

# Excerpt from *The Tyranny of Urgency: Dismantling white dominant culture in the (nonprofit) work space*

By Sachi Graber

## Chapter 3: What are the impacts of white dominant systems?

White dominant culture creates a white dominant system. Just like my family kitchen, there are aspects that are permanent and aspects that are movable. Our work is to understand how the system is set up to advantage and disadvantage different people. Where are the places that it gives those who already have greater privilege even more advantages? Where are there tweaks we can make to create a more equitable structure?

Consider these two scenarios:

**Scenario 1.** Jessie from Mega Widgets and Dan from Distributors R Us work together to accomplish a goal.

*Jessie: Thanks so much for working with us to build more widgets. With our widget producing abilities and your market distribution, we'll be unstoppable!*

*Dan: We're definitely going to take over the market. Did you see that I just emailed back the partially executed contract you requested?*

*Jessie: Yes, thanks so much. You know how lawyers can get. We have 2 more questions for you but need answers in the next 24 hours. Can I send them to you after work tonight?*

*Dan: Yes, I'll run it by my supervisor once you send them over.*

*Jessie: Great. We'll be up and running within the one-week window we have to get this right.*

**Scenario 2.** Jessie from Mega Widgets engages Latrice, a Black community group leader of OurTown.

*Jessie: Thanks so much for working with us to build more widgets. With our widget producing abilities now entering the market in your community, we're taking over!*

*Latrice: We're looking forward to working with you. This partnership could be a real turning point for our community. I'd like to discuss some questions my community's leaders and seniors raised. They want to be sure this agreement makes economic sense, but also that it will not have negative environmental or social impacts on our community. Do you have any availability to meet with them?*

*Jessie: I hear you, but that could be tough. We only have a one-week window to seal the deal.*

*Latrice: Many of our community members are at a retreat this week. I would feel better if we could wait to engage them so that we know we have the right solution.*

*Jessie: I hear you. Could you sign this contract for now so that we can move things forward, and then we'll make sure to sit down with your elders sometime later?*

In the first scenario, white dominant culture provides a uniform operating principle (in this instance, there is a shared sense of urgency and a shared value for production quantity over quality), and the collaboration proceeds smoothly. Jessie and Dan share the same set of assumptions about what is needed for a corporate partnership to succeed.

We need to consider the second scenario with a bit of context: historically, we know that communities of color almost always have less power than big corporations; and BIPOC communities are often asked to take on burdens that would not be asked of white communities.<sup>[1]</sup> The system is set up so that the corporation has more power—they can reach anything they want with little trouble. On top of this, the corporation and Jessie's sense of urgency causes the community (representing an already disadvantaged group) to fall farther behind. The community's priorities are ignored, and Jessie sets an ultimatum that forces Latrice to choose between their loyalty to the community elders' wishes and their desire to bring economic growth to the community. (I have found this deference to community elders to be common in Black and Indigenous communities, while not so prevalent in some others.) Latrice, coming from a disadvantaged position compared to Jessie, is forced to choose between moving at a pace that is comfortable for the community and moving quickly to acquire an economic gain without recognizing their community values.

Breaking down these two scenarios, they reflect equality. Both of Jessie's partners—the corporation Distributors R Us and OurTown represented by Latrice—were given an equal window of one week to make a decision and complete an agreement. However, they did not reflect equity. Distributors R Us is very used to operating on the same principles of Jessie's Mega Widgets and has a hierarchical structure that makes it easy to make decisions quickly. Conversely, OurTown is a dispersed community with distributed sources of power that cannot necessarily make fast decisions, and it is not clear whether it has made similar agreements in the past. While the one-week time period is sufficient for Distributors R Us, it is not enough for OurTown to make an informed decision.

The inequity in scenario 2 is why we are here. If shared principles—like white dominant culture—work for everyone, then there really is no problem. But if it advantages or disadvantages some people more than others, we need to take a closer look. Especially if already vulnerable populations are the ones being most disadvantaged, we need to question how we can change the structures to have more equitable and just outcomes. We need to change Jessie's method of engaging communities and partners so that Latrice has as good of an experience as Dan. It might have helped for Jessie to approach both conversations with a question rather than statement—"would one week be enough time?"

For those who read this in the near future, the concepts of environmental justice and community needs may seem familiar. As a part of the U.S. federal Inflation Reduction Act, in 2022 President Biden allocated a whole lot of money (\$900 billion or so) for climate action, public health, and other investments across the country. Alongside this initiative, the government also implemented Justice40, a protocol to ensure that federal investments are more equitable. Justice40 specifically targets environmental justice. It requires that climate and environment projects, like those enabled through the Inflation Reduction Act, support not only big corporations and those who are comfortable with white dominant culture, but that 40% of investments would go to under-invested “environmental justice” communities.

The Justice40 program is important because of institutional racism.<sup>[2]</sup> Institutional racism is another way of thinking about white dominant culture. It does not necessarily reflect a racist leader, but rather a system (“institution”) that was set up long ago, and which has lingering, inequitable effects.

For instance, federal grants in the U.S. are very complicated to access—and although they generally are not set up to encourage racism, they enforce the underlying structure. To access a grant, one has to have access to a specific type of account on a specific website, hold specific relationships, and have very specific writing expertise. There is no funding for the process of writing and negotiating these grants, which can take years. Only experienced grant writers and appliers really have a chance—and even then, they must also have the financial flexibility to cover their time and costs while waiting to see if the grant is awarded, as well as the right type of financial capabilities to handle and report on grant spending. This system is institutionally racist, because even though the grant language doesn’t say more money should go to large white-led organizations, we know that through inherited wealth, formal education, and other factors, more “incumbent” people and organizations will meet the grant requirements. Similarly, it will be harder for a smaller organization run with community funds to have dedicated capacity and expertise to spend so much time on a grant. This spiral continues to exacerbate inequities across our country and the world.

The Justice40 requirement is one effort to break down this barrier by forcing the federal government to ensure that smaller community organizations and less common grant recipients also have the ability to apply for—and to receive—grants. Justice40 says that 40% of funding from the U.S. government (through specific programs) should go to disadvantaged communities.

This type of policy “carve out” is common in the U.S. when there are specific populations who are not benefitting from policies in the way intended. Carve-outs in the federal Farm Bill create set-asides for “socially disadvantaged farmers”—a policy implemented after it became clear that most federal agriculture funding was going to big farms—massive corporations farming thousands or tens of thousands of acres, and largely owned by white farmers. At the same time, the more numerous small (and usually more sustainable) farms were receiving only a very tiny share. For instance, 15% of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funds are held explicitly for beginning and socially

disadvantaged farmers.<sup>[1]</sup> While it's not a perfect solution, setting aside some portion of benefits for populations who otherwise might not be able to access them is a common way to work towards equity in the U.S. policy context.

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The clearest example of white dominant culture in action, for me, is office culture in the U.S. It is often extraordinarily clear how each of Okun's fifteen white dominant culture traits plays out in the office, and there is usually a straight line to how culture impacts a company or organization's bottom line, mission, and outcomes. It's not always a positive relationship, but those in leadership often think that it is.

To reiterate, we are not talking about white supremacists. Individual who are white supremacists put a lot of thought into individual beliefs and skin pigment, and they hold a set of values that say white people deserve more privileges.

Instead, in this book we are talking about what Isabel Wilkerson would call a Caste culture.<sup>[ii]</sup> Just because you and I are not white supremacists does not mean we don't have racist ideas or do racist actions sometimes. We have lived our whole lives in a society that tends to make assumptions and to value people of color less than white people.

We are talking about something that has played out all around the world, somewhere right around the time that the British, and the French, and the Spaniards, the Italians, and other Western European nations started thinking about colonialism. Wilkerson explains this concept of caste fantastically well, so I encourage you to pick up her book! The cliff notes version is that essentially, through the course of time, colonialism, power, and whiteness came to be regarded as a caste of the highest level. Whiteness came to be associated with power. Whiteness was identified as something to strive for, something to protect, and something to defend. Whiteness was used as a strategy for helping poor white people feel separate from enslaved people of color to ensure those groups couldn't gang up and take power away from rich white people. In the end, the concept of white domination became normalized.

This normalization of white domination promoted those with lighter skin into positions of greater power, for long enough to embed certain white cultural characteristics across our entire society. For instance:

- For centuries, the lingua franca of choice has been a European language. This puts people of European ancestry at an advantage.
- Many melanated<sup>[3]</sup> communities put a premium on lighter skin. In places like India or Namibia, where there are a broad range of skin tones, it is often assumed that those with lighter skin are wealthier and hold more social power. Many skincare products, especially for women, contain bleach because lightness is associated with beauty.<sup>[4]</sup> These assessments based on skin color also occur in some U.S. communities today.

- Currency is most commonly exchanged for the pound, euro, or dollar. This puts people of European or American (“western”) ancestry at an advantage.
- School systems around the world have been modeled after the English system, due to their former colonial power and a common acceptance of their curriculum.
- Most institutions rely on written contracts and signed documents for validity, distrusting spoken and other forms of agreement. This puts people of European ancestry at an advantage, especially compared to many Indigenous cultures that value the spoken word more than written agreements.

White dominant culture is about power. The power to shape ways of operating, like how we set deadlines and how we interpret time. The power to shape ways of communicating, and our proclivity to value the written word over other forms of communicating and exchanging ideas. The power to shape systems of value.

I want to be especially sure to separate cultural characteristics from all the -isms here. Colonialism, racism, and misogyny (ism?) are insidious and inequitable characteristics that co-developed with white dominant culture to some extent. However, they are not the same as white dominant culture. “European colonizers are better, smarter, and prettier than individuals from Indigenous Nations” would be an example of a colonialist attitude that an individual could hold. However, “we write using the Roman alphabet” would be a characteristic of a white dominant culture. White dominant culture is about having structures that create subtle advantages and disadvantages for different people.

Just because we live and work in a white dominant culture does not mean we are all guilty of the -isms. White dominant culture reflects our institutional racism and our racist policies and structures, which show up all across our society. The characteristics of our culture—our ways of interacting, the systems of thought that we collectively follow—are not necessarily bad or good. White dominant culture may teach us to say that “deadlines are important” because we value urgency—this does not necessarily have to do with skin tone. It’s just a shared understanding of how we do work together. Those shared understandings usually came from western-influenced cultures, which often allows them to create racist structures.

The problem is not exactly that white dominant culture exists, because it is just fine that many of us work in a shared understanding. The problem is that white dominant culture is expected of everyone regardless of their preferences or backgrounds, and that it is set up to advantage some people over others. It was ok for Jessie from MegaWidgets to ask Dan from Distributors R Us for a short deadline, because both parties consented to this way of working. The culture became a challenge when it was not shared by Latrice from OurTown, and it played into the power dynamics between two parties.

With an understanding of how white dominant culture impacts us, we can apply more critical lenses to our culture. Does this culture, which evolved to suit certain needs at a certain time, still serve us? Who does this culture help vs. hamper? The question is not whether white dominant

culture exists, but whether we are comfortable operating in a system so heavily influenced by such a small portion of the population. And if we are not, how can we change it?

### **Ideas for independent reflection:**

- What do white people give up if we move on from white dominant culture? What do they gain?
- What do people of color give up, and gain?
- What do you most fear you might lose if your communities relied less on white dominant culture? Please spend some time reflecting on this.
  - Will you lose something, will somebody else gain something, or both?
  - Is it fair for you to have the privilege you fear losing?
  - How would you feel if your child came to you and wanted to have this conversation?

### **Questions to discuss with a group:**

- What ways can you identify that white dominant culture helps your organization? Where might it cause harm?
- In what scenarios do your partners, clients, and other collaborators receive benefits or damages due to the white dominant cultural system?
- What do you feel afraid of losing if your workplace relied less on white dominant culture?

### **An example: Sense of urgency**

A *sense of urgency* is the white dominant characteristic that, out of Okun's summary, struck me the hardest. I struggle with anxiety, and it often comes with the baggage of wanting things to be done, done quickly, and done right—so that I won't have to be anxious about them anymore. After reading Okun's article on white supremacy culture, I spent about a year intentionally noticing and battling my tendency towards unnecessary urgency. Here's a spoiler: despite all the meetings I canceled or delayed, all the work objectives that I rescheduled, and the deadlines that I said "no" to while battling my internal urgency... I still didn't get fired.

My sense of urgency was exacerbated by my anxiety, but I'm not going to stand here and tell you that it was something new I created out of thin air, or that simply had to do with my mental state. A sense of urgency is something we see over and over in most Western-influenced communities, whether they are offices, neighborhoods, or families. I often feel that I have to come up with the solution *now*, and I worry that I need to be productive with all of my time. I have even been guilty of becoming stressed and feeling urgency around completing my pleasure reading.

This is one of the reasons that metrics can be challenging. I use the Goodreads app to track my reading progress, and it can drive me to focus on quantity (*will I hit X books this year?*) over quality (*did I take the time to really soak in and enjoy my current book?*). The same thing can happen at an institutional or organizational level. Many organizations are forced to propose

metrics for their Boards, shareholders, or grant-givers. These metrics, while they can be inspiring and certainly drive accountability, can also cause organizations to focus more on the quantity of outcomes than on the quality of the impact they are having. As you might guess, this does impact the organization itself, but it also comes at significant detriment to the communities the organizations are supposed to serve.

Personal anecdotes aside, I do think workspaces are among the worst offenders when it comes to creating unnecessary urgency. It's at work that we nearly always have set deadlines, annual objectives, and 5-year plans on which we are reviewed and compensated. And it's at places of work that I believe many of us really live into white dominant characteristics.

You might ask, "How do we know that a sense of urgency is specifically related to *white* culture and not tied to other forms of identity, like Western or Northern hemisphere behavior or nationality?"

I don't have the answer, but this is how I think about it. Many white dominant culture traits are common in the Northern (above the equator) and Western hemispheres (west of the prime meridian and east of the International Date Line). I know that our sense of urgency is the default because it is just how we think about time. My parents used to joke that if you had been on time to their wedding, you would have missed it—things were so urgent and time was so important that everyone arrived early, and it was considered appropriate to begin before the time printed on the invitation.

This is at complete odds to my experience working in countries such as Ethiopia or Namibia, where we worked on what was called "African time." This meant that even if the start time for an event was given, it would likely start an hour or three or five later. Even in a professional sense, deadlines were approximations—they reflected about the time you would start the project, not the point at which it was actually delivered. My friends tell me that there is a similar sense of time flexibility in Mexico, Brazil, and other South and Latin American countries. However, white-collar business culture in these countries still follow the "northern" type of time because of interactions with countries like the U.S.

From these examples, I can extrapolate that my sense of time and urgency is common to countries dominated by white people (Europe, the United States, Canada) and not as popular for countries in other parts of the world. This is what I am thinking when I refer to white dominant characteristics.

Another interesting idea is that we may not all prefer to be grounded in time. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitov Ghosh describes how place, rather than time, is important to some cultures.

*In the words of the great Native American thinker Vine Deloria Jr., a shared feature of Indigenous North American spiritual traditions is that they all "have a sacred center at a particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural features... Regardless of what subsequently happens to the people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in their cultural or religious understanding."*

*Developing this argument, Deloria contrasts modes of thought that take their orientation from terrestrial spaces with those that privilege time. For the latter, that crucial question in relation to any event is when did it happen? For the former, it is where did it happen?*<sup>[iii]</sup>

Understanding of time is not a constant across all people everywhere, and so we know it is an artifact of our culture.

We still need agreements on how to operate—every workplace needs a culture. We face challenges when multiple cultures clash (e.g., one colleague shows up to meetings 10 minutes early, while another shows up 10 minutes late). As we learn to address white dominant culture characteristics, we will need to come up with new working agreements. For instance: perhaps the first 10 minutes of meetings are just time to chat, so those who arrive late can still be welcomed. Or maybe starting precisely on time does really matter in your office, and other concessions can be made to folks for whom that is not natural. Any agreement reached should include input from everyone involved, and should seek to lessen the burden for those who appear in lower-power positions and with more marginalized identities. Communication will be key.

It is also true that many working in (especially environmental) nonprofit spaces feel urgency for moral reasons that should not be ignored. It is true that we have years, not decades, to reverse the emissions that are driving climate change and destroying habitats. Similarly, those who choose to work at nonprofits across many sectors feel personally invested in providing healthy food, safe homes, education, and many other important services.

Yet, to me (and to quote a recent collaborative publication), burnt-out people cannot save a burning planet.<sup>[iv]</sup> On planes, they tell you to put your own oxygen mask on before helping others, and similarly, nonprofit structures must function before they can effectively serve others and serve their missions. First, let's adjust our own structures to avoid harming our own employees. Let's streamline processes and write out white dominant culture where it is not serving us. Let's slow down efforts to force relationships so that, once we have trust and our partners are ready, we can do something lasting.

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One of my former bosses had great intentions to support a team-first, white dominant-last environment, but they had trouble seeing it in themselves. They<sup>[5]</sup> encouraged team members to have good work-life balance, and even led us through exercises around team culture, working norms, and boundaries. This supervisor cared about their work and our team and really did their best by us.



They cared so much that when they were out sick, they read and replied to emails all day long. Depending on when you're reading this, it may or may not be relevant—but this was in the days when COVID-19 was really taking people out. Not that COVID is the exception; I encourage you to listen to your body anytime you're sick and really, *all the time*.

Well, this supervisor clearly was not demonstrating work life balance and listening to their body. They were really, truly sick, but I received at least half a dozen emails from them in the course of one workday—as did my teammates. Some of those teammates were newer to the organization, and so I got stuck fielding various questions around “is this the expectation when we take sick time?” and “I didn't know this issue was so urgent, did you? Do I need to work late to respond?”

Even though our supervisor said all the right things, they did not model the behavior we wanted on our team. They inadvertently ended up making our team more stressed and anxious about meeting deadlines, because we took our cues from our superiors. As a side note, it also put more burden on me to answer my teammates' questions rather than getting my own work done!

This dynamic was reminiscent of another prior workplace. I used to travel about once a month for work, which translated into “work a 50–70-hour week, then travel on the weekends and work some more on your flights.” Because I didn't set boundaries when I started at this organization as a bright-eyed young professional, I settled into the routine travel culture common at the organization. And, as you might have expected, I started to burn out.

When I shared my concerns with my boss, they reflected that they too often worked long weeks. I vividly remember some feedback that went along the lines of “if you're not working over 60 hours regularly, please don't complain.” In other companies, I know my friends have heard this line too.

Well, for the sake of clarity: that's outrageous! *I was only paid to work 40 hours a week, as I assume are many of you.* Why does my workplace get to agree to a set of conditions around my employment, and then demand 50% more? I will note that they certainly did not offer to pay me 50% more for my troubles.

This didn't work for me. Although I didn't want to be working so much, that sense of urgency would push me to work extra hours—sometimes starting at 6am to get on international calls—to hit my deadlines. And, because I hit my deadlines, I was always offered more work, extra projects, and struggled to say no. *Because if I didn't do it, who would? I wouldn't want my teammates to burn out, either. And if I slowed down, then where would we be with the climate crisis?*

It took me a depressive breakdown after working under these conditions for a few years to recognize that this wasn't simply a facet of workplace culture I needed to adapt to. There was a real mismatch between what my body and mind needed to be healthy and what my employer

offered. I took off several months of work to (partially) heal<sup>[6]</sup> and ended up quitting that gig shortly after.

Here are a couple of additional questions for consideration. They are questions I have continued to hold since quitting the last job I describe in this section, and to which I have no answers—but I think they help to inform a conversation around boundaries, deadlines, and urgency within a broader context. Maybe you have wondered some of these same things—or maybe you have teammates who do.

- I am a mixed-race woman, and all my bosses and most of my teammates have been white. *Did this contribute to the expectations they had of me?*<sup>[7]</sup> Did it contribute to the power dynamics and my inability to push back against unrealistic expectations?
- I was young, and this example was early in my career. If I had had more experience, *could I have set stronger personal boundaries? Would I still have received promotions and acknowledgment for my work if I had? Would my boss still have given me a good reference?*
- *How much better could my work have been if I was not exhausted and sometimes bitter? How did that mindset influence the quality of my (our) work?*

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As I've mentioned, urgency is a white dominant characteristic that I really struggle with. To this day, it is necessary for me to intentionally pause and actually question the timelines and expectations I lay out for myself and others, as well as to be very deliberate about pushing them back when needed. It is not something that comes without effort for me. But, I have learned that pushback around timelines can be especially crucial in nonprofit organizations, where many of our projects may depend on grants or other funding that come with strings and timeline expectations, and where truly we are not compensated enough to ask each other to work so much extra.

For me, the decision to change a timeline comes down to a process of reckoning with reality. Here are some of the questions I use to encourage myself to be thoughtful about how urgent something really is. Maybe some of them will resonate with you; take what you like and leave the rest.

- *Will we remember in 3 months if I push this back, cancel this meeting, or simply don't do this piece of work?*
- *Why did we set this deadline the way we did? What assumptions did we make? (and can I change that, next time?)*
- *What would I want my teammates to do if they felt how I do and had this meeting coming up?* This question is especially helpful for me when I think about postponing meetings or asking to cancel something. Usually, I feel a strong sense of guilt, but once I flip the perspectives, I see that it's only my expectations and a white dominant team culture that I would really let down by rescheduling. I would want my colleagues to take care of themselves, so I should do the same.

- *Will I ruin anyone else's day if we change this meeting?*
- *When the next climate emergency rears its head, will this work help us, or is it just busy work that is going to burn me out?*

There are probably infinite ways you can start to subtly push back around a culture of urgency. I started by canceling calls when I felt overwhelmed, as well as deleting recurring ones that didn't always add value. This helped me to do the work that mattered while skipping some of the junk in-between. I also learned to postpone meetings when I had too many and found that usually my partners were only too happy to have a bit of extra time.

Not everyone has the autonomy and privilege to push back in this way. That's ok—this is just the step that worked best for me at the time! You might also find ways to subtly push back against urgency without literally canceling a meeting. One of my mentors likes to say, “just because you procrastinated and are up against a deadline does not mean I have to be in crisis mode.” They set their personal and emotional boundaries without even touching the calendar!

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Naomi Ortiz writes in her book *Sustaining Spirits*, “If both attempting accountability and avoiding accountability take energy, then the choice to act or the choice to withdraw becomes a spiritual choice. Making a spiritual choice, to me, means choosing from my heart, a place of love... First, I have to know what my truth is.” [\[M\]](#) Ortiz's connection of acting vs. withdrawing to our own spirits helps me to isolate the difference between acting in urgency and acting on my values.

When people own their values and decisions to act or not act, it can be such a relief to engage. When I was out sick, a colleague shared some good news with me via text and included “no reply required, I just thought you'd like to know.” It honestly made me feel so great to hear that a great collaboration was moving forward, while also not having the emotional burden of celebrating with them or exploring next steps while I wasn't feeling well.

I spent a summer in my early 30s working with a friend on a part-time farming operation. One reason I wanted to work with this individual was their amazing centeredness and ability to put people first. In fact, they pitched me on the dry bean business through their approach of wanting to do right by ourselves, our community, and the land. A plethora of factors led us to believe that our yields would be low that year—a new plot, a drought, a vacation, a family illness, which raised a question of how much we should invest to maximize profits.

It would have been very easy to lapse into a sense of urgency. We could have gone to the farm (requiring an hour drive each direction) every single day to coddle the plants and keep them watered. We could have harvested meticulously by hand rather than using machinery to thresh and winnow (with some losses). Instead, we agreed that yield would just be low this year. We only wanted to spend one day a week on the farm due to our other personal commitments and knew we couldn't really combat some of the factors we were up against. We agreed that our vacations and spending time with family were more important.

And in the end, we grew some beans, sold some beans, and just about covered our costs. It wasn't the most financially savvy move, but being out on the farm fields filled our hearts and souls. We might have made more money but lost that regenerative experience we both sought if we had decided to "lean in" to maximize profits. I can say for certain that our friendship wouldn't have made it, and I would probably hate farming now rather than viewing it as an outlet for my anxiety and a healing practice for my body.

### **Ideas for independent reflection:**

- Can you remember a time that someone else pushed you to meet a deadline that wasn't really fair? How did it make you feel?
  - Who set the deadline, what was the logic behind it, and was it necessary?
- Can you remember times that you have pushed yourself or your colleagues (or your family) to meet a tough deadline? Why did that happen?
  - Consider your daily schedule and identify one or two things you could change to reduce the feeling of sprinting from one task to another. You might want to assess the frequency of your chores, like cooking and cleaning. Can you make one fewer meal per week, and eat leftovers that night instead? You could also think about your social engagements, family commitments, and work schedule.
- What is your reaction when an external force presents you with an unrealistic timeline? Do you push back, ignore it, or work like hell to meet it? Why do you think this is?

### **Questions to discuss with a group:**

- To what extent do you think a sense of urgency contributes to stress levels in your workplace?
- What are some examples of a sense of urgency in your workplace? Where does the urgency come from?
  - Who sets deadlines in your organization? Who has influence?
- Can your group identify one or two places where you can remove the sense of urgency from the equation? Try it!

### **Conversation starters:**

- *I've been noticing that I feel tense about the timelines we've set for this project. Is there a reason [deliverable] is due so soon, or do you think we could have a discussion about the due date?*
- *I spent some time today cleaning up my calendar and noticed the number of standing meetings I have. I noticed that we don't have anything on the agenda for [meeting] tomorrow; what would you all think about cancelling it? Or even cancelling the recurring calendar hold and scheduling time only when we need it?*

*I've been consistently working over 40 hours, which I know is the expectation. Could we schedule some time to discuss which of my projects are priorities, and which might be able to move to the back burner for a few months?*

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[1] The entire field of environmental justice exists to get at this question of how differently advantaged communities experience different environmental threats and opportunities.

[2] Institutional racism or systemic racism refers to the ways that racial inequities are built into our systems. It is the policies and practices of how we do work, which may not say anything about race right now but still impact racial outcomes.

[3] “Melanated” refers to something that has more pigment or is a darker color. The term is sometimes used as a way to center Black and brown skin types.

[4] Of course, this does not always hold true. There are many movements working towards the embrace of natural beauty. Black is Beautiful and the natural hair movement are two that come to mind here in the U.S.

[5] You might notice my use of they/them pronouns in many stories throughout this book. This is largely to protect former colleagues and acquaintances from any identification—although the co-benefit of helping a bit to normalize these gender-neutral pronouns is also a positive!

[6] In the U.S., we have something called “the Family and Medical Leave Act,” or FMLA for short. It requires many employers to let employees take time off without losing their jobs. It is often at least partially compensated. While this is not as robust a health system as we deserve, and not every job comes with FMLA benefits, it is a program worth looking into if you need a break. In my case, I received 60% of my salary for several months of time taken off because my doctor could confirm that I needed it.

[7] Expectations and stereotypes are different for different groups of people. However, I had a couple of specific questions in this circumstance. Was I expected to be quiet and not complain, because I was in the minority? Was I expected to be a “model minority” as is often expected of Asian Americans—to work hard, not complain, and be good at math? What stereotypes did my colleagues have about me before we even interacted?

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[i] National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. (2017, November 14). *Path to the 2018 Farm Bill: Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers*.

<https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/path-to-2018-farm-bill-bfr/>

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