

Reflections on classism

Homework for 2018 Anne Braden Program

Please use the following questions to reflect on classism, how it might be showing up for you, in your relationships, and in our overall white and multiracial movement cultures. Use the questions to journal and have a conversation about your thoughts with someone, great if it's someone from your class background.

The questions are broken down into three categories, General Queeries that everyone should engage with, Questions for class oppressed people, and Questions for class privileged people. We know that class is complicated and you might straddle the lines, please do the set of questions that feel both most useful and most challenging. When we say class privileged, we are referring to middle and upper class people because classism is partly about norms and values and in our society middle/upper class values and culture are what is considered normal.

This homework was sparked by and adapted from questions that two amazing queer working class southern organizers put out in 2015, Jes Kelley and Caitlin Breedlove. We owe much gratitude to them and the work that they do.

General queeries

1. What does it look like to build true trust across lines of class difference in your personal relationships or in your movement work? What about building trust across lines of race *and* class?
2. How has the current mode of doing racial justice work largely separate from economic justice short-changed all working class people and alienated poor whites from racial justice work?
3. In what ways are divide and rule strategies that were put in place to keep poor people from working with one another being replicated in left organizing today?
4. What's possible when poor/working class folks build with each other without middle/upper class involvement?
5. What would be different about how white anti-racism is done today if it was framed more by working class leadership?

Questions for class oppressed people to consider in working across class

1. How have respectability politics f*cked up working class organizing?
Respectability politics refers to when minority and/or marginalized groups are told (or teach themselves) that in order to receive better treatment from the group in power, they must behave according to dominant cultural values, such as when poor people or people of color are told (or tell themselves) that they should be more articulate or dress better if they want mainstream society to respect them.
2. Have you been encourage to adopt middle or upper class cultural norms as part of your own leadership development? What has been the class and race backgrounds of people who have mentored you? Have mentors helped you develop an understanding of your own class, analysis of class within capitalism, or how to develop anti-racist strategies that center poor and working class communities?
3. How have you felt in white anti-racist spaces because of your class? When has it been awesome? When has it been hard?
4. What kinds of culture and spaces help you feel like you can bring your leadership? How can you help build that for other people?
5. How do you think about yourself in terms of leadership? Are there ways you hold yourself back that are about internalized classism? What do you feel about the nuances of how race privilege and internalized classism play out here?
6. How has your class background/experience contributed to your work as an anti-racist organizer?

Questions for race and class privileged people to consider in working across class

1. How do you think your cultural values have shaped how you show up in your political work and relationships? For example what do you notice about how you respond to (or avoid) conflict? What are your values around how people should spend their time and money, express their emotions, and what work is prioritized and valued? What of those might come from class privilege? How and when do you put your cultural values on poor or working class people and what are you doing to increase your respect for working class values?
2. What do you notice about how you respond to or avoid conflict? What work are you doing to increase your comfort with working class styles of confrontation?
3. What values did you learn in your family and community of origin about money, sharing money, raising money, and how money is used in families and groups? How does that impact how you work with/relate to others individually and in groups?

4. What do you feel is within your arena to pass judgment on? How wide is that sphere? How do you think class privilege plays into your ideas about what is and is not subject to your scrutiny, judgement or disapproval?
5. What do you notice about how you delegate tasks and assume control across lines of class? How do you respond when a working class person doesn't behave in a way consider appropriate or doesn't do something in the way you want them to? Do you feel entitled in any ways to control the outcome or other people's actions?
6. What work are you doing to be aware of and counter an internalized sense of entitlement? What can you tease out about where race and class privilege intersect and diverge here?
7. For many working class people, loyalty to families, communities and groups is essential for daily survival. Class-privileged people usually have a very different experience, because lack of loyalty to causes, ideas, groups, and people often carries less consequence. How do you reflect on, and understand this in your daily work? How do you think about commitment and how do you show it? What/who do you regard as disposable in the work?
8. How are you sharing and redistributing money and other resources that you have because of your class privilege? What discomfort are you willing to experience, and what risks are you willing to take towards wealth redistribution/reparations?
9. Have you have been able to do unpaid internships or unpaid movement work in ways that would have been hard if you had to work to support your family or pay off debt? What was made possible by doing that unpaid work? How have you thought about supporting the leadership of poor and working class people who might not have as much capacity to do unpaid movement work?
10. In what ways do you attempt to mask your class privilege? What's at stake for you if you were transparent about the resources you have access to? Is there a way in which you focus on what you don't have or a marginalized aspect of your identity in order to downplay or divert attention from the power/access that your privileges award you?
11. Have you had shame about your or your family's wealth or privilege? What has that felt like? What do you think might be underneath that shame? What do you think has been lost because of shame around your or your family's privilege or wealth? What do you think would be possible if those of us who have class privilege had less shame about our own or our family's wealth?