# **POWER PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION Video Transcript**

Think of a baby when it's born as a

simple stick figure.

Pretend identity is like the first set

of clothes given to them by others who

expect them to wear that style

throughout their life. Now consider their

personal style, might be color or hair

style, as clothes that they would pick to

best match their personality.

Likewise, gender identity is shaped at

birth when a doctor assigns gender.

Grandparents then begin to describe boys

as having strong cries or gift girls

pink headbands with bows. For some, gender

assignment and all that is associated

with it is without conflict. As we mature,

we carry this assigned identity as we

engage with social structures like

schools. Cisgender kids go into their

assigned boys or girls bathroom without

hesitation. Walking into a different

bathroom is met with redirection. For

transgendered and genderqueer people,

however, the assignment of gender at

birth is painful. Their identities create

tensions and are in opposition to assign

gender roles, behaviors, and expectations

from friends, family, and society. They

worry which bathroom is safe for me. This

tension also happens around language. In

the U.S., English is considered a primary

or sole language and this affects

everyone's identity. Unless you are in a

foreign language class or a bilingual

school, there can be stigma about

speaking languages other than English in

the classroom or in the playground. You

may receive messages that English is the

only acceptable language in school. The

social messaging is that speaking

another language is shameful and

problematic, while speaking English,

ideally without an accent, is rewarded as

good behavior.

In this way, Spanish-speaking family

members are stigmatized as others and

speaking Spanish becomes undesirable.

This process explains why, regardless of

country of origin, children of

non-English speakers lose their language

by the third generation. These are just a

couple examples that demonstrate how

social structures construct limit and

place value on identities. This becomes

highly problematic when school

completion, racial profiling, poverty, and

health disparities are associated with

specific identities. Social messages from

schools, peers, and the media are

conflicting. They tell us that all men

are created equal despite what is

actually reinforced by everyday

interactions, like the classic example of

a white woman who guards her purse in the

elevator when a black man enters. A clash

begins when the social messaging and the

actual experiences do not match. We

cannot be equal if we define one group

as better or even superior to another

based on gender or racial identification.

Whiteness is the preferred norm, the

identity that all other identities are

compared to or contrasted against. The

norm of whiteness is so strong that it

is invisible.

For instance, when describing a person if

their race is not described, the

assumption is that they are white.

Inequality touches all parts of our

Lives, even when we're thinking of

starting a healthy family. We assume that

education, income, and healthy lifestyle

should produce the same healthy birth

outcomes regardless of race in the U.S.,

yet research indicates that regardless

of age, education, income, and healthy

behaviors and unrelated to genetics,

Black women in the U.S. have poorer

birth outcomes than their white

counterparts. Black women experience

increased infant deaths, maternal deaths,

and low birth weights.

Many scientists associate the resulting

poorer birth outcomes to increased stress

related to experiences of racism, but how

do we have social change and equity when

those who are most affected can be

demoralized and frustrated by their

everyday attempts to achieve the same

outcomes as their white counterparts? Our

relationship to identity groups can be

the key to creating change. Since social

inequities occur predominantly to

communities of color, social

transformation requires, among other

things, a mobilization of identity. Social

movements based on identity, such as the

Black Liberation Movement, the Chicano

Movement, and the Women's Rights Movement,

harness identity by educating people

about social structural inequality and

its impact on them.

In this way, social movements can create

an educated counter-narrative, stories

like that of Benjamin Banneker, a Black

architect who was hired by Thomas

Jefferson to build the White House after

the French architect Pierre Charles

L'Enfant stormed off the job. This

exemplifies Banneker's invisibility in

U.S. history and the prominence of

L’Enfant, who has a metro stop named after

him in Washington DC.

Knowing the invisible history and

cultural icons of communities can be

used to coalesce people of a shared

identity and can call forth other

successful historical struggles. For

instance, the United Farm Workers Union

and their leaders Cesar Chavez and Dolores

Huerta carried banners of Our Lady of

Guadalupe as a march from Delano to

Sacramento California to demand justice

for farmworkers. The same icon was used

by Father Miguel Hidalgo in Mexico's

fight for independence from Spain and

again in the Mexican Revolution by

Emiliano Zapata. The way that these icons

were used are also evidence that global

and national struggles for

transformational change can be organized

at local levels. As people committed to

social change, the questions for us are

how much do we really understand about

the history and legacies of the

communities in which we work, and as both

insiders and outsiders of these

communities, how do we use the power of

narrative informed by cultural histories

of contribution, resistance, and justice to

activate change in grassroots community

organizing?

[Inspiring music]