

Silencing White Noise: Six Practices to Overcome Our Inaction on Race  
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Report written by Lydia Banton, January, 2023

Mr. Francois begins with a metaphor: a white noise machine is effective with children to help them avoid distractions and to help them sleep. White noise may be helpful in comforting children; in contrast, Francois proposes that another kind of “white noise” makes us deaf to the impact of racism in society. As a black man, Francois gives his personal history of how lack of awareness led him into complicity with racism. He explains the importance of educating ourselves and of taking action to dismantle our culture’s racism. Racism, in this book, does not mean that people are bad; it just means people do not understand and are lulled to sleep by cultural norms. The proposed six steps are designed to help us all address racism as we become more aware of the issues and aware of what we can do to change things.

Step one addresses the idea that we “are all the same in Christ.” Mr. Francois encourages us all to embrace diversity and to celebrate how people are different. Step two involves recognizing how histories of whiteness blur our capacity to see what the issues are and what challenges those issues. Step three (pattern recognition) encourages us to see how racism is involved in all situations as a pattern in society. It is easy to stay within our “bubbles” resisting new information about racism by saying, “we have had problems too.” Our cultural norms bubbles prevent us from listening deeply to those outside our own bubbles and from seeing the patterns of injustice involved in racial issues.

Building on the pattern recognition, syncopated identity encourages us to “own our racial identity out loud and courageously” and to proactively pursue choices that reinforce mutuality and interdependence. Only then is it possible to begin Step 5. We can do so by sacrificing established power and privilege to help others who have suffered from lack of power. Step six, “downbeat truth” addresses the importance of recognizing how we lose track of our mission through exhaustion or through the pain of retaliation. When we avoid the work we are called to do, “we can practice rhythm six, downbeat truth: harvesting the discomfort of telling on ourselves.” As issues come up in our interactions with others, acknowledging our complicity with racism empowers us to make changes that can effectively address issues of race.