



*Anti-Racist Community Engagement*  
**Digital Companion**

<https://compact.org/anti-racist-ce>

Intergenerational Strategies for Dealing with Racism: Perspectives of  
African American Women Elders

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*Community-Engaged Activities*

[Community-engaged activities commence on the next page.]



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## **Implementing Community-based Programs: African American Women Elders As Natural Community Resource**

### **Materials for Digital Companion**

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#### **Introduction**

This document provides details about two different community-engaged activities focused on the wisdom of African American women elders in coping and combating racism. The activities are (a) experiential learning for students and (b) intergenerational conversations with youth. They were developed as methods of community engagement focused on the wisdom of AAWE. The following includes the background and rationale for all activities, a description of each activity along with their objectives, planning and implementation of the activities.

#### **Background and rationale for Activity.**

The following information ought to be shared at the beginning of the activity. The method used to share may vary according to the people involved. For example, it may be shared in a PowerPoint presentation or in summarized bullet points followed by questions and answers. Another way to begin is to first inquire about the audience's knowledge about AAWE in their families or neighborhood. Such questions as:

1. Describe two positive aspects of AAWE in your family or neighborhood.
2. If you were experiencing a problem, would you consider asking an AAWE to help? Why or why not?
3. During the most recent anti-Black racism event (name it in your location. For Minneapolis, it was the murder of Mr. George Floyd), how might hearing from AAWE be different from listening to your peers?

Historically, AAWE have weathered their unique experiences of racism and are seen as respected elders in the African American community (Trotman, 2002). They participated in the civil rights movement in large numbers and were firm believers in antiracist work. They were enlisted to monitor children during the civil rights demonstrations when their parents were absent due to work obligations. hooks (1982) described the characteristics of these women as hard working, persevering, and relying on self. Many of these qualities were amplified as they aged, resulting in wisdom. Exum and Moore (1993) found that despite the oppressive circumstances of their environment, AAWE maintained a spirit of forgiveness and resilience. They tend to hold a

collectivistic view that bodes well with helping a younger generation rather than an individualistic view that focuses on themselves. AAWE have lived to tell their stories of overcoming racism and thus have the wisdom to help others deal with it. However, their efforts and resiliency need to be acknowledged and made visible. Instead, research continues to focus on the negative results of racism that produced health deficits and other problems that may occur as older adults.

### Activity 1: Experiential Learning about AAWE

Experiential learning is increasingly used as a pedagogical method to connect students, regardless of their level of education, with people and spaces in their local community. For university students in human services, they may potentially provide services to them. It is defined as using concrete experiences, observations, reflections, and testing implications in new situations (Kolby, 1984; Canboy et al., 2016; Miettinen, 2000). It involves activities conducted outside of the traditional classroom to bring students physically into spaces of significance to learn about AAWE and their role as anti-black racial activists. It is informed by Black Feminist Theory (Bekele, 2021) and Ethnogerontology (Crewe, 2005).

- *Objective:* To highlight examples of anti-black racism activities by AAWE throughout their lives depicted in community settings.
- *Tasks:* Tasks involve (a) selecting a leader, (b) obtaining funding, (c) identifying spaces, (d) obtaining permission to visit and (e) preparing the students. Each will be influenced by the location of the activity and the educational level of students. Here is an example in Minneapolis when conducting such an event with graduate students.
  - The leader selected was an African American woman faculty member who was an elder in the community.
  - Funding was obtained to hire a bus to transport students. Although there was not an entrance fee, we provided the tour guide with a small monetary gift.
  - The leader identified appropriate spaces such as community centers where older women gathered monthly to discuss issues in the community and an African American Museum.
  - We obtained permission to visit the African American Museum during a time when it exhibited art from many generations, some of which provide a historical perspective on AAWE as community activists against anti-black racism. Sites were contacted three-to-six months before the planned activity. After permission was obtained, an agenda for the day was created.
  - Students were prepared by being given a description of the activity and pertinent historical and contemporary information about AAWE. They were also provided with background information about each site on a designated website for the activity.
- *Implementation:* Students were contacted one month and later, one week, prior to the day of the training. They are given a brief orientation about respectful interactions between the site and its members. During the visits, they can interact with members by making comments or asking questions. At the end of the day, students completed an evaluation about their learning and recommendations for deepening their learning.

## Activity 2: Intergenerational conversations with youth

These informal conversations are specifically structured to be youth-friendly (non-judgmental) in the local community at schools, agencies or organizations that allow AAWE and youth (younger generation) to come together. They involved informal exchanges about various aspects of coping with anti-black racism. These conversations involve AAWE sharing their stories but also youth responding to the stories and sharing their own stories as well. They fit the oral tradition as a way to share knowledge. This activity is informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) and intergenerational practices in the African American community (Waite, 2009).

- *Objective:* To promote talks between the elders and youth about racism without a facilitator. It ought to be structured in a manner that youth voluntarily attend and participate. It should be set up in a welcoming space that forms a circle and includes snacks.
- *Tasks:* Tasks involves (a) soliciting a group of AAWE who are willing to share their stories, (b) finding a venue in the community (or contacting teachers at schools) to explain the conversations, (c) obtaining funding for snacks and (d) securing permission to visit and bring snacks. Below are details.
  - Soliciting a group of AAWE. We recruited AAWE for a similar reason but to collect data for our qualitative study. We developed an Announcement Letter describing our project, eligibility criteria and tasks. We suggest that you similarly develop an Announcement Letter to invite AAWE to volunteer to share their stories about coping with ant-black racism. We also suggest that you meet with them at least once to provide strategies about storytelling.
  - Finding a venue. Our experience has been that schools, agencies and other such spaces in the community are generally open to conversations about positive action that highlight resiliency. Be prepared to document your aims, objectives, and goals.
  - Funding is needed to buy snacks but do engage in a conversation. The venue selected may already have snacks. Some AAWE may donate money for snacks, or you may decide to solicit them from large grocery stores.
  - Securing permission to bring snacks into the venue is an important step but often forgotten or taken for granted.
- *Implementation:* Conversations about racism are difficult even within racial groups. Having intergenerational conversations brings its own set of barriers including thinking that AAWE hold outdated views (ageism) and that youth are impulsive (judgmental). Have the AAWE to work in pairs and arrive early. If possible set up the room in a circle format that allows everyone to be seen. Have a name tag for everyone. Beginning with introductions, the purpose (to talk about coping with racism), how snacks will be distributed and rules about the best ways to talk and listen (one person speaks while others listen, no name calling, etc.). Next, ask questions and invite comments. This unstructured method allows youth (who usually think that adults generally like to tell them what to do) a measure of control. Here are some helpful hints:
  - Structure the conversation to last for less than an hour.
  - Allow youth flexibility to change seating.
  - Show a genuine interest by asking youth to provide more information
  - Inform the youth when the conversation is about to end.

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