

Social Justice Training Institute

Words of Wisdom

Helpful Thoughts and Reflections for Re-entry



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

HELPFUL THOUGHTS FOR RE-ENTRY

Welcome to the SJTI family!

As alum of SJTI you are joining a group of over 700 folks who have completed the Institute!! We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead for greater networking and partnering to increase social justice in our organizations, communities, and global society.

This packet has been created with input from SJTI alums, some of their “Support People,” (partners, colleagues, supervisors, etc.), and SJTI faculty and interns. It is our hope that you find these resources helpful as you continue your re-entry after SJTI. These “helpful thoughts” and recommendations are organized into three sections:

1. For Alums - Reflections and Thoughts about Re-Entry
Suggestions as you plan your re-entry with family and friends and in the workplace.
2. For Alums - Words of Wisdom
Thoughts from other SJTI alums over the years
3. For “Support People” - Some Thoughts and Suggestions
A document that was specifically created for you to share with family, friends, colleagues and supervisors: Its intent is to provide a summary and overview of what they might experience as you re-enter as well as some suggestions for how they may be of support to you.

Be gentle with yourself and people in your life....and enjoy this amazing journey and transition!

1. For Alums - Reflections and Thoughts about Re-entry

What we encourage you to consider as you re-enter:

- Journal your thoughts and feelings...and journal some more...
- Remember that your awareness may be extremely heightened as you go back...and you will probably notice far more dynamics around issues of race, racism and other forms of oppression than you did before SJTI.
- Remember that other people in your life did not have the ability to attend this SJTI session, and so they may not understand what you are experiencing, nor have the same level of passion and commitment to dismantling racism...yet.
- Remember that you are very tired...and your emotions are stirred...and you may have re-triggered some intrapersonal roots....and you may more easily feel triggered and feel more intense emotions in the short term.
- Remember how triggering events are “gifts” to explore the deeper roots of your triggers....and waiting to respond until you are more centered and reflective may be a good choice for the next short while...
- And be sure to remember that people in your life kept on doing their lives while you were at SJTI....taking care of the home, possibly children or elders, working, possibly taking up the slack so you could be gone, worrying about you, supporting you through the Institute....and they may have things they want to tell you or ask you to do as you come back. Be grateful and appreciative of them.
- Be gentle with yourselves as you re-enter...and BE GENTLE with all others as well.
- Take time to rest, sleep and rejuvenate yourself. Take a day off before you return to work, if you can.
- Talk to people in your life about your learnings, reflections, insights....always asking them if they are available for the conversation.
- Know that some people will ask “How are you?” and only want a short response. While others in your life truly do want to have deeper, more authentic dialogues with you...they just may not yet have all the skills to meet you where you are...yet.
- Find people (alums or folks who’ve had similar experiences) to debrief with.
- Expand your support circle to include more people who are allies and change agents.

And as you re-enter the workplace:

- Go slowly as you go back to work....pay attention to dynamics around you and inside of you....and consider not reacting or responding in the moment....there is always time to come back and talk about a situation at a later time.
- “Do not try this at home...” meaning we encourage you to NOT try to recreate SJTI in your organization. If your supervisor or another colleague wants you to “do a diversity training now that you went to SJTI,” explain to them how SJTI was a professional/personal development program, and that in time, you will integrate all you have learned and be able to use it as you do your daily work activities. If you want to do some/more diversity training, remember that SJTI participants chose to immerse themselves in a 5 day experience....meet the participants “where they are,” without expecting anything similar to SJTI to occur.
- As you interact with your supervisor, thank them for their support of your attending SJTI. Consider letting them know that your intention is to use what you’ve learned to continue to help create an inclusive environment, AND you may need some time to reflect and integrate what you experienced. If you want to talk with them about some of your insights, it may be best to talk about yourself (your learnings, reflections, aha’s) and NOT about what they should be doing differently. Most likely, at some point they will ask you for some thoughts on how the department could increase inclusion; if they ask you, they will be more open to hearing your thoughts and reflections.
- If you haven’t had much experience discussing issues of race, racism, or social justice with your supervisor and work colleagues, moving slowly and in small steps. You may choose to find support with those who already have significant experience discussing race and racism with a social justice lens.
- In addition, you may want to offer to share some resources with your supervisor and work colleagues if they show an interest (i.e., some basic definitions and terminology, some materials discussing an introductory understanding of the common dynamics of race, racism, and oppression in the U.S., and possibly around the world. Having a shared vocabulary and understanding may deepen your conversations and ability to engage these issues more directly.
- If you anticipate that your colleagues and/or supervisor will be very supportive and eager to learn all about issues of race/racism and social justice AND you find this is not the case, at first....remember when you were just like them....find your compassion and empathy for them, and commit to “meeting them where they are” without judgment. Consider saying how excited you are about your new learnings and insights and how you hope to share them with them as the opportunities arise. And then seek support and counsel from other SJTI alums (current and past) and let go of any sense of urgency or demand that people show up in ways that you want....

Things you may experience as you re-enter your life:

- As you've probably already experienced, most alums report feeling a wide variety of emotions, some of them very intense. After intensive personal growth sessions like SJIT it is common to feel somewhat disoriented, vulnerable and/or confused. We hope you take the time to rest and rejuvenate as you begin to integrate everything you've experienced and learned.
- During SJTI you probably explored and uncovered internalized negative beliefs and assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices, and past experiences related to race and racism. You may have directly looked in the mirror and acknowledged some of your behaviors and attitudes that have helped perpetuate racism, such as when you've colluded, or actively done something out of some racial bias.
- Most alums return with a heightened awareness of their racial/ethnic identity, and may use their more focused "racial lens" to analyze their past and current situations. It may seem like "all you see or talk about is race..." And this may be true...for many of us, we have not paid attention to the daily dynamics of race and racism that occur around us all the time. It's been our experience that over time you will find a new, integrated balance among your increased attention to dynamics of race/racism, your commitment to social justice overall, and the other passions, commitments and interests in your life.
- Many alums report how they took many months or even a couple of years to fully integrate their new insights and learnings. Some have used this opportunity to re-examine many aspects of how they have chosen to live their lives to date. And you may find that, at times, you don't want to talk about your experience, your feelings, your new insights...you may not, yet, have the words or the clarity to share in ways that you feel will be useful. Give yourself permission and grace to wait, take your time, and move in your own pace. You may want to ask your support people for their patience and empathy as you transition over the next few weeks, months...
- You may find that some of your support people fall into the predictable trap of trying to "fix" and "solve" things, when what you are wanting is a good listener and someone to try to understand what you are feeling, needing, and experiencing. If some of your support people begin to give you unwanted advice or try to minimize your feelings, please remember that it can be difficult to see someone they care about in pain or deep emotions. You might gently thank them for their care of you, and then ask if they can just listen to you as you're wanting their understanding and support.
- You may need more alone/quiet time than usual for awhile. You may find it helpful to journal or reflect by yourself at times. You might also find you want greater support and connection with others in the community who have a similar passion and commitment to creating social justice.

Things you may experience as you re-enter your life:

- If you are sharing your thoughts and experiences with people who are relatively new to talking about issues such as white privilege, racial identity, internalized racism, internalized dominance, horizontal prejudice, collusion, etc., you might experience their reactions and comments as resistance or disagreement. We encourage you to “relate in” and remember times you have been in their position ~ listening to others who have a great deal of passion and understanding of issues. Their reactions may be a signal that they want to be listened to with compassion and empathy. Consider moving into dialogue with them and asking them questions to explore their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. And remember when you used to have only a base line understanding of dynamics of race and racism, much less times when you had not looked inside at your own Internalized dominance and Internalized oppression.
- Some alums have reported it very helpful when their Support People have shown an increased interest in learning more about issues of race and racism by watching related movies, attending presentations and lectures, and discussing the news or TV shows with a race lens. Having long, engaged conversations about race may add a delightful new dimension to your current relationship ~ opening up deeper layers of intimacy and connection.
- And it could be that you some of your support people will never truly understand what you experienced at SJTI...or show much interest in deepening their own learning around issues of race and racism. And you can still value their love and support and presence in your life.

Creating inclusion and social justice is sacred work.

Thank you again for your ongoing support of SJTI alums!

2. For Alums - Words of Wisdom: A Journal of Thoughts from SJTI Alumni

Over the years, SJTI alumni have shared thoughts, words, and reflections that they thought would be helpful to the re-entry process. This section is a compilation of their thoughts that resonated with them, sometimes months and/or years after re-entering. Some of these offerings are pieces of advice, others poems and quotes.

Don't try to give people answers. They won't listen to you. Try to decide which questions are important to raise- and then raise them. Remember that creating dialogue around important issues, in a context of mutual respect, is usually a very good way to move things along.

-Jane Fried, Central Connecticut University, Class of 1998

Have faith. Take risks. Make mistakes. Make lots of mistakes. Apologize sincerely. Repeat the process.

-Mamta Motwani Accapadi, Texas – Austin, December 2001

Take your time when you first "re-enter".....you will want to confront everything and educate everyone. Pace yourself. Continue your journey: we each have our own journeys so you need to continue to challenge yourself to learn and grow. Make mistakes and "step in it".

Find others who want to have continued dialogues on social justice issues....they will be your saving grace. Also find others who will not let you off the hook and will continue to challenge you!

-Laura Giles, Tucson Class of 2003

Be sure to schedule time to reflect on the experience after one week, one month, and every month thereafter. The self-awareness and personal 'checks' are as important today as they should be every day. Schedules are busy, but the work is daily and ongoing. Stay close to it.

-Penny Pasque, Michigan, 2000

1. Remember to check in with yourself daily. The lessons you will learn and the ways you will be challenged will be tremendous.
2. Be open to new experiences and new ways of thinking.
3. Remember ALL the pieces of yourself and how they play into the journey you are about to take.
4. Prepare to have a new sense of personhood or new glasses to view the world.
5. Tracking is a good thing. You will get tired of everybody doing it.
6. There will be someone in your class that does not seem to get it. Be patient with that person. By the end, they will.
7. Be honest about you. That is how you will grow.

-Jessie Grant, Edinboro, 2000

Rules for Being An Activist, by FTM gender activist, Raven Kaldera:

1. Take nothing personally. Nothing.
2. Never expect gratitude.
3. Never expect to be trusted, by either side.
4. Remember that people lie, especially to themselves.
5. You're not doing this work for your ego. If you die hated and rejected by the very people that you helped, as long as the work got done and the ungrateful bastards are actually better off, it's all worth it.
6. Remember your mantra: "It's not about me. It's not about me." Corollary: The above counts regardless of whether you're facing someone's praise and hero worship, or someone's anger that's clearly actually directed at some target in their head that they're trying to paste over your face. Learn to recognize when it's clearly someone else's damage that they're refusing to own. Learn that you can't do anything to change that and move on.
7. Have a support system of family/friends/tribe/people you respect who love and respect you. Listen to them about when you're running amuck. Take all other comments with several bags of salt.
8. You're a role model, not for how other people would like you to be, but for being who you think you ought to be. Hold onto that. Don't compromise. Being a model of someone who compromises themselves does no one any good, even if the immature might disagree.
9. Having an enormous ego is *good*. If you don't you will never be able to keep up the total hubris necessary to believe that insignificant little you can actually make a difference in the big impervious world. However, it must be a rock-solid ego without any perceptible cracks or fragility, so that no matter what people say or how they treat you, it won't make a dent, and you won't ever feel the need to strike back at them.

As long as I keep this stuff in mind, and don't resent it, just accept that this is the way it is, I do fine as an activist. ...

We need leaders. Even if there's more than one leader, or if they switch off, or take turns, or something. We need leaders. The human need for them is very strong in us as a species.

-Thomas Walker, Arizona State, '00

Time often seems like it's not on our side, but it's a myth that can destabilize us. If we remember that a steady stream of water essentially formed the grand canyon over time – perhaps not in one person's lifetime, but change witnessed by future generations nonetheless – then we can keep going. Sometimes that need to see immediate change makes many throw their hands up in defeat but releasing that need can bring tremendous need (even in the face of triflin' craziness). We're all drops of water, so I'm pressing with to form our future canyons of change. Energy and love to you ... and the rest of my rain family.

-Anonymous SJTI alumnus, 2002

I wish I had known that the greatest transformation that I could influence was myself; and that in doing so I would achieve more serenity and have more of an impact on my community than I could have thought possible.

-Rachel Wagner, University of Dayton

I think one of the beauties of SJTI is there is no preparation for re-entry. The most powerful part of SJTI is the learning that occurs AFTER the institute is over. Being immersed in a social setting like SJTI is powerful, but during the experience we have that community willing to work with and be supported by and outside of that circle we are many times alone.

The fact that re-entry was difficult and uncomfortable aided me in my learning process - making the experience more real. The emotions although probably exaggerated because of the setting were very real and haunt me in a positive way during my day-to-day life. I am constantly reminded of the many voices of colleagues at SJTI and for that I am eternally grateful.

-Rob Andrews, Brandeis, '00

I had been aware of the glacial pace of change at my institution (at least in the areas of diversity and social justice education) but I had not been aware of the "will" behind it, the resistance to actually addressing those issues in a real way.

Last summer I prepared a fairly comprehensive concept statement for a position and duties related to faculty development and coordination of diversity efforts in our college. This did not come out of the blue, but was based on ideas in a proposal submitted the previous spring to the National Science Foundation, ideas that had been reviewed and vetted by some of the same persons to whom I submitted my own document.

Nonetheless, this "internal proposal" was rejected about as completely and finally as a new idea can be, and more quickly, without discussion. There was no money for such a position (although I proposed to do the work in addition to my other duties), it fell outside the "official" channels for dean-to-faculty dealings (although it was proposed as an assistant dean of faculty development), I was needed full time in my current job (although I had, in fact, been asked to provide a current job description, and in doing so felt that I could handle both, at least as a first step), etc. But most important, the philosophy went that it was not a good strategy to have a "diversity dean" - that would "marginalize" the efforts. (In the proposal, diversity issues were integrated into a program of faculty development/mentoring.) And further, the opinion was, "I don't think our faculty are going to be developed."

My experience at SJTI was key in giving me even the confidence to present such an idea to my superiors. SJTI (along with the support of my spouse) probably more than anything helped me withstand the force of the rejection and realize that I was having the most clear lesson it was possible to have about where my institution (at least some of its leaders) were "at" with these issues. The truth though painful is somehow efficient - I don't give up, but there are paths and areas of processing I don't need to go over again (I think!). I find I want to learn more about the issues, the history, the economics, of race, racism, racialism. I don't know exactly how change takes place on a grand scale, at least how it can happen without a calamity like Sept. 11, but I think it must happen by changing minds.

Said by Julian Bond at the Martin Luther King address he gave here in Jan 2001 - these might not be his exact words, but close: "In the battle for civil rights, you have to renew your credentials every day."

My best wishes and courage to you all.

-Priscilla Auchincloss, Rochester, '00

I guess I kinda knew this but was very much in denial about how slowly change would occur in my work environment after I had communicated to folks about my experiences in SJTI. Here I was on the plane back home thinking about all the great things I wanted to do for change to occur in my department. First thing I did the morning back at work was make an appointment with my Dean and tell him what kinds of things we needed to do for faculty and staff....Let's do social justice workshops, lets get a forum going for all us to talk about how we are all oppressors and need to recognize the privileges that we own....blah..blah..blah..blah. I thought that I was going to change the face of my College. The whole university would be so jealous of us because we all took a stand and everyone would acknowledge that they've got a lot of "shit" to unpack in that knapsack of theirs. NOPE. Change around here takes forever. I feel that I have made some baby steps but not near what I had envisioned right after I came back from SJTI. So, I felt disappointed and even started to evaluate whether my values were even recognized in my college and whether I wanted to continue being in my job.

SJTI did change me in many ways. I find myself easily pissed off of those little things that I use to think were no big deal. And for awhile I distanced myself from folks who don't "get it" and didn't want to "get it." What has been most beneficial for me in keeping active in my social justice education is surrounding myself with folks that truly support the cause. It's nice to call up one of my STJI buddies and say..."ok I was at a meeting and while I was tracking... this happened to me." My STJI buddy understands exactly where I am coming from. Just the mere fact that I have someone to voice my madness and sadness makes me feel validated. I came into the SJTI as a woman of color who was pretty complacent with the systems that dictated my place in this world and I came out a fighter who is unwilling to accept things as they are. Much love to the new STJI class! Peace and social justice to you all. Yours fighting for the cause.

-Susana Munoz, Iowa State, 12/01

I wish I would have known the enormous impact that SJTI would have had on every aspect of my life. Truly you do not see the world the same after SJTI. I've really dedicated time and energy to Social Justice issues, discussions, readings, web sites, etc. I've challenged my family, friends and colleagues. I took about a month after SJTI for me to be able to compose my thoughts and send those thoughts to family, friends, and colleagues about my experience and who I am. There were some people who reacted well and some who did not. I'm taking more risks and being true to myself. I feel a special connect to anyone who has experienced SJTI. If anyone from the new class needs to talk after the experience please feel free to call me or email!

-Christa Sandelier, Texas – Austin, 12/01

Don't let them beat you down! We all give of ourselves so much during SJTI, and we must continue to give of ourselves when we return to our campuses. I have been lauded, praised, beat down, and suckerpunched in the few months since leaving SJTI. I have been excluded from certain email exchanges that I was "privileged" to before, but have lived a healthier life because of it. And students have felt more valued since my return. Staff have felt more valued. And my peers, for the most part, feel more validated and valued since my return. The HOPE is worth the pain. My SJTI friends' faces are in my heart, and carry me through the tough times when I doubt or fear. And they are with me in every success.

-Rob Umbaugh, Fall 2005

I was very emotional at the end of the SJTI experience, and reading through this booklet was very helpful for me to stall that "re-entry" a little bit longer. The first thing I noticed is that it was really hard to speak of the experience at first. My partner wanted to know all about it, and it was hard to articulate. As I've had more time to reflect, it's become easier.

I also found it difficult for a while back at work, because I had all these fresh perspectives floating around in my head, and none of my colleagues could relate because they hadn't been through the major life change I just had! They didn't want me starting every sentence with "Well, what I learned at SJTI was..." so I had to be careful. I've since learned how to express my opinions in a constructive way that does not put people off - but still gets my point out there! I may be the only one speaking on behalf of social justice in some of my meetings, so I feel like if I don't speak up, no one will.

It's been a year since SJTI for me, and I finally feel like the experience is integrated into my life rather than this "extra" knowledge that I had to work through. I am a new person because of SJTI, and it's a change for the better that I think my colleagues and friends appreciate. The ally work I do has become much more meaningful, and I can tell that my work is making more of a difference to those in need. My best advice is to hang in there, keep processing this amazing gift you've been given, and give it time. All us past graduates are here for you if you need us! Don't hesitate to email or call if you need help!

-Erin Peltzman, Davis, Dec '02

What surprised me about myself in the institute was the anger I was carrying about an unresolved professional conflict that I had not previously seen as racial discrimination. Amazingly, I had ignored that major element of my experience and had masked it with perceptions of professional jealousy, personality conflicts, and philosophical differences. As the weekend progressed, this experience came to the forefront and WHAM; I was hit with it right between the eyes! The opportunities during the institute to be honest with others and myself helped me to work through my feelings. When I returned home, I found an opportunity to address the problem in a calm, deliberate way that has since liberated me from the pain of that experience.

Since my return from SJTI, I have a support network that I did not have before. The electronic SJTI list is now my gateway to knowledgeable advocates, who share a common interest. I have come to accept that I will not change the world overnight, but that slowly each one of us together has a chance of making long lasting change. I also feel more confident that change will continue for the better because of all the young, dedicated participants I met in our group.

Some words of advice to the new participants:

1. When you feel overwhelmed during the institute, and you will, rest, however you usually do that.
2. Get to know everyone in the group. If you don't, you will miss the opportunity to meet someone who may be a great inspiration to you, or someone whose humanity may astonish you. Every one there is truly your brother or your sister (or both).
3. Trust the process and your facilitators. They will make the institute work for you.
4. Make yourself heard. No one there can necessarily read your mind.
5. Be honest to yourself and others.
6. Have a wonderful time!

Ann Woolford-Singh, Tidewater Community College, VA, '00

The last few hours of SJTI were an exciting and nerve-racking time. What had changed about me? What had changed about the world around me? My senses were very hypersensitive to all the subtle and not-so-subtle ways oppression is interwoven throughout our daily experience. As I prepared to put my shoulder bag onto the x-ray belt at airport security, the security guard welcomed me back to reality with a PLE. He has asked if I was carrying a laptop in my bag, and when I told him "no," he said that it didn't surprise him. An SJTI friend followed and asked why he wasn't surprised. Apparently, I wasn't business nerdy enough to be carrying one; however, my Asian heritage and that I was carrying a shoulder bag was clearly enough for him to inquire in the first place.

When I returned to campus, I was nervous and excited simultaneously. I had a whole new lens to view my friends, my colleagues, my students, and everyone in St. Louis. It was hard to explain to everyone what going to SJTI was like; I wasn't sure if people would understand how incredible the time I had was and whether they would be open to exploring how oppression really works. I had so much to process that I just couldn't hold it all in. Fortunately, I had a colleague on campus who went to SJTI the year before and we worked together on social justice programming on campus. Also, our SJTI e-mail list was very active in the weeks following our time together and I was able to visit with a colleague from my SJTI class over the winter break.

Thinking back on the re-entry process and the year that has passed, there are several things I believe worked well for me as I continue on my journey: 1) Challenging myself to move beyond the PLEs and look at what could really be going on. 2) Maintaining faith that everyone in our world has the ability to really see how privilege and oppression really work. 3) Talking, processing, venting, and relishing the experiences of living in our society with other SJTI folks. 4) Remembering to "breathe" often and to put a "comma" in place when you need it. 5) Taking the time to celebrate what I've done, and what others continue to do, to keep moving ahead with the necessary work that we do.

Two years after SJTI, I've continued to challenge myself and others to consider the simple possibility that the impact of their behavior could be related to diversity and social justice. This has been no easy task by any means, especially when folks are not ready to truly acknowledge their place in society. What I've discovered is that the support network of SJTI alumni has been an invaluable resource throughout this on-going process of change. They're working towards similar goals and can help you process, reflect, and guide your response to the challenges we face when reality sets in after the institute. Take advantage of them and you'll keep your SJTI experience alive well after you leave Tucson.

-RJ Holmes, Washington University in St. Louis, Tucson, 12/01, Intern 12/03

So, I have been working on putting myself in situations with people (mostly whites) who I know could benefit from my patience & coaching, and little by little it is paying off. I see things in my workplace shifting a little bit - in just these few, short months. In turn, I think I've been developing more authentic relationships with my colleagues & friends of color because I think they are sensing & seeing my commitment every day in little ways. I guess what I am trying to say is, you don't have to expect yourself to move mountains upon your return. Patience & persistence to keep the fight alive has worked for me so far. Best of luck!

-Trish Anton, Dec '03

I'm a straight white guy. I knew that going into the Institute. And I knew, on a cognitive level, what it meant to have benefited from privilege -- what it took (or didn't take) for me to be where I am today. But I didn't know it. Or at least I didn't know that I didn't know it.

So I walked into the room on that first night ... thinking that just being there should be enough for the people in the room to KNOW that I am safe. That I'm not THAT kind of straight white guy. Just being there, I've learned, is never going to be enough. And it never has been enough. You've got to speak. And you've got to own what is yours. As a straight white guy, a lot of it is mine. A lot of it (all of it) was given to me without questions. I tripped over my privilege a lot at the Institute. And I was pushed over it. I've never been pushed with such compassion.

I've learned that people react when a straight white guy starts talking about privilege and racism. Mostly I've learned that a lot of white people don't like it. Especially students on a predominantly white campus. They want to talk about other things. Anything else, really. They've had enough diversity talk ... we can stop now.

I've learned that you can't stop and that by not stopping you might become unpopular. You become that kind of white guy ... the kind that makes everything a race issue. You learn that when you challenge the notion that it might be fun to portray your school's mascot as a Rasta mascot, you get funny looks from other administrators. I've learned that RAs who once connected with your style of training suddenly don't hear you as well. And I've learned that, by becoming that white guy who makes everything a race issue, the people who wanted you to become that person begin to see you only as that. So you find ways to make it fun. Sometimes you mess with people.

And then Jamie comes to your school, gives you a big hug, and lets you know you're loved. And this is a good place to be. Thanks to all my friends who helped me find here.

-Troy Headrick, Vermont, '00

The [re-entry] issues for me were that for several days I was around people for whom the issues of social justice were #1. Plus the discussions were encouraged, pushed forward and generally facilitated. Back at my campus these three things rarely if ever come together that way. Yes, the conversations were not easy but "re-entry" means that all too often I am alone raising the issue. At best it is the "choir" and no one to challenge us with our own "baggage/stuff." SJTI was good for me in "moving it up a level and challenging me". I do not get that in my work a lot, and not by a room full of folks who are there for the same reasons.

[To ease the return and keep spirit alive:] The books you gave help me to keep focus. I am lucky in there was someone else from my school there, too. The main thing is having folks you can touch base with. I get to see SJTI at conferences, which is really great! The work has been focused on making my teaching and training more complex...and working to better facilitate those difficult dialogues. It was helpful to remember our discussion. E-mail helps me keep in touch. Folks are great at sharing resources.

The SJTI was an excellent experience for me. The balance of challenge and support were perfect. I wish for a longer event but such is life.

-Sherwood Smith, Vermont, '00

I would echo much of what has already been said, especially Troy's powerful words about speaking up and out and not stopping. It took the institute for me to begin to find my voice. I approached the institute with the perspective of a person used to sitting back, sizing up a group, and figuring out where I fit in. I always explained that strategy by saying that I was learning how to best raise issues in any given context. After my institute experience, I realized that what I was doing was waiting for someone else to speak, someone else to raise the issue, someone else to confront the privilege or the "ism." I was simply waiting for someone else to do the work...sometimes because I was afraid; sometimes because I assumed others knew more than me; sometimes because I just didn't get it. It took this experience with a room full of caring, compassionate strangers (somewhat terrifying, at least initially, for this introvert) for me to realize what I was doing. It took Kathy getting pissed in my caucus group at our unwillingness to speak up about and take ownership for our privilege. It took the "lunch counter" experience and conversation (and doing it again the next day) to get me to look at how I was comfortable in my privilege, unconcerned for the impact that privilege had on other folks.

I left the institute feeling overwhelmed and somewhat disappointed. The disappointment had nothing to do with the institute and everything to do with me. I was disappointed that I hadn't gotten to a level of honesty that I needed to get to earlier in our time together...I felt as though I had wasted time, being more focused on what other folks thought than on the work I needed to do. I was disappointed that I had used all sorts of defense mechanisms (at least early on) to avoid doing the hard work. I was disappointed that I hadn't spoken more, taken more ownership; that instead I'd sat back and let others take ownership for what I knew was mine. And, in some ways, I was disappointed that I hadn't really gotten to know people as well as I'd hoped to. I remember sitting on the plane home and thinking about Gia's question..."what are you going to do?" I knew that I had to begin to find my voice and use it. It was no longer okay to sit on the sidelines. Once you've experienced the brilliance of the sun, burying your head in the sand will no longer suffice.

Three things were important for me in the year since the institute...1) finding allies; 2) getting involved; and 3) looking for what I'm not seeing. As a full-time doctoral student (with no peers, at the time of the institute) with two young kids and very little free time, I felt pretty isolated both from people who could serve as allies, role models, and mentors and from social justice work. Finding allies, for me, meant speaking up. It meant raising race as an issue, naming white privilege (even when it involved one of my professors), asking questions, and pushing for explanations. It meant having conversations I hadn't had in the past, so that I could explore who my allies and mentors might be. It meant taking risks that I had previously avoided. Getting involved in social justice work again required getting past my belief that others knew more than me and that I couldn't do the work until I understood it all perfectly. It required coming to an understanding that it was important to DO SOMETHING! To do what I could, knowing there's a whole lot I don't know or understand yet but to recognize and act on the fact that there is a lot I DO know. And, then, of course, getting involved required speaking up and asking people I didn't know if there were ways I could be of help to them in the work they were doing. As a result, I've been able to help out with a conference on white privilege and will be a TA for a graduate multicultural counseling class this spring..and am learning a lot from the folks responsible for these two things. The third thing for me is to keep looking for what I'm not seeing...exploring the ways in which my privilege is so hidden that I do not recognize it. The "lunch counter" conversation pushed me not only to think about privilege but to think a lot about the concept of "space" as well. Who defines it, who controls it, who has access to it. So, having felt disappointed in myself when I left the institute turned out to be a big motivator for me...I wish that I could be there with all of you again; I know now that I would be at a better place to do the work that I needed to be doing then. Much love and peace.

-Becki Elkins, Iowa, '00

Ditto to many of the words you will hear and read. SJTI has forever transformed my life and its purpose. I found my life passion through this experience...social justice. I had considered myself to be open, informed, aware, and all of that, little did I know what was about to happen. I learned to be truly conscious of the world around me (the good, the bad and the ugly). I learned that while my voice may be one of few, silence is more painful than speaking out. I learned why family and friends are so angry at the world. I learned why I, as a person of color, always gave excuses to white folk. I learned I have so much to learn. And the lessons learned extend well beyond racism. It's about using your voice to create equity for everyone! It's frustrating, it's tiring, it's challenging, it's downright hard, and that cannot stop you.

Upon re-entry, and the many, many days to follow, be true to yourself. Be mad, be sad, be frustrated, be happy, be honest, be angry. SJTI changes you in this world, in your workplace, with your family, with your friends, at the grocery store, in your community. In the comforting words and advice of the faculty, remember to give grace, to yourself and to those around you (even the ones that piss you off). Do not use this as an excuse to live in the manner you did prior to SJTI but rather find forgiveness in even the most ugly situations. And when those situations arise (and they will, sometimes all too often), utilize fellow SJTI friends to process, cry, debrief, yell, whatever you need to do to become grounded so you can continue to do the work that is too important to let slide. Much love and much peace to you.

- becky martinez, Dec '02

I would say this.....no matter what.....no matter how tough it gets.....how much it gets under your skin.....how much someone might piss you off.....hurt your feelings.....make you feel like complete crap.....no matter how much you might want to cry, scream, get up and leave.....the number one thing you need to always remember is this.....BE REAL, AUTHENTIC and HONEST WITH THOSE AROUND YOU....BUT MOST OF ALL BE REAL, AUTHENTIC, and HONEST WITH YOURSELF.....this is not supposed to be an easy experience cause if it was it would not be worth a pot of beans.....what it is supposed to be is a place that you strip yourself to the most base raw place in your skin/life/feelings and you truly examine and look at yourself.....how you see/view others.....how you treat others.....what truly are your thoughts and feelings on people who look, act, talk, think and love differently than yourself.....then once you do that then you truly might have a chance to be the real, true, authentic person you need to be to live as a human should live in this diverse world.....

-Bryan Vanosdale, Springfield Class of 2005

First, if you are able to, get your own room during the institute, it was nice to go back and "stir" in my own stuff by myself. Plan on taking a couple of days off after SJTI. I was fortunate to have scheduled vacation right after I attended, so my re-entry was a little smoother. I was also fortunate to have gone to SJTI with three other colleagues from my department and another from campus, so I had people to talk to. Look for other SJTI folks if there are any, if not, look for folks on your campus that you know are committed to social justice issues, or call an alum or someone from your class. The world will have many new windows for you and some of them will not make sense, it is so important to process. In regards to using the information that you get, make sure to read through the binder and whether it be something in your home, office, department or campus, create something. I created a year long program with my staff that later won ACPA's Commission III Program of the Year because of the amount of people that the program touched. It can be done, you can get people to start talking, and most importantly, start doing, even if they did not attend.

-Kenrick Ali, Class of 2004 – Springfield

I left with a sense of hope and affirmation. The hope was created when I was able to see many people be challenged and was able to witness them doing the work, in particular white people. It is not often that the dominant culture group "air their dirty laundry" with people of color present. I left affirmed because I witness the impact of racism on a daily routine in the lives of others. This eliminated much of the psychological preoccupation that accompanies daily incidents of racism. And now, I put more energy into resolving the racist situation. Also, I felt affirmed in my educational approach to social justice and anti-oppression training.

Since, September 11, I have been able to witness and track the overt and covert sabotage, creation of propaganda and massive targeting of another group of color. It is a completely intolerable situation for me. With other incidents at the Oklahoma bombing, I did not see one soul who was passionate about committing a hate crime against a white male in response to the tragedy on September 11. I do not advocate hate crimes, but it is response I did not encounter as oppose to those who wanted to harm people who were or who were perceived as Muslims or Middle Eastern. In addition, I have been sickened with the exclusion of people of color and underclass and lower class people who were impacted, but not getting media coverage. The face of the victims in majority of the cases has been white. No one needs a tracking tool to see the madness. Not to mention all the legislation and policy changes and proposals that are impeding the civil rights of many people of color in our country. People of color do not have the privilege of avoiding this when a person of color is identified as the enemy to the great white American institutions. There is much to say, but I will stop here.

I learned hands-on at the institute is that my voice is important for confrontation and disrupting racist acts (and other acts of injustice), whether I am with people of consciousness or not. I think we experienced some very painful lessons with the facilitators and participants. The beauty of it all, we tried to work through it. It was an honest, naked and direct approach to problems that occurred at the training. I appreciated working through it.

Finally, while I do not always engage in the conversations over e-mail with SJTI, it is wonderful to feel that presence of colleagues around the country actively participating in combating racism and other isms and phobias daily. I know that I do not always hear of everyone's actions and nor do I share, it can be exhausting at times. But I love knowing that I have another source of colleagues who will not only validate my concerns, but will assist in support and solutions.

-Fleurette King, DePaul, '00

In looking back to my SJTI experience in the summer of '03, I've realized that I am *still* in the process of learning. As a woman of color, I came into the experience believing that I had a pretty good grasp of social justice issues. The workshops and my interactions with the staff and other participants forced me to examine my dominant group memberships (something I hadn't done before SJTI) and today, four years later, I continue to gain valuable insights related to those memberships.

- Wanda Tyler

Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk.

-Debra Griffith, San Jose State University, Intern '05

As I am in the middle of teaching my second semester of undergraduate Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, my SJTI experience is on my mind more than usual. Well and also, but he knows this, the incredible teaching and mentoring I have received from Jamie over the course of many years. I'm learning that all teaching is just trying to replicate the great teaching you've received from others. And I've been truly blessed.

The SJTI experience was a particularly difficult one for me. Emotionally and really even physiologically. The Tucson weekend was where I really confronted for the first time the idea that all white people are racist by nature of their socialization in a racist system and their (willing or not) participation in a system of white privilege. It was really, really hard. When we get to that place in my class, where we address the definition of racism (using the film *The Color of Fear*) as prejudice and discrimination plus power they all, including many of my students of color, get very mad at me. Remembering the difficulty I had negotiating my own first exposure to this idea at SJTI provides me with the most valuable place to relate to them. I am able to describe in great detail what my own reaction was and how important it is for them to stick with it in spite of the difficulty, as I had to in order to still be doing this work today. That is was truly difficult for me allows me to go to a place of honesty in relating to the students I could not have gotten any other way. I still have a physical reaction to thinking about that weekend. And I'm thankful for that.

After my first class got so angry, I realized that I had gotten angry right back and spent some serious time trying to figure out why. Not sure if it will all make sense to you but it does paint a vivid picture of that Tucson weekend.

Of all the topics we have covered this entire semester that regularly gets me pissed off and fired up, the one that has gotten the most people in this class the most fired up is our definition of racism. So, instead of just reacting back to that in my own frustration I spent some time thinking about the weekend in Tucson, AZ where I had it done to me for the first time. I am white, I am racist. We had to say it. And I hated it. And I didn't get to voice my frustration with it the way some of you have. Well I wrestled with it for a long time. And I HOPE you will too but I can't control that. Well now I can see why, seeing my rejection of that definition in my body language, a good chunk of the people of color who were participating in that conference were pretty pissed at me for the rest of the weekend. I see them thinking in their heads, "Look, the poor little white girl is upset because she can't call us racists anymore. That bad word is reserved just for her so she can't avoid it." Maybe, just maybe, it's okay if one really bad word (that only recently, say a generation ago, became a bad word, after it was no longer the LAW of the LAND) is reserved just for white people. Because honky just doesn't have the same power as some of the other words that we have talked about and in some cases even agreed not to use in this classroom.

Maybe you hate it and maybe it's uncomfortable and maybe it makes you want to bail on the class because it makes you feel impotent and powerless. Maybe it is a valuable lesson to be able to sit in and know what it feels like (bad) to have forced on you and not be able to reject a definition that someone else is imposing on you just by virtue of the color of your skin. Feels crappy, huh? And that is not a valuable learning experience because? And you know what else, you're not powerless, you can do something, that's part of your privilege. So I am offended that of all the possible things to get really pissed off about after you learn them in this class, the one that most offended my students is not being able to call people of color racists. Why do we need to be so concerned about policing the activity of people of color and what they say about us? Why is not our first priority policing and being concerned about the racism that is in our own communities? You don't need to name Snoop a racist. His behavior is not good, but it is not impacting your life. Yours is. And your friends. And your family. And maybe if you name it racism it will be bad enough and bother you enough to do something about it rather than spend all this energy identifying how people of color are racist too, uh huh, yes they are.

-Stephanie M. McClure, University of Georgia

I can offer two pieces of advice to SJTI alums, as you leave for your family, home and work again. First, realize that your filters are off and you will see all sorts of bias and oppression in your travels, among colleagues, friends and family. I was amazed by what I heard colleagues say upon my return - when before I would have just given myself a PLE to cover their lack of sensitivity or their intentional bias comments. I learned quickly how to confront people in situations where I could do so safely.

Secondly, encourage peers and colleagues to attend - even if you or they don't believe their work would benefit from attending the institute. I had two office colleagues attend - one who works in campus activities, the other in community service programs - and among the three of us, we have had positive impact in our office to help change the culture of acceptance and inclusiveness.

I am always happy to meet other SJTI alums at conferences and I can't wait to hear about your adventures post-SJTI on the listserv!

-Joseph Rios, Dec '02

Congratulations, newest SJTI alums! It is so wonderful to know the SJTI family is growing again with your completion of the week's program. One of the most helpful things for my own re-entry was to know that I had a network of wonderful friends & colleagues around the country to rely on for continued advice, assistance, and support. The REAL work gets started when you get home & back to your workplace....so if you feel tired now, be sure to give yourself a few days when you get back to rest up for the journey ahead! I took a day off from work when I got back in December - if you can swing it take more!

Upon leaving SJTI I was completely expecting to be frustrated and short on patience with those around me - especially my fellow white people. I was nervous about seeing the people who had already been triggering me in the past, figuring they would really set off my buttons now that I had this heightened awareness of racism, privilege, and status quo behaviors....but, what I found was that SJTI had given me the strength to have more patience. I learned the work is too important to lose my cool & walk away mad....I had to try harder to help coach & mentor - especially other whites - because other whites & people of color kept their patience with me & helped me along this journey.

I wish I would have known truly HOW HARD it would be to return (maybe it was better that I didn't know). To leave a place where so many voices can openly discuss REAL issues and re-enter a place where people try so hard to avoid real issues...so incredibly frustrating. It was also hard to lose the support system of people who shared common thoughts and awareness levels. I felt very alone.

I was disappointed in myself for believing that being a "good person" was enough. I had been passive aggressive for so long in order to avoid any real confrontation without recognizing the value of growth through confrontation. I almost found it difficult to function. I basically clung to those individuals who really got it. I would seek them out and it was so helpful to be able to discuss things with them.

Our staff first participated in a 2 month staff development program based on the "Readings" text, which was more intense than anything we had done before. The staff then planned a modified-mini-SJTI-for-students so we could help students explore issues of social justice, which really hadn't been done prior in an authentic way. One major thing that SJTI did for me was help me find my voice. I was too timid before, too afraid people would be so uncomfortable that it would do more damage than good. SJTI helped me realize that you have to be uncomfortable to truly learn and be impacted.

-Betty Jeanne Wolfe Taylor, June '03

Know that this is some of the hardest work you will ever do. Take time to rip off the scabs and heal. Take time to sit in the emotion and stew. Get to know your allies. Determine who you can trust. Understand we all collude and we all hurt each other sometime. Dialogue is powerful and so important to the process. Emotion is awesome, even if it doesn't feel like it at the time. Understand that we all make mistakes and that forgiveness is powerful. Know you are the key to change. Know you are not alone. Know that you have allies in places you never thought you would. Do the good work and take care of yourself. Only you can heal the wounds of time. May you always know inner peace.

-Leilani Kupo, Wesleyan University, '04

I was reading through some articles sitting around my place and came upon this article, "the racism of well-meaning white people" by Naomi Wolf. This particular line struck me and reminded me of one of the main messages that I personally took from SJTI. I can definitely relate to this and get caught up from time to time in my own mess--losing sight of the real issues.

She writes, "I imagine that what bores and infuriates black people about the racism of well-meaning white people is watching them struggle with this scrim and entangle themselves in it and blow at it and touch it and ignore it and disown it to the point that they become more involved in their own drama of guilt and fear than in getting on with the real struggle at hand - the struggle to see clearly across race."

-Stephanie Bondi, Summer '05

The most important piece of advice that I heard from other SJTI Alum was to NOT push your re-entry to quickly or too much. As I returned to my campus, a million ideas were running through my head and I wanted to make changes right away. I decided to follow the wisdom of the alum and take more time to reflect. From this I summarized that SJTI was the best thing I ever did for my organization, and more importantly, for myself. By waiting to bring the information back to my campus in a meaningful way, I had time to digest the experience for myself, and I learned that was the only way I could truly represent the importance of the SJTI experience. So, do what you can to fight the urge to return home and dig right in. There are so many layers to what you have experienced, a little time is essential. It will help make the change you work to affect all the more meaningful.

-Annie Aversa, Barnard College, Tucson '05

SJTI opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about oppression and racism. Not only of my own experiences of being oppressed as a Latina and as a woman. In this institute I was forced to think about how I oppress others, whether in thoughts or inadvertent actions. It was painful to admit, but oh so necessary in the work that I do for social justice. I learned that change has to happen first within ourselves before we can convince others. I am forever grateful for this life changing experience and I am sure that whether you recognize it now or not, you will be grateful too.

It will be rare to find such a forum and space for this type of honest and frank discussion. You can try to recreate these discussions when you go back to your home and work environments, but take care to remember that no one else will have the same setup and frame of reference, so tread carefully. Good luck to you in your reentry process.

- Sofia Bautista Pertuz, Wagner College (NY), Tucson 2004 and Intern Tucson 2006

peace...

consider these words from poet audre lorde...

when i dare to be powerful to use my strength in the service of my vision then it becomes less and less important whether i am afraid...

if you didn't have a vision before you arrived in tucson, i hope you have one now
i hope you see yourself, honestly, authentically...and in a way that inspires you to do more
i hope you celebrate the friendships that you've started and
i hope you're inspired to hold your current family and friends closer to you

december 2005 was my year...i listened, i shared, i laughed, i agreed, i grimaced, I cried...
i cried so hard i stopped breathing, then someone walked up to me, hugged me and said "exhale"
i listened, i trusted, and then i exhaled...

stop laughing...yes, i too read the book and watched the movie waiting to exhale...
sadly, i wasn't waiting to exhale...i was proud that i had perfected holding my breath
holding my thoughts, my feelings, important things to say...all held perfectly inside my heart and mind...
so you could imagine, i held in the anger, the disappointment, the tears, the questions, the frustration
the "oh no you didn't"..."what did he just say to me" ...and "no i can't speak for MY PEOPLE"

if this sounds familiar to you...know that you have a kindred soul in me
re-entry hit me like a ton of bricks...it hit like waves on the sand...constantly
i fought to listen, to stay open, to be constantly reminded of the injustices
i wanted to keep learning and educating, trying to make a change
i was tired...fed up...insulted...worried that i still didn't know enough...

do me a favor...do yourself a favor...think about the words audre lorde wrote
when you are working towards a vision...a vision of equity, access, and inclusion...
your fears...while real and important to name and recognize...
can't stop you
can't stop you
can't hold you back
can't hold you back

don't hold back...say what you need to say...do what you need to do...

Here are some suggested songs:

"Don't Feel Right" - The Roots - from the album Game Theory

"I Am Not My Hair" - India.Arie feat. Akon - from the album Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship

"I Choose" - India.Arie - from the album Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship

peace,

samantha m. ivery
sjti, december 2005

For the white participants in the room, my biggest advice is to get over yourself. Let go of the need to prove yourself to everyone in the room, to prove that you "get it" or that you're trying really hard. Let go of the need to "get it" at all. Be present in the room, listen hard, speak your experiences (seriously, you need to speak up if this is going to do you any good), challenge yourself and the white folks around you. And remember, be patient with yourself even as you push yourself--and keep pushing. You'll feel stuck at some point, you'll feel frustrated, maybe even angry. Musicians don't learn to play their instruments overnight--but they work their butts off to learn how to be great. As a white person, your most powerful instrument is your voice. Use it, at SJTI and at home. Seriously. You need to speak up, even if it's scary or feels uncomfortable, because the world needs us white folks to work really hard to turn ourselves and other white folks around. The price is too great not to.

As Kathy, Vernon, and Jamie say, See yourself in other people. Speaking from my own experiences, don't get self-righteous with other white people because they don't "get it" like you think you do. Remember that this could be you tomorrow and probably was you yesterday. People of color have worked long enough to change white people that don't "get it". It's our turn (it's always been our turn, we just haven't taken it on), so don't shy away from the task just because you're afraid that other white people will make you see your own racist reflection in their faces. As I said before, get over yourself.

And T the P.

- Jena Olson

Don't feel the need to immediately "correct" individuals that have said/done something wrong. Be ready to engage them into a conversation about that comment/ action made you feel, put the emphasis on you, it makes it more real to them.

-Aja Holmes

Be kind to yourself... be gentle too. Remember that it is OK to be enraged... to be mad... to feel shame. Work through it. Do not wallow. Find time to heal. Rip off the scabs of the wounds of the past and let them heal. Just let yourself heal. Forgive yourself. Forgive others. It truly is about trusting the process. Trust yourself and know you know what is best for yourself. Find those who will help you continue to process your experience, those you can trust, those who are in it for the long haul, those who will challenge you. They will be your energy, your strength, your guide when times get tough. Know that this in not just a one time deal. You will continue to process. You will continue to change. I am still processing after all these years. I wish you strength, wisdom, and perseverance... and Aloha in your heart.

- Leilani Kupo

Commit yourself to the process. Commit yourself to healing. Commit yourself to speak out. Commit yourself to action. Audre Lorde and Barack Obama give me inspiration; I hope you find something in their words to inspire you to COMMIT.

-Samantha M. Ivery
SJTI, December 2005

i have come to believe over and over again, that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.

~Audre Lorde

making your mark on the world is hard. if it were easy, everybody would do it. but it's not. it takes patience, it takes commitment, and it comes with plenty of failure along the way. the real test is not whether you avoid this failure, because you won't. it's whether you let it harden or shame you into inaction, or whether you learn from it; whether you choose to persevere.

~ BARACK OBAMA, speech, July 12, 2006

Based on my personality and my work environment, this mantra worked for me: practice patience with yourself and with others. After being in such an intense, authentic experience I wanted to make big change happen right away. However, the predominantly white, middle-class world I was going back to didn't experience the same transformation while I was away at SJTI, and so I did my best to describe how I was affected by SJTI and some of the changes I wanted to see happen. While I did advocate for social justice in more specific and meaningful ways than I had in the past, I did it at a pace that allowed for real change to happen (instead of just putting a band-aid on things) and for people to realize that while I was providing *direction* in the change process, I was not *directing* them to change major components of themselves right away. This collaborative style does not work for everyone, however, and there is room for lots of different styles in this work. It has been one year since I attended SJTI and since then I have had many, many opportunities to do the head and heart work that was role modeled so well at SJTI; it just didn't happen all at once as soon as I got back to campus.

- Shannon Marthouse, University of New Hampshire

Call someone out. That's all I'm sayin'. If you called someone out at SJTI, you just gained 20 points. But if you call someone out after SJTI, you get 100 points...each. Internalization is the worst. Silence helps nobody. We can't read you and we're not about to try. Not telling your story? Waiting for others to tell theirs so you don't have to share the pain? Get ready to be called out. Call someone out, or they'll never know. Be prepared to get called out, too...but think about your family member or your partner or your supervisor. That's like 300 points right there - redeemable at your local karma center. If I could give you 1 piece of advice, it's to call someone out. Get it together...disturb the system...call someone out!

- Matthew Antonio Bosch, North Hennepin Community College

Social Justice Training Institute: Making Meaning

I was not prepared for what happened to me at SJTI. I feel foolish for having believed it would be nothing more than touchy-feely, but grateful that I did not go into it with any more expectations than that. It gave me room to explore what I apparently did not realize I had within me. I did a lot of journaling, mainly because one of my tasks upon returning was to write a reflection for an independent study (which turned into 53-pages of reflection), but also because it helped me process my experiences.

The five days were a whirlwind. So much happened that I cannot do it justice here, in this short amount of space, but the following words summarize the intensity that I felt during that time. I was the first to cry. I felt alone and vulnerable. I got angry. I felt tight, uncomfortable, afraid, silenced, and exhausted. I made friends. I drank (which is not typical of me), and I talked *a lot!* I felt ignored, unwanted, unsure, guilty, isolated, marginalized, out of control, introverted, and ugly. I experienced self-hatred. I felt invisible, hurt, attracted, used, triggered, empowered, strengthened, paranoid, loved, exposed, and free. At different times I felt welcomed, appreciated, proud, pitied, included, excluded, beautiful, safe, weak, accomplished, validated, and heard. It was a roller-coaster, but not one I wanted to stop riding.

The very last day came too soon and I did not want to go home. I did not want to leave that place where I felt safe. I did not want to leave what, in five days, had become my family.

After I left the convention center, I had plenty of time to sit in the airport and think. I felt disoriented and edgy. I wondered if people could see what I had gone through, if they could see how damaged I was. I felt ill-prepared to be out there. I wanted support and guidance. I wrote *a lot* during the twelve hours it took me, between layovers and air time, to get home. It was cathartic to write, to put pen to paper and spill the ugliness out of me. I had to do something to cleanse myself.

One thing I had to do was to stop tracking, a skill I already had developed as a sociologist, but sharpened even more while at SJTI, because it was tiring and painful and I needed a break. I needed to sit in my experience and not pay attention to the world around me because I felt like if I focused too much, I might shatter.

The first week back was not particularly difficult since I did not have an office to return to. I emailed SJTI people often and I sent several long and heart-felt words to a few participants. I felt the detachment happening already. We were certain people in that pressure-cooker, and now we were all un-wrinkling back to the forms we were when we began. In a way, it made me sad.

Several people have written on the SJTI listserv about their re-entry since our return to the "real world." Some have struggled more than others. My struggles are still very internal. What I felt so much of was that I was walking in a haze. It was like I had gone through this experience, been thrown into a vortex and kicked out, and I was disoriented. People asked me how it was and I had no words for it. I only wanted to talk to former SJTI participants because I knew they would understand. It was our own little secret society. SJTI was an amazing opportunity for growth and connection. I connected with others, but most importantly, I connected with myself.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure round you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

- Marianne Williamson

This quote really reminds me of why I do what I do...and helps me find clarity and peace. That's my biggest advice. Take time each day to find some peace and clarity. It really will help. And don't forget.....don't forget anything, how to felt, what you thought, what you learned, how others felt. Don't forget it when you get back home and back to your daily grind. It's too easy to forget and nobody benefits from that. Believe in yourself and know that everyone can do their own part. Find a way to move past the anger and get to a place that helps you and others and keep doing the work. Remember you're only useful if you are a clear instrument, have faith, and be the change.

- Sara Furr, Mount St. Mary's University, Tucson 2005 and Intern Springfield 2008

You are going to have all these emotions and questions after the Institute. Just remember that not everyone has gone through the experience you have gone through. Change is hard and slow but it is possible (look at the our president). When you get frustrated or just want to give up call an alum from your session or any alum or vent to us on the listserve we all have been there.

Just remember in the words of our President Barack H. Obama "Our Destiny is not written for us, but by us".

-Eddie Diaz SJTI Alum June 2007

In seeking to avoid a fight we concede what we're about. We're about justice, fairness, equality—that's our strength. We cannot concede our strength. We must realize, understand and believe that our current conditions do not reflect our ultimate potential. If we limit our choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, we disconnect ourselves from what we truly want. And all that is left is a compromise. In order to move forward we need both the courage of our convictions and the commitment to do the work. --Gary Delgado, Black organizer

- Sarah Gonzales

Once you have been through SJTI, there is a change that will come over you, a kind of awakening of some sorts. This will scare the heck out of you because you are so sensitized to the power of the one up one down struggle. You are very conscientious of how you are when you enter a room, you are going to be triggered by so many situations that you want to scream!!! With all that said, take a deep breath, own the moment and know that you can make a difference.

- Aja Holmes, SJTI I-2005 and SJTI II 2008

to bear witness.
to simply exist. and by my existence, my continued breathing –
at times deep exhalations of peace, at others labored gasps –
to defy the system that would suppress
and bury my truth, my hue, my love.
to bear witness.
to question what I've been told, to uncover
and name the implicit lessons that teach me
to doubt my strength and loathe myself.
messages that show me how little value I hold.
to dismantle these lies.

to bear witness.
to name injustice, for me, for you,
for ancestors, and those yet to draw breath.
to let my light, so oft submerged, shine free and unfiltered.
to share my history without shame, proudly bearing
the scars tattooed on flesh and memory.

to bear witness.
to challenge not only those around me
but my own internalized dominance and subordination.
to bring my whole and authentic self into every space.
to take ownership of my intersections
in the continual constructing of identity.

to bear witness.
to build community. and through coalition,
our melanin majority, healing the wounds of
oppression and collusion. Engaging without
self-serving pats on own backs.
standing together, refusing to be silent.

to bear witness.
to embrace the journey, without need
for destination and appreciating each moment
as both trial and blessing.
to continue
to bear witness.

- Stephanie Nixon – Springfield, 2006, Intern June 2009

Be gentle with yourself and expect life to feel turned upside down. It was helpful for me to listen to the new urgings inside of me seeking a place in my life. I didn't need to decide what to do about them right away. I did need to make sure I honored the space they had created; sometimes painful; sometimes exhilarating. My re-entry was helped by acknowledging that I had been changed by my experience and my trust that it would become clear, in time, who that called me to be in the world.

- Diana Schmitz, SJTI June 2007

you have now completed a mind changing experience. i would encourage you to take the new values you have learned and put them to use. your reentry may be challenging, but know that many people have gone through this experience before you, which translates into having numerous people who are here for you. lastly, i would also advocate that you if you leave with any guilt..please do not stay in that space....find support and continue to challenge yourself so that you are able to use that energy for change. the work will be worth the effort.

- derrick gunter, tuscon fall 07

“YOU DON’T KNOW IT ALL”. Leaving this experience you have now started a new journey of constant exploration of self. We all have our issues and these will take much longer to “unpack” than one week, one month, or even one year. My advice is simple, take some time to digest this experience call Social Justice Training Institute. If you can afford to not rush back to your natural environment (work, family, and friends), make time to try and figure out some of the thoughts that are racing through your head.

Be patient with the outside world, not everyone has had the privilege of experiencing SJTI. Don’t forget that those who experience SJTI are privileged, and hopefully you continue to feel and share the love once you leave the institute. I hope you grow from this experience in a way that you never thought possible, I sure have. I wish you the best as you return back to whatever environment you came from. Congratulations for making that first step, attending and graduating from the institute.

And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

Lastly, don’t forget to remember your interns, and especially your faculty members. They ALL are truly an inspiration to us all.

Travis Gabriel
SJTI c/o Fall 2009

After SJTI, my emotions were quite jumbled. I felt impassioned to keep up the fight, humbled and saddened by some realizations I had about the role of my whiteness in past experiences, deeply moved by the desire/need to keep trusting that people can love each other across lines of difference even after lifetimes of experiencing that trust betrayed, exhausted by the schedule and late night conversations, and inspired to use new skills like recognizing and responding to triggers and confronting bias effectively. Talking with a friend (and SJTI-alum) after my experience helped me integrate these feelings, and to put the momentum into action. I was also able to hang out with a few of my fellow participants from my area throughout the summer and that was truly affirming to the deeper work of relationship building that was done in Springfield. The best advice I got during the bumpy re-entry period was to make room for it all -- the anger, the compassion, the forgiveness, the rage, the sadness, the excitement -- to write about it, talk about it, and do something about it.

- Mandie Stout

Think of your next few days, months, the next year as a year of firsts. This process will open your eyes, fill you with mixed emotions, and bring forth new eyes to see the world with day to day. Take time to reflect. Give yourself time to think, feel, open up, and to truly trust the process. Breathe.

- Bernie Liang, Tucson 2003

"The only way out is through." -SITI 2008

"Do your own work." -A. Flesher

"If you have come to help me, please go away. But, if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, let us work together." - L. Watson

"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." -A. Nin

"Damaged people are dangerous! They know they can survive!" -J. Hart

- Staci Gunner

"let grace, courage, and your inner spirit be your guide. sji is a deep and wonderful exploration of self. with that said, give yourself grace to explore all that you learn as you go through this experience. then use your courage to continue the work and let your inner spirit lead you because there is still more work that needs to be done!"

derrick gunter
educational advisor, upward bound
roosevelt university

Start the Dialogue

"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." – James Baldwin

"Fear is a powerful emotion, one that immobilizes, traps words in our throats, and stills our tongues. Like a deer on the highway, frozen in the panic induced by the lights of an oncoming car, when we are afraid it seems that we cannot think, we cannot speak, we cannot move." – Beverly Daniel Tatum

"Efforts to create collegiate environments that mirror society at large have too often fallen short of the mark. Clearly, we must create more effective learning environments for all students -- regardless of such factors as age, race, ethnicity, and economic background." – Patricia M. King

"The diversity dialogue is not about making the majority "comfortable." The dialogue should be about making people of color more comfortable in this society. The goal is achieved in having the privileged see what people of color live through, everyday. Oppression is not a condition, it is a reality. There's little comfort in that." – Kyle S. Clark

"The more contact we have with people of color and with images and information about them, the more we are equipped to challenge racism... This awareness can guide our action and enrich our lives." – Paul Kivel

"None of us alone can save the nation or world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so." – Cornel West

- Kyle S. Clark

You are going to have all these emotions and questions after the Institute. Just remember that not everyone has gone through the experience you have gone through. Change is hard and slow but it is possible and will happen. When you get frustrated or just want to give up call an alumni from your session or any alumni or vent on the listserve we all have been there and always willing to listen.

Just remember in the words of our President Barack H. Obama "Our Destiny is not written for us, but by us".

-Eddie Díaz, Springfield, MA June 2007

My words to you are simple. It takes being strong, vulnerability, trusting others, and trusting yourself to get through the institute. It takes those elements times 3 to continue after SJTI. If you showed up authentically, you leave forever changed for the better.

I left SJTI with a greater sense of love for myself and for my fellow beings. I left SJTI examining my own hatred and dislike for some groups of people; and learning that I needed those same people I had hatred for to help make positive change. I left SJTI examining race and racism in all that I participate in. I left SJTI wanting to making positive change immediately; and supported in my efforts when I couldn't make change happen as fast as I wanted to.

Be the change I wish to see in the world is how I live my life now. The ownership is on me to decide how I will live my life. Living my life means having love and compassion as a foundation in how I interact with others and do the work that I do. Sometimes I think I'm headed in a right direction; sometimes I get it wrong. But I know it starts with me showing up and wanting to engage actively in this manner. Along the way, my old friends and I along with the new ones I meet; some who look like me; and some who don't, work together to do the work that needs to be done.

My advice to you alums: Take time to always self reflect; and know you can't make change by yourself. We need each other.

- Bethel "B" Nathan-----December 2009, Tucson AZ.

When I first arrived at SJTI, I thought I knew some stuff about social justice. What I learned was a new meaning for who I am and what I do on a daily basis. I soon found a voice that I didn't even know I had. With the support of the people around me, I was able to talk with others, challenge myself, see how others are challenged, and continue to grow. I continue to use what I learned at SJTI in my daily life, and have begun new journeys within myself. Specifically, I look for the opportunities for healing, rather than playing "gotcha" to whomever I deem necessary with my Social Justice bat.

I encourage anyone and everyone that goes through this process to open yourself up to the learnings that you don't know you don't know. I also encourage you to use the people in your cohort as long time support people. Only they know what the experience was like in that brief moment you all shared together.

Victor Santana-Melgoza
Oregon State University
Participant – Dec. '09, Tucson | Intern – Dec. '10, Long Beach

After SJTI Re-Entry Back Into Society Instructions

1. Count to 10 after every “trigger” moment. This is so you know if you want to respond.
2. Find a contemplative practice. What that means is find a practice where you can reflection, reenergize and recuperate. This can be, yoga, journaling, mediation, reflective walking.
3. Find a SJTI Support Group. This is beyond the listserv; this institute has been around long enough that there should be people who you can connect with in your area.
4. Know how you want to do the WORK.
5. Remember that “PLEs” are triggers too, even how awesomely logically that sound.
6. Trust the process or “T the P” even once you have left SJTI.
7. Refer to your manual often. Use the information in there for work, team builders, and family game night.
8. Trust that little voice in your head, it will lead you.
9. It is ok for you to “sit in” whatever you are going through.
10. It is not over, you grow every day.

Welcome to the SJTI Family!!

Aja Holmes
SJTI I 2005 | SJTI II 2008
PhD Student, Iowa State University

I always knew I was white. I saw it in the mirror every morning. I'd read Beverly Tatum and others' work and understood I had white-skin privilege. But, I never KNEW I was white, if that makes sense. I would always default to my non-majority identities of being a woman, growing up low SES, etc. It's easier to think of how you don't have privilege than how you do. SJTI allowed me to focus on my privilege. To face it. To be called out on it. To KNOW my whiteness. To use one of my favorite phrases - to "sit in my shit." It was new, it was uncomfortable, and it was necessary. SJTI gave me the space to discover that the world was everything I thought it was and nothing I thought it was ... all at the same time.

Be real. Even if it makes you feel ignorant. Even if you get called out for that ignorance. If we aren't real, we can't get to the heart of the issues of social justice and we can't help ourselves or other people.

SJTI taught me how to stick it out with an malfunctioning group. I usually separate myself from those situations. Just leave. Or, I attempt to fix it or ignore it, whatever "it" is. I now see those options as part of my privilege. This time I could not, or would not, allow myself to do that. Rather, I stayed engaged in the process. I trusted the process. Was that tiring? Yes. Was that a lot of intrapersonal and interpersonal work? Yes. But, it was worth it. I learned how to function in dysfunction. I learned that it is okay for a group to not leave feeling warm & fuzzy. I also learned that growth and development don't always lead to a "happy" ending. All of that is okay. Sometimes the most messy situations are the most rewarding.

Don't compare your SJTI experience to other people's SJTI experience, and don't try to make it like what you've heard it should be. That is a recipe for disaster. Even with people at your same session. We all arrive to SJTI at different places and we will all leave in various places. That does not mean the experience was less valuable for one than another. Instead, it means we all find our own value in the experience.

- Sonja Ardoin
June 2010, Springfield MA

3. For Your “Support People” - Some Thoughts and Suggestions

The Support People in the lives of SJTI alums play a significant role as their loved ones and colleagues “re-enter” their lives after SJTI. Similar to returning home after any intensive, personal growth experience, your SJTI participant may have a period of adjustment as they figure out how to integrate into their lives all they have learned about themselves and about issues of race and racism.

We hope you can take a moment to review the information in this short packet...it may be useful as you consider ways you can support your loved one/colleague in their journey of self-discovery and increasing usefulness as a social justice educator. In the following pages we discuss the purpose and intention of SJTI and some insights into common experiences of past participants as they re-enter their lives with family, friends, and colleagues. We also offer some “tips” from past participants and members of their support system of ways you might be useful and helpful in this process.

Many alums have reported that SJTI was a very transformative and life changing experience for them, specifically related to their racial/ethnic identity (as a Person of Color; as someone who identifies as Biracial or Multiracial; as a White person). We thank you for all your support of them as they continue to find ways to help dismantle racism and create a truly inclusive society for all!

Warm Regards,

SJTI Faculty

What is Social Justice?

Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) define social justice as both a process and a goal. "The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure."

What is the Social Justice Training Institute/SJTI?

The *Social Justice Training Institute/SJTI* provides a forum for the professional and personal development of social justice educators and practitioners to enhance and refine their skills and competencies to create greater inclusion for all members of their organization or campus community.

Founded in 1998 by Jamie Washington, Kathy Obear, Vernon Wall, and Maura Cullen, SJTI provides diversity trainers and practitioners an *intensive laboratory experience* where they can focus on their own learning and development to increase their multicultural competencies as social justice educators.

Past participants have found SJTI to be an **intense experience** designed to deepen understanding of the dynamics of oppression at the individual, group, cultural, and systems levels through the lens of race and racism.

- During the first few days participants enhance their ability to engage in authentic dialogue about the dynamics of race and racism both across and within racial groups.
- Through community activities, race caucus work, core group discussions, and exploring the impact of in-the-moment situations that occur during the Institute, participants expand their competencies as social justice educators and change agents.
- During the final two days of SJTI the focus is to apply the learning from this experience to other areas of oppression.

The focus of the institute is on *personal work* ~ working dynamics of internalized dominance and internalized oppression, and learning to better use yourself as the instrument of change.

Institute Format

The Social Justice Training Institute will provide an intensive developmental opportunity for social justice educators to examine the complex dynamics of RACE AND RACISM and to focus on how to develop their personal competencies as trainers and practitioners.

[NOTE: "This is not a training to teach the trainer, but a deeply personal experience where one explores his or her on feelings and thoughts around issues of difference" (past SJTI participant)].

Reference:

Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook (1997). Edited by Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin.

Taken from SJTI web site: http://sjti.org/register_a.html

What we encourage SJTI participants to consider as they re-enter:

On the final day of SJTI we have a short session on “Re-entry” where we encourage participants to think about how they want to re-enter their lives. Some suggestions we offer are:

- Journal your thoughts and feelings...and journal some more...
- Remember that your awareness may be extremely heightened as you go back...and you will probably notice far more dynamics around issues of race, racism and other forms of oppression than you did before SJTI.
- Remember that other people in your life did not have the ability to attend this SJTI session, and so they may not understand what you are experiencing, nor have the same level of passion and commitment to dismantling racism...yet.
- Remember that you are very tired...and your emotions are stirred...and you may have re-triggered some intrapersonal roots....and you may more easily feel triggered and feel more intense emotions in the short term.
- Remember how triggering events are “gifts” to explore the deeper roots of your triggers....and waiting to respond until you are more centered and reflective may be a good choice for the next short while...
- Remember that people in your life kept on doing their lives while you were at SJTI....taking care of the home, possibly children or elders, working, possibly taking up the slack so you could be gone, worrying about you, supporting you through the Institute....and they may have things they want to tell you or ask you to do as you come back. Be grateful and appreciative of them.
- Be gentle with yourselves as you re-enter...and BE GENTLE with all others as well.
- Take time to rest, sleep and rejuvenate yourself. Take a day off before you return to work, if you can.
- Go slowly as you go back to work....pay attention to dynamics around you and inside of you....and consider not reacting or responding in the moment....there is always time to come back and talk about a situation at a later time.
- Talk to people in your life about your learnings, reflections, insights....always asking them if they are available for the conversation.
- Know that some people will ask “How are you?” and only want a short response. While others in your life truly do want to have deeper, more authentic dialogues with you...they just may not yet have all the skills to meet you where you are...yet.
- Find people (alums or folks who’ve had similar experiences) to debrief with.
- Expand your support circle to include more people who are allies and change agents.
- “Do not try this at home...” meaning we encourage you to NOT try to recreate SJTI in your organization. If your supervisor or another colleague wants you to “do a diversity training now that you went to SJTI,” explain to them how SJTI was a professional/personal development program, and that in time, you will integrate all you have learned and be able to use it as you do your daily work activities. If you want to do some/more diversity training, remember that SJTI participants chose to immerse themselves in a 5 day experience....meet the participants “where they are,” without expecting anything similar to SJTI to occur.
- As you interact with your supervisor, thank them for their support of your attending SJTI. Consider letting them know that your intention is to use what you’ve learned to continue to help create an inclusive environment, AND you may need some time to reflect and integrate what you experienced. If you want to talk with them about some of your insights, it may be best to talk about yourself (your learnings, reflections, aha’s) and NOT about what they should be doing differently. Most likely, at some point they will ask you for some thoughts on how the department could increase inclusion; if they ask you, they will be more open to hearing your thoughts and reflections.

Recommendations for you, their Support People

As you would do in any similar situation, ask them how they are doing and, more importantly, what they think they need as they re-enter...how you can be helpful and supportive. Each SJTI alum probably has a different set of needs based on their personality and group memberships (for instance if they are a man or woman or identify as transgender; or if they identify as multiracial or biracial or white or as a person of color). They may not yet know what they need when you ask, but asking could feel very supportive. And, they may know more about what they need as time goes on.

The following suggestions are based on feedback from some of our alums and their Support People. As you review these you might find a new thought or two to add to how you plan to support your SJTI alum:

- If you haven't had much experience discussing issues of race, racism, or social justice, you might consider doing some reading on your own to get some basic definitions and terminology as well as an understanding of the common dynamics of oppression in the U.S., and possibly around the world. Having a shared vocabulary and understanding may deepen your conversations and ability to engage these issues more directly.
- As you may have already realized, your alum may be coming back feeling a wide variety of emotions, some of them possibly very intense. During SJTI they may have explored and uncovered internalized negative beliefs and assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices, and past experiences related to race and racism. Some alums may have directly looked in the mirror and acknowledged some of their behaviors and attitudes that have helped perpetuate racism, such as when they have colluded, or actively done something out of some racial bias.
- Most alums return with a heightened awareness of their racial/ethnic identity, and may use their more focused "racial lens" to analyze their past and current situations. It may seem like "all they see or talk about is race..." And this may be true...for many of us, we have not paid attention to the daily dynamics of race and racism that occur around us all the time. It's been our experience that over time alums find a new, integrated balance among their increased attention to dynamics of race/racism, their commitment to social justice overall, and the other passions, commitments and interests in their lives.
- Many alums report how they took many months or even a couple of years to fully integrate their new insights and learnings. Some have used this opportunity to re-examine many aspects of how they have chosen to live their lives to date. Your patience, continued interest, and empathetic listening will be immeasurably helpful to them throughout their journey. And please remember that the alum, at times, may not want to talk...they may still be trying to make sense of their experience and may not yet have the words to talk about it at times.
- One trap some of us can fall into is to try to "fix" and "solve" things, when what the person is wanting is a good listener and someone to try to understand what they are feeling and experiencing. If you feel the urge to fix and solve when listening to your alum share about their experiences and new insights, you might consider asking instead, "What would be helpful right now?" or "How can I be supportive of you in this process?"

Here are some more suggestions on how to support the person in your life who has attended SJTI.

- It can be difficult to hear a loved one share intense emotions and feelings. And it may be hard not to take these emotions personally. After people have experienced an intensive personal growth session, they may feel somewhat disoriented, vulnerable or confused as they take the time to integrate everything they experienced and learned into their current lives.
- Your SJTI participant may need more alone/quiet time than usual for awhile. They may find it helpful to journal or reflect by themselves. They might also want to reach out to others in the community who have a similar passion and commitment to creating social justice.
- If you are relatively new to talking about issues such as white privilege, racial identity, internalized racism, internalized dominance, horizontal prejudice, collusion, etc., then you may consider listening a lot and asking questions out of a desire to learn more. While it may seem difficult at times to refrain from arguing or getting defensive, these reactions may not be as useful as your willingness to be open to learning and exploring those concepts that may be new for you.
- Some alums have reported it very helpful when their Support People have shown an increased interest in learning more about issues of race and racism by watching related movies, attending presentations and lectures, and discussing the news or TV shows with a race lens. Having long, engaged conversations about race may add a delightful new dimension to your current relationship ~ opening up deeper layers of intimacy and connection.
- And it could be that you will never truly understand what they experienced at SJTI...and still your love and support and presence in their lives will be immeasurably helpful as they continue on their journey. Your relationship and how you spend time together may shift in ways that feel unfamiliar, yet the new opportunities can be very exciting.

Creating inclusion and social justice is sacred work.

Thank you again for your ongoing support of SJTI alums!

Thank you to all of the SJTI Alumni who have contributed to this journal:

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