

Scene On Radio
Transformation (Seeing White, Part 14) Transcript
<http://podcast.cdsporch.org/episode-45-transformation-seeing-white-part-14/>

John Biewen: Hey everybody, this is *Scene on Radio*. I'm John Biewen. Welcome to part fourteen of our series, *Seeing White*—the final episode of the series, and of *Scene on Radio* Season Two. This is the promised so-what-do-we-do? episode.

First, though. Previously, as they say, on *Seeing White*.

[Sound: Button click.]

D.L. Hughley, *The View*: Ultimately, America is aspirational. Like, to me, Obama is what we would like to be. Donald Trump and his supporters are what we are.

[Music.]

John Biewen: I'm not sure I'm the right person for the job. I'm a little concerned about my perspective as a white dude. And thinking I maybe could use some backup.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Right. You're not asking me to speak for all people of color, are you?

John Biewen: Yes! Of course.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Good. Because that's what I do. [Laughter] So, all right.

Nell Irvin Painter: The three races, in the order usually presented—Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid, Caucasoid at the top—is not a biological fact, and....

John Biewen: So it's fair to say literally that slave traders commissioned the invention of this sort of codified racist idea, of black people, and implicitly then on the other hand, of white people.

Ibram Kendi: Yes.

Suzanne Plihcik: It's important that we see this creation was for the upliftment of white people, primarily the white people at the top.

Barack Obama: Our pride is based on a very simple premise: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal....

Nell Irvin Painter: Yeah, Jefferson was a Saxonist, an Anglo-Saxonist. That was something I didn't know until I started my research.

Ben Leonard: Jefferson basically says, look, we want Indian land, but they're not just going to give it to us. So we have to motivate them to sign treaties, and the way that we do that is going to be to get them into debt.

Nell Irvin Painter: If you had a long skull and you were light-skinned, that was good. And then if you had a long skull but you were dark skinned, that was not good.

Ian Haney Lopez: And everybody knows a dark brown Hindu is not a white person. So we're going to jettison science and we're going to say the only people who are white, in terms of being able to join the country, are the sorts of people that we as a country believe are white.

John Biewen: Deena goes on this way, ticking off government benefits that were set aside for white people.

Deena Hayes-Greene: So, was this country built on affirmative action for white people?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: I don't know what that means about trying to salvage the idea of, like, good whiteness. That's something you've got to wrestle with.

John Biewen: Right.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: You know, when was whiteness good?

Suzanne Plihcik: It is all about power. It revolves on power. It is not prejudice, it is not racial prejudice, it is not bigotry. It is power.

[Music ends.]

[Sound: Street ambience, Philadelphia.]

John Biewen: This is a...

Chenjerai Kumanyika: A little, we got a little stone monument block here, that just has the first phrase of the First Amendment, and that's pretty much at the entrance to this whole square, just letting you know where you're at.

John Biewen: "Congress shall make no law...."

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right.

John Biewen: "December, 1791."

John Biewen: That's Chenjerai Kumanyika and me in historic Philadelphia, the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Chenjerai is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers. He's a political organizer, artist, and podcaster. He's been my regular collaborator on the *Seeing White* project, helping

me make sense of the stories we're telling in phone conversations. We decided to get together in one place for the finale.

John Biewen: And the statue—lot of talk about statues lately, statues of historic figures. This one is Washington, isn't it, right in front of Independence Hall.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yep. We got a statue of George Washington, standing out here, some people taking a picture with it....

John Biewen: We came here to ask people a few questions. In this spot, along with the tourists from overseas, most of the Americans we can find are white folks. Like Robbie.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Well, I was wondering what you feel like the solution to our race problems are.

Robbie: Oh, so just a little quick question like that, not anything deep or anything that would really require multiple adult beverages to really get into the conversation.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Not at all.

Robbie: Just something quick and easy.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Quick, easy one, yeah. Quick question.

Robbie: I think it's humility. I think that we, even when we're communicating our frustration or our anger, we do it from a very selfish place. Because I want to feel a certain way, and the fact that you're not doing something that makes me feel that way, I'm offended by it. So I think selfishness is a huge, huge barrier to us being able to have an open and honest conversation. We have extreme challenges and things that have happened in the past are absolutely unacceptable. But we bring that anger to the

conversation from both sides. And that selfishness, that I want to feel a certain way, I think that really hinders our ability to move the conversation forward.... [Fades out.]

[Music]

John Biewen: We'll dip back into more of our person-on-the-street interviews throughout the episode. We talked to people not only in Philadelphia, but on the National Mall in Washington, and in Greater Los Angeles with help from our editor, Loretta Williams. We're also going to hear from two leading thinkers about how to take on our legacy of racism, with emphasis on the role of white people. Meantime, for this episode, I've split my sit-down conversation with Chenjerai, which usually comes at the end, into two parts. The first of which we're going to put right here:

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Welcome to Philly.

John Biewen: Thank you, man. Good to be here. And in fact we're sitting in your house, in your upstairs studio.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right.

John Biewen: It's pretty nice.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Don't tell anybody where it is. Especially white people.

[Laughter]

John Biewen: And as we sit here, it is late summer 2017, we're wrapping up this project. And the news for the last couple of weeks has been all about overt white supremacy, the Klan and the Nazis and the white nationalists, and of course I'm talking about Charlottesville and everything that has kind of tumbled out of that scenario over the last couple of weeks. Charlottesville, the site of our latest domestic terrorist attack.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yes it was. And you know, I mean, in response to that, we've got people out here that are equating white supremacists with the people who oppose them, and you got people out here defending our quote "beautiful Confederate monuments." And when I say people, I'm not talking about like your embarrassing uncle type person, I'm talking—unless your uncle is the President of the United States.

John Biewen: Right. So that's where we are now at this moment as far as the headlines are concerned. Next month it will be something else in the long saga of the story of race in America. But in our series, we, we're in it for the long game, right? We're not really about the headlines. We've looked at a 400-year arc of history, well actually longer than that.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah. So although right now you have all this focus on Trump and his followers and the increasing visibility of these open racists—I mean it's definitely a thing and I think it's clear we can't ignore that. But it's not really a radical break from the story of the country and the story of whiteness that we've really been looking at.

John Biewen: Yeah. And we said earlier that we, in the last episode of the season, that we would try to offer some kind of answer, or set of answers, to the question of what to do, what should we do individually and collectively given what we've learned together in this series.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right. You know, and I just want to give some love to our listeners. They've gone on this journey with us and you know, anybody who's listening, so we want to definitely come, kind of want to come across with some direction about how you can think about where to go from here.

John Biewen: Uh-hm.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: But before we get to that, John, one thing I want to ask you is, you put yourself out here to some extent, you've talked about your own journey as a

white person trying to understand whiteness. You talked about things you were learning or at least, like, getting to a new depth of understanding on. What are some of the takeaways for you at this point?

John Biewen: Well, you know, I knew you were going to ask me that, Chenjerai. In fact you warned me you are going to ask me that.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah, yeah. Yes. [Laughter]

John Biewen: I gave it a little thought. And you know we've covered a lot of ground, told a lot of stories, talked about a lot of things. But if I were to boil it down—I actually have a very short list—to the essential, I think, lessons, that I feel like I have taken away and I would hope other people would take away: just two. Two things on my list.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Only two?! All right....

John Biewen: But I think the ramifications of these two things are huge, because they both run deeply counter to the way that most of us, and especially as white people, are taught to think about all of this by our society.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: All right, man. Well bring it. Let's go.

John Biewen: All right, lesson number one: race, as we know it, including whiteness of course, is manmade. It's not biological, nature did not make humans into distinct "races" in anything like the way we talk about them. People invented race.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Dr. Chenjerai says: correct. Yes, race is socially constructed, as we academics like to say. Proceed.

John Biewen: Okay. There's one. Two: people constructed race with a particular agenda in mind. It was not just, you know, for fun. And this is number two. Whiteness

and white supremacy were invented to justify slavery and by extension other forms of exploitation.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah....

John Biewen: How am I doing?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: You're doing well. I mean especially on that point, because I think there's this debate about race—is it race, is it class? And you know, for me, the story of race is the story of labor, as one of our folks in a previous episode put it. So. But that's it, right?

John Biewen: That's it. That's all I got.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: We spent 10 hours of this podcast, and like, you're saying that's your only takeaways?

John Biewen: We could have just said those things in like a minute. But imagine if everybody came to understand these things. Or, not everybody. Some critical mass of people, including people of power and influence.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah.

John Biewen: If a lot more people understood these things in their bones, what a different conversation we could be having about race. Right? And certainly, there's more to say, there's more that I think we've learned. But I think the other things that we could say are really kind of sub-points, corollaries of those two things that I've listed.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: No, I like it. I mean those are two big takeaways people can use. But, I think we're like early on in the podcast. I think we've got some time for some some corollaries.

John Biewen: [Laughing] We've got time for a few corollaries? All right.... [fades under.]

John Biewen: Chenjerai asked me to elaborate. So we kept talking, as we tend to do once we get going. Talked about some of the other lessons from our series, like the fact that racist ideas and stereotypes are the *result* of oppression and exploitation, not the *cause*.

John Biewen, in conversation: And then you take the fact that those people aren't doing so well in their oppressed state. You point at those *symptoms of your abuse* and you declare those things to be the *cause*....

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Mmm.

John Biewen: ...the cause of the oppressed peoples' problems. So even in our time, that means, look, those people of color. They're poor, they didn't go out and get a good education and a good job like I did! You know, they're criminals.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Right. Right. They don't have good family values.

John Biewen: Their, their mindset is all wrong. That's why those people aren't doing well and why they deserve their second-class status.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's a big corollary, and important. And you know, another thing, though, is that at this time when we're sort of debating whether or not racism goes against American principles, or something like that, one thing we've talked about in our show.... [fades under.]

John Biewen: We talked about the way white advantage, white supremacy, was baked into the country's institutions from the start. And those systems have never been fundamentally rebuilt. So:

John Biewen, in conversation: All white supremacy needs to keep chugging along, even here in the 21st century, is for most white people to go about our lives being nice and being good non-racists.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Mmm. Could you say that again? [Laughter]

John Biewen: Right? So, and that includes people working, you know, doing the good work of working in the caring professions and social services and even charity work, right? If we just go about our lives, we can have a white supremacist society without individual racists. As it happens, we have individual racists, too.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah.

John Biewen: But we don't need them to have a white supremacist society.... [fades under.]

John Biewen, studio: Which, we agreed, leads to the unavoidable conclusion that to overcome our history and make a more just society, we will need a lot of white people getting involved, more than ever before, and being willing to sacrifice some of the advantages that come with whiteness.

Chenjerai Kumanyika, in conversation: That's right. And you know, one thing I want to say, people often talk about giving white people, and not just white people but men being willing to give up power and privilege. And I think that's good. But I want to be clear, this is not just about doing things individually, on this kind of sporadic case-by-case, voluntary basis. It's about being willing to participate in transforming our basic

systems in ways that will distribute power differently. We need systems that will distribute power differently. It's not about leaving it up to individuals, really.

[Music]

John Biewen: I'll come back to Chenjerai a bit later. But I talked to a couple other smart people who've thought a lot about racism and what it would take to counter it and to heal in a real way. They come at the question from very different angles. First...

Robin DiAngelo: Oh, you know, white progressives are my specialty because I got here by being the best intended white progressive you ever met, right? I graduated with a degree in sociology, I applied for a job as a diversity trainer. I really thought I was qualified to lead people in conversations about race because I was a vegetarian!
[Laughs] Of course I'm not racist, I'm a vegetarian.

John Biewen: That follows.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah, and I shop at Whole Foods!

John Biewen: That's Robin DiAngelo. She's based in Seattle.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah, I'm a former professor of education and currently full-time traveling the country writing, speaking, presenting, facilitating workshops on the fundamental question, What does it mean to be white in a society that says it doesn't really mean anything and yet is profoundly separate and unequal by race.

John Biewen: As we've said, this episode is not about individual acts as a solution to systemic racism. But there is individual work that most of us white people need to do before we can be useful contributors to antiracist movements. Most of us suffer from a malady that we need to acknowledge and deal with.

John Biewen: And you, you really coined the term “white fragility,” didn’t you.

Robin DiAngelo: I did, yes. You know and I think I just put language to something that was so familiar to so many people.

John Biewen: White fragility grows out of that phenomenon we’ve talked about in this series, the fact that white people aren’t even reminded very often that we’re part of a racial group, let alone challenged directly about our racial attitudes or actions.

Robin DiAngelo: And so, as a result of that racial insulation, we just really have not had to develop any kind of capacity to withhold the stress of being challenged racially. And we don't respond very well. We kind of fall apart in a range of ways. We get our feelings hurt, we get our backs up, we get indignant, we get defensive. And all of those responses—the fragility is, again, that inability to handle the challenge—they function to deflect and push the challenge off.

John Biewen: DiAngelo says in moments like these, the white person may feel like the victim, and is certainly behaving like one. But she argues these responses are actually a kind of bullying.

Robin DiAngelo: We make it so miserable for people of color to try to talk to us about our inevitable and often unaware racial patterns, that they just don't, right? It's like it's not worth it. And in that, it's a really powerful way to maintain white racial control. Right? And I often say, I'm not the one percent, I'm not a CEO, I've never even been a manager. But I can control the people of color in my orbit through white fragility. I can kind of keep them from being, to put a really crude term, too uppity. Right? You know, stay in your place, keep me comfortable, don't challenge me, and things will go well, you'll be seen as a team player and you might get ahead. Challenge me and you'll be seen as a troublemaker and a problem and you very likely will not get ahead.

[Music.]

John Biewen: How does a white person stop with the fragility? One step, DiAngelo says, is to resist the impulse to say, “Wait, but that’s not me!” every time racism comes up. Robin herself says, besides being a vegetarian, she used to think she couldn’t be racist because she was part of marginalized groups. She’s a woman and she grew up poor, the daughter of a low-income single mother. Eventually, though, she came around to this:

Robin DiAngelo: I cannot tell you how transformative and liberating it is to start from the premise, *of course* I've been thoroughly conditioned into a racist worldview. *Of course* I have a racist frame of reference and investments in this system, and I have patterns. Of course. That is unavoidable. And while it wasn't my fault, I do have to take responsibility, because to not do that is to actually collude, right?

John Biewen: In other words, DiAngelo has no use for white guilt. But a sense of responsibility that comes with our acceptance of our whiteness? Yes.

Robin DiAngelo: And so now I can stop defending and denying and hoping you won't notice, and I can actually reach for continually trying to identify those patterns and how they're manifesting, and then challenge them. It's actually incredibly exciting. But we just can't get there from the current paradigm that tells us only really mean, Southern, you know, [laughs] bikers are racist.

John Biewen: So instead of claiming, or striving for, some mythical colorblindness, it's more about getting good at catching the racist attitudes and biases in ourselves before we act on them. It's about refusing to go along with what she calls white solidarity.

Robin DiAngelo: I think of it as the unspoken agreement amongst white people that we'll keep each other comfortable around our racism, that we won't basically challenge each other and make each other feel bad, right?

John Biewen: And when engaging with people of color, DiAngelo says, in everyday life and in antiracist work, white people need to come with real humility and a willingness to get called out without running for the hills.

Robin DiAngelo: Sometimes I will ask a room, I'll have a room of, you know, mixed people, across race, and I'll also ask the folks of color in the room, "how often have you given white people feedback on our inevitable and often unaware racist patterns and had that go well for you?" [Biewen laughs.] And of course they laugh. And usually the answer is never, or very very rarely. And I then ask, "what would it be like if you could simply give us feedback when we step in it, as we will, and had us receive the feedback with grace, reflect, and then seek to change the behavior? What would that be like?" And I'll never forget this man of color raised his hand and said, "it would be revolutionary." And I was just like, wow. Revolutionary. That's a really strong word for "receive it with grace, reflect, and seek to change the behavior." That's how difficult we are.

[Music.]

[Sound: Outside ambience, Philadelphia.]

John Biewen: Can I just ask your first names?

Harry: Harry.

John Biewen: And?

Elaine: Elaine.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Well I just wanted to ask, do you have any thoughts on what solutions to our current race problems are?

Elaine: I'll start, I guess. And I don't know that there is a solution, but I think it could start with the individual trying to be respectful of every other individual. If everybody can do that, maybe we will make some progress.

Harry: Yeah, I would second that. I think it starts with the individual. And it starts with culturally, and the family, and how people are raised. If—you have to be taught racism, it's not something that is.... [fades under.]

Chenjerai Kumanyika (to Biewen): One thing I've noticed, man? The word individual. When you talk to white people, it comes up like... [laughing]. It's like, what do you think about race? Like, "Individual individual individual individual individual, family, individual...." [Laughs.]

John Biewen: Can I ask your name, first name?

Hamid: My name is Hamid.

John Biewen: Hamid? Where are you from originally?

Hamid: Nigeria.

John Biewen: Nigeria. How long have you been here?

Hamid: Um, six months.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: What do you think the solution to problems on race in the U.S. is?

Hamid: I think the government has a major role to play, making sure everybody is on the same page, like, irrespective of your race, your color. You know, more awareness... [fades out.]

[Music.]

John Biewen: Robin DiAngelo, the white fragility expert, offered tips for the white person who wants to get involved in antiracism work. But, what to work *for*? One category of answers to that question is government policy, in particular, the sorts of large-scale initiatives that only government can manage. To talk about that, I just had to go a few hundred yards from my office in Durham, North Carolina, to see William Darity, Jr.

Sandy Darity: Better known as Sandy.

John Biewen: Sandy Darity is an economist at Duke, a professor of Public Policy and African and African American Studies.

Sandy Darity: I'm also the director of the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity.

John Biewen: Darity is one of the nation's leading thinkers on income and wealth disparities, and on what to do about them.

John Biewen, to Darity: So, let's turn to reparations.

Sandy Darity: Okay.

John Biewen: And tell me about your book, actually.

Sandy Darity: Yes. I'm working on a book with Kirsten Mullen, who is my wife, and the book is going to be called *From Here to Equality*....

John Biewen: Darity doesn't want to give away the details, but an important part of that upcoming book will be a proposed program of reparations for African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the U.S. And yes, he's talking cash money.

Sandy Darity: And that could include funds to support higher education, it could include a fund that would be available for individuals to try to get adequate resources to start up their own business, but I do think that it's important that part of that be a check that's written. Not only for symbolic reasons but also of a sufficient amount so that it could actually begin to compensate for these huge wealth differentials that we now observe.

[Music.]

John Biewen: Reparations, of course, is a loaded subject, an idea seen as kind of radical and fringe-y by lots of people. Chenjerai and I asked Elaine and Harry about it, in front of Independence Hall.

John Biewen: Any thoughts about reparations?

Elaine: Um ... I don't know that, I'll just take it from a female point of view. I want to earn whatever I get. So, do I want to get payback for something that was done wrong years ago to females? I don't know, I think I just want to be taken as an individual and as I am and earn what I get. So I, without going much deeper, I'm not big on reparations. I just think the biggest reparation would be, like, going forward, treat people with respect and take them one at a time, and ... yeah.

Harry: Yeah, I don't know that reparations. Then it becomes an entitlement of some kind and that whole attitude can become involved and perhaps pervasive, and I don't know that that necessarily helps things.

[Music.]

Diana: I'm originally from Mexico but I live here in D.C.

Joseph: I'm also originally from Mexico and I live here, five years now.

John Biewen: I approached Diana and Joseph, recently, sitting in the shade on the National Mall in Washington. I asked them about reparations for the descendants of enslaved Africans.

Joseph: Personally, I'm against that and I'm against like hiring practices that benefit people that have suffered unjust treatment in the past. I believe that's unjust to other people and you go into a circle and that's why people feel that they're being, especially whites in the South, they feel they're being mistreated or they're being overlooked. Terrible things have happened in the past and terrible things continue to happen now. But doing something to favor one group will always be seen as unjust to the others, so I think that's not the way to go.

John Biewen: How about you?

Diana: I, I agree with Joe.

John Biewen: But aside from straight reparations for slavery, Sandy Darity and other economists talk about other ideas for addressing the country's legacy of unequal opportunity. Scholars have compared that history to a rigged Monopoly game in which some of the players don't get to have a turn until the privileged ones have bought up most of the property. Of course, while black people and some other POCs have faced the steepest barriers, some people of every shade have been left behind. So, along with reparations for slavery, Darity favors broader efforts to reduce inequality. For example, what's known as the Baby Bonds proposal. It was developed by Darity and his colleague Derek Hamilton of the New School.

Sandy Darity: The Baby Bonds proposal, the basic idea is, it's not that you give a child a bond per se, but you give every child a trust fund. Wealthy families frequently provide their kids with a trust fund. Well, why shouldn't every child have a trust fund? And we could use government finance for the purposes of providing every newborn infant with their own trust fund.

John Biewen: The program would be for everybody but would operate on a sliding scale.

Sandy Darity: And so for families at the upper end of the wealth distribution a newborn child might get a 50-dollar trust fund. But for kids that are born to families at the lowest end of the wealth distribution, we'd give them 50 or 60 thousand dollars, and we would guarantee these funds a one-percent real rate of interest.

John Biewen: Young people could access their trust funds at age eighteen. So most young Americans, of every color, would start adulthood with some real assets. Yet another proposal debated by Darity and his colleagues is a federal job guarantee. The government would serve as the employer of last resort, roughly like it did through the WPA in the Great Depression years.

You might be thinking, come on. How much would programs like this cost? And aren't these things pipe dreams in our current political climate? This is part of Sandy Darity's answer.

Sandy Darity: I'm committed to pursuing these kinds of proposals regardless of whether or not it happens in my lifetime. If I think something's the right thing to do, then I'll support it.

John Biewen: At the same time, he says, these ideas aren't as politically far-fetched as they might seem. There's already strong support, according to polls, for government providing a job for anyone who can't find one elsewhere. As for reparations, a survey

back in 2000 found a meager 4-percent of white Americans supported reparations for slavery. But....

Sandy Darity: I think more recent surveys have indicated that maybe about 20 percent of white Americans are in favor. Which is actually a pretty sharp increase, although it's still a very low share of the total white population. And I focus on the white population because I don't think that this can be passed legislatively unless there is sufficient support among white Americans. So, my target is to get into the 40 to 45 percent range and then I think it becomes a possibility for active legislation.

[Music.]

John Biewen: A survey in 2016 found that fully half of millennials either favor reparations or are open to considering the prospect. As for the cost, Darity says some of the taxpayer's price tag for these projects could be partly offset by savings on other anti-poverty programs that wouldn't be needed as much anymore. And anyway, he says, if the country decides something is essential to do, it finds the money. Take the massive government bailout of the financial industry in 2008, for example.

[Music.]

Loretta Williams: So, the idea of reparations for say like African Americans is the notion that several generations were enslaved, right, and there were laws that actually kept people from being full citizens, so.... [fades under.]

John Biewen: That's Loretta Williams, who is a radio producer and our editor on the *Seeing White* project. She's interviewing Lua, a 19-year-old student at UCLA, in Los Angeles. Lua identifies as half Japanese and half Uruguayan. She reminds us the U.S. government has given reparations before, for past abuses based in racism. Ronald Reagan signed the act in 1988 to compensate almost a hundred thousand Japanese Americans who were unjustly interned during World War Two.

Lua: I don't necessarily have the voice to talk about African American issues of reparations because I'm not a part of that community and it's not something I can fully understand. But talking in reference to Japanese Americans, my grandmother was in the internment camps and so was my grandfather and all their siblings, and it had a huge impact. The day of, being told that you're going to have to put all your belongings in one suitcase and then move off? I mean, my dad was telling me homes were left, you really didn't know when you were coming back, if you were coming back, what was going to happen. And so I think reparations are really, really important.

Deborah: That's one thing, I've got a pretty strong opinion on it. And that is, financial reparations, I don't believe in it.

John Biewen: Loretta also spoke with Deborah. She's 62, the child of Filipino and German immigrants. In thinking about the reparations bill for Japanese Americans, or, potentially, for African Americans, Deborah argues the important part is not the cash.

Deborah: And to say, well, you got paid so everything's good now, to me is not the answer. It was to openly acknowledge, and to say, we hope in our history we will never do this again. That to me would be a proper reparation.

[Music.]

John Biewen: So back with Chenjerai, in your upstairs studio in Philadelphia.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah.

John Biewen: Sandy Darity is talking about things, really big scale government initiatives...

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Right.

John Biewen: ...that cost probably hundreds of billions of dollars. Those are things that, if people agree that those are good things to do, that they can write to their congressmen about, right?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Right.

John Biewen: But if somebody wants to, also, to just do something locally, to get involved with some community or some organizing work to address white supremacy, what kinds of suggestions do you have for that person?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah, I mean first of all I fully support the things that Sandy Darity is talking about. But I want to talk a little bit about organizing and collective work, because I think that there's a tendency for people to try to do this work in a way that preserves the integrity of our individual lives. You know, this is what happens to middle class folks and with white folks. I want to fight racism and then come home and, undisturbed, I want to go to the soccer game or whatever. And....

John Biewen: That's me, by the way.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Oh really? [Laughs.]

John Biewen: Yeah. I want my, my personal time or whatever. Anyway.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: And so you know, I think that we have to look at what we can do collectively. I mean look at where we're at here, man, we're here in my hot studio together. You're in my state, you know what I mean? I'm in your life, we're in each other's lives....

John Biewen: On a Sunday, by the way.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah, on a Sunday. And we're not, we ain't just here eating multicultural foods. You know, we're really trying to do some work here. So I want to talk about organizing. And I think, the way I define organizing is involving yourself and communities that are collectively working to exert power on institutionalized oppressive systems. That's my definition.

John Biewen: So, I should join my local chapter of the Movement for Black Lives.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yes. I support Black Lives Matter and my wife is a member of Black Lives Matter. But, before you sort of rush out and everybody just tries to join Black Lives Matter, white people have access to some spaces that black people don't have access to, for one. And two, you know, I get it. Like, if you've been learning about race, you've been listening to the podcast, you read some Ta-Nehisi Coates, and you're like, I want to I want to take race on directly! Right? You want to just join anything with black in the title, anything with anti-racist in the title. And I think that we have to expand our thinking beyond that. Right? What we've been learning in this show is that whiteness has shaped our legal system, and whiteness has shaped our healthcare system. Whiteness has organized who has access to certain kinds of schools, and whiteness has organized who has access to citizenship, and voting. And whiteness is involved in like our priorities about climate change, right? And the effects, disproportionate effects of climate change on brown people in the global South. Then that means all of those fronts have to be fronts of battle in the battle against this world that whiteness has created.

John Biewen: Hmm. So I should join my local food co-op, too, and maybe a few other organizations.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: [Laughs.] Yeah. I mean you know, no doubt. Look, I'm a member of my food co-op. Let me just say, Philly has an incredible food justice movement and really, like there's urban gardens here. So, you know, but I think it's about looking at organizations that are linked, doing other work. So for example, here in

Philly you have a group called the Philly Sun project, which is organizing with parents and teachers and schools to take back control of schools. Now that group has anti-racist politics, but they're also dealing with schools since so many of our children are in schools. There's also a campaign that, a lot of organizations, including 215 People's Alliance, Media Mobilizing Project, Black Lives Matter, other people, to get a really progressive district attorney elected in Philadelphia. I think on a local level that's going to have a real impact, right? Again, that coalition has anti-racist politics, but race is not necessarily like how they define what their work is in each case.

John Biewen: Okay, and so what about, one other thing I want to ask you about is the D Word. Dialogue. Because I think, you know, a lot of times, in the sort of mainstream discussion, the “race relations” kind of discussion that you've kind of cautioned us about from the beginning of the project, that that's where people go, is, you know, have the conversation with that member of your family who sort of needs to be brought along on racism. And I realize from the whole discussion that that's not what, you know, that's not what we're suggesting is the core of what needs to be done. But what would you say to people who are thinking, uhh, there are some people maybe I should be talking to.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah. I mean, if you listen to me talk in certain contexts, it sounds like I hate dialogue. [Laughter.] But you know, it's not that I hate dialogue. I think it's about where you put the dialogue. You know, we have to be strategic. We have to really try to fight this battle in a strategic way. And I think that when you're talking about changing—for example, this move towards voter suppression. And if we're talking about addressing, you know, issues of mass incarceration. All those things require dialogue, right? As part of those movements. But they're also exerting power on systems, in another kind of way. So I think that that's important. Let dialogue be informed by your organizing priorities.

But I also got to say this. You know, having been in Charlottesville and standing right in the face of a whole lot of young people, I mean, I'm talking hundreds of young white people who are really just spewing explicit bigotry and hatred. There is a role for

dialogue, as part of moving people from those outer circles of hate and fear and, you know, ignorance to a center of community, power, and radical transformation.

[Music.]

John Biewen: Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika. Radical transformation. People will have different ideas about what that means. And it's not at all clear that Americans, or enough of us, are ready to push for it. Especially those of us who'll need to give up power and privilege in the process. Humans in general, and white people in particular, don't have a good track record when it comes to voluntarily giving up power.

In *Seeing White*, we set out to turn the lens. To look at racism not mainly through the experience of the people on the receiving end, as we journalists usually do, but by examining those of us whose ancestors built this contraption, this white supremacist dream. Those of us conditioned not to see whiteness, even as we accept its advantages as our birthright. We set out to get better at seeing the water we're all swimming in. And maybe we have. If you're like me, you've still got much, much to learn. But also if you're like me, you know enough now. Enough that there's no longer any excuse.

[Music.]

This is it for our second season. I'll have a few words about the next season of *Scene on Radio* in just a minute. Lots of you came to this show through *Seeing White*. I know that because our little audience has grown—a lot—since we launched the series. Thanks to each and every one of you who came along, and who told your friends and your loved ones to listen. Please don't stop doing that. The response, at least what we get to see through social media and iTunes reviews and so on, has been hugely gratifying. You all make me hopeful. Very soon we're going to add a [Seeing White landing page](#) to our website, to make it easier to share. We'll post a [bibliography](#) there for people who want to keep learning, and a [study guide](#) to go with the series, which some folks have requested.

We need to stop putting out episodes for a few months and do some research and reporting for the next season. Meantime, please check out our other episodes, pre-*Seeing White*, if you haven't yet. We've done a lot of other stuff about race in the U.S., if that's your main interest. "El Nuevo South." A couple of episodes on Emmett Till. The Storymakers series. The Contested series, looking at race, class, gender, and sexual orientation through sports. Stacia Brown's beautiful audio essay, "Prince and Philando and Futures Untold."

So, what about next season? Can't tell you right now what it'll be, but know this: the spirit of our next series will be in keeping with *Seeing White*. In this moment of American history, we're not about to abandon the social justice beat, the who-are-we-and-whose-country-is-this-anyway? beat. Watch this space.

[Music]

I don't know how to thank Chenjerai Kumanyika for the time and thoughtfulness and fierce intelligence he brought to his contribution to *Seeing White*. He signed on and gave all that time just because he cares about this stuff and wants to, you know, change the world. Thank you, Chenjerai. Thank you, too, Ms. Loretta Williams, our brilliant sounding board and editor on the series. You made every episode a lot better. The music makers who got us through the season, and this episode: Blue Dot Sessions, Lee Rosevere, Kevin MacLeod, and Sumtimes Why—better known in my house as Lucas Biewen. Recording help on this episode from Trevor Pogue in Seattle.

Thanks to the fine communications team at CDS: My colleagues, [communications manager] Liz Philips, web manager Whitney Baker, Jenna Kruger, Alexa Dilworth, and my bosses, Lynn McKnight and Wesley Hogan. You can find Scene on Radio and talk back to us on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter @SceneonRadio](#). The website is sceneonradio.org. The show comes to you from CDS, the [Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University](#).