAL**



## CAMPAIGN AGAINST RACISM

# GLOBAL PUBLIC TRIAL ON ANTI-BLACKNESS AND THE MIGRATION INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

JAN 25TH 2PM ET

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT



**ALL EYES ON HAITI**  
Occupations, Migrations and Reparations

THURSDAY JANUARY 19 2:00 PM CT

The Haitian people are in the grips of a worsening humanitarian crisis marked by political instability, surging gang violence, a cholera outbreak, as well as food and fuel shortages. As Haitian migrants and asylum seekers search for safety outside of their homeland, they are facing egregious anti-Black racism from multiple nations.

Join the UIC Social Justice Initiative and EqualHealth, along with Haitian activists and healthcare providers to discuss the current situation in Haiti.

REGISTER | [bit.ly/AllEyesOnHaiti](http://bit.ly/AllEyesOnHaiti)

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# Join Us!

6<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SOCIAL MEDICINE CONSORTIUM CONFERENCE

PRESENTS

# JUNE 2023

## Save the Date

26<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>



Workshop Days

26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup>

Main Conference Days

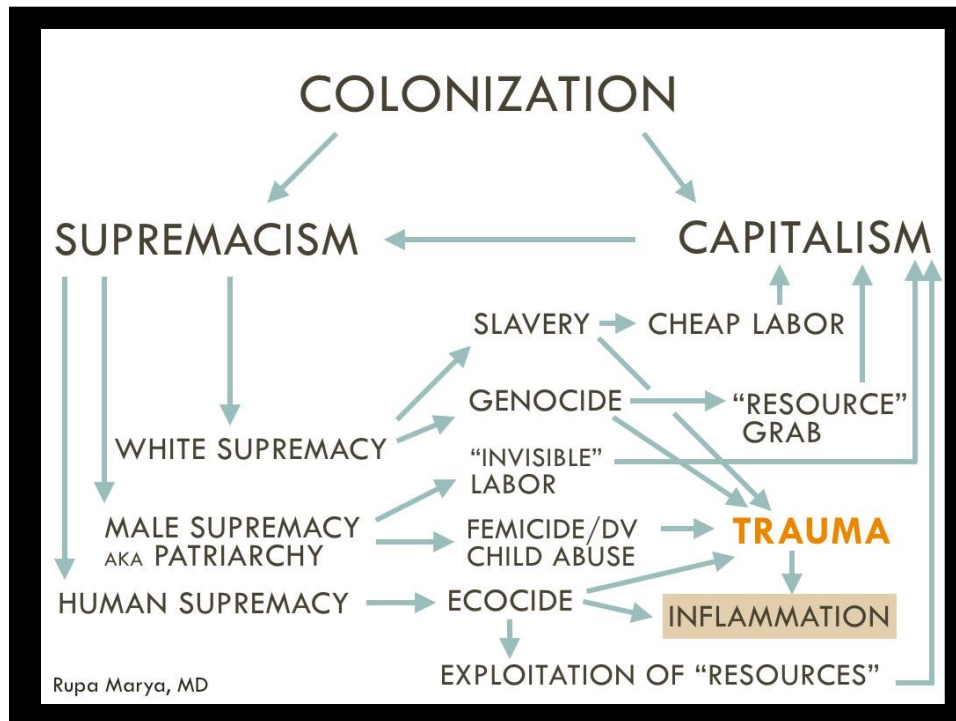
28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>

Mbarara University of Science & Technology - Uganda

info@equalhealth.org



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“Organizing is both strategic and therapeutic – strategic because our collective labor and voice are greater than the sum of their parts; therapeutic in the sense that the activist Grace Lee Boggs articulated: ‘Building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual.’ When we recognize ourselves not as individual actors each isolated in an exam room, but as a collective joined in common cause, we start to feel less alone.”

• Leo Eisentstein 2018  
 “To Fight Burnout, Organize”

Leo Eisentstein. 2018. “To Fight Burnout, Organize.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 379(6): 509-511.

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Thank you  
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EQUALHEALTH

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