

# **Written Submissions for Public Hearing on Petitions**



Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

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## Renaming of the school district - a mother's two cents

1 message

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Molly Hodge <[REDACTED]>  
To: "commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org" <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 10:10 PM

Hello,

Thank you for your time. My two sons attended Vallecito and Miller Creek and one is currently in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I appreciate the thought and the energy that is being put into the potential re-naming of the district and I would like to give my thoughts on the name.

I first attended a school board meeting last year where I heard from many emotional people about the name change. To be honest, I had and still have empathy for both sets of opinions. I was beyond curious so decided to start my own research into the origin of the name. I dug deep, going to the Calaveras archives and the history of the Miller Family. I bought many out of print books and read them cover to cover. I corresponded with tribe members. I did research in the California Room at the Marin County Library. I listened to hours of oral histories of both Marin and Calaveras County residents. I did all of this in my spare time after work and after my kids had fallen asleep. I was relentless in my search and the deeper I dug, the more fascinated I became.

Throughout my research, I got to know and admire a 98-year old mother of 12 named Mary Dixie from Vallecito, California who was an excellent basket weaver who lived in immense poverty in a time and place when Native Americans were not only persecuted, but killed for gold. She was married to Bill Dixie who was part of the Si-ya-kum-na tribe of Miwok in Calaveras County, California.

I also got to know and admire James Miller. An incredibly courageous and kind man, James Miller sacrificed everything and brought his pregnant wife and children on a treacherous journey with her family (the Murphys) to start a better life for his family. He was so impressed with his Native American guide that he recommended that they name their Sierra stop "Truckee" after the name of the guide. He continued to have an affinity for the Native Americans, adopting two orphaned Miwok babies and raising them as his own in Miller Hall. His daughter had a large collection of beautiful "California Indian baskets and Indian artifacts" according to an oral history.

James Miller also made a fortune selling cattle to gold diggers while he lived in the Placers for a year during the Gold Rush.

Here's where it gets interesting. Two of James Miller's brothers-in-law (Daniel and John Murphy—his wife Mary's brothers) had gone up to Calaveras County and founded their own "placers diggings" calling it "Murphy's Diggings" before and during the Gold Rush. That location is now called Vallecito, California. They soon moved their operation to another nearby location down the road (now Murphys, CA) and *lived among the Native Americans* in this location, specifically the Si-ya-kum-na tribe of Miwok (the very same tribe that Bill and Mary Dixie were part of.) John Murphy even married a Native woman named Pokela, a member of that same tribe. This to me is a crazy coincidence and where I believe that James Miller crossed paths with the Dixies.

I don't think that we will ever really know what inspired James Miller to name the school Dixie. It could have been on behalf of his 10 ("dix" in French) children. It could have been because he felt affinity for the South (although in my heart of hearts, I doubt it—he grew up in Ireland and Quebec and only spent a year in Missouri in a county that had no slaves.) He just had no connection. What I really like to think and what I have begun to believe in is that he named it after a Native basket weaver who may have charmed him during the year he made his fortune.

I know that the name Dixie offends members of this community. I know that there are members of the community who are against the re-naming. What I hate the most of all is that our lovely little community is at odds.

**I would like to propose that you strongly consider naming the district after Mary Dixie.** Not only is it a lovely gesture to name a school district after a Miwok woman, I also love the narrative of what that means for our community and students. I would assume, too, that James Miller knew that he was building the school on land that was once where Miwok lived and flourished. As you may know, there is a Miwok burial ground/shellmound that was discovered at Miller Creek Middle School in the 1970s—steps away from the Old Dixie Schoolhouse. People still find arrowheads in the creek. Can you imagine what the Miller children may have found in that creek in the 1800s?

To me, this is the only option that will heal our community, and I would love for the students to be proud of what the name stands for—a mother, a Native American and a pioneer woman.

I'm happy to share the research with you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]

INVISION

Member of the Pledge1% Foundation



Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

## PLEASE REMOVE IMMEDIATELY ALL PETITIONS FROM THE DISTRICT WEBSITE

2 messages

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 4:49 PM

To: "commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org" <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>  
 Cc: Jason Yamashiro <jyamashiro@dixieschooldistrict.org>, Alissa Chacko <alissachacko@yamashiro.com>, "bnguyen@dixieschooldistrict.org" <bnguyen@dixieschooldistrict.org>, "mhutchinson@dixieschooldistrict.org" <mhutchinson@dixieschooldistrict.org>, Brad Honsberger <bradhonsberger@gmail.com>

Jason,

Upon reviewing your posting to the Dixie School District website, I noted irregularities for collecting and processing public comments regarding your decided format. Specifically, it's alarming to note you have made a dangerous and grave mistake by publishing the 13 petitions submitted to the board on January 15 to the internet. I am demanding that you immediately remove all petitioners personal identifying information from the website and destroy your illegal copies of all petitions as they are and remain forever protected by state law under Government Code 6253.5

I have contacted and confirmed with the Marin County Office Registrar's Office that the Dixie School District should not be in possession of the petitions, let alone publicly publish the identities of the petitioners.

### GOVERNMENT CODE - GOV

#### TITLE 1. GENERAL [100 - 7914]

*( Title 1 enacted by Stats. 1943, Ch. 134. )*

#### DIVISION 7. MISCELLANEOUS [6000 - 7599.2]

*( Division 7 enacted by Stats. 1943, Ch. 134. )*

#### CHAPTER 3.5. Inspection of Public Records [6250 - 6276.48]

*( Chapter 3.5 added by Stats. 1968, Ch. 1473. )*

#### ARTICLE 1. General Provisions [6250 - 6270.7]

#### 6253.5. (SPECIFICALLY)

Jason, as you have been assigned responsibility to manage this for the board and the public, I will look to you to answer how and why the district decided there would be any good reason or rationale to assume responsibility for protecting all petitioner's privacy and legal rights after publishing personal identity information publicly. You obviously have retained

copies of the petitions without considering how the district will safeguard this information beyond what the County is prepared to offer for free? Also, it will fall to you to notify all those effected by this gross error. Jason you must prove you are taking immediate positive measured steps to notify all those petitioners that they are no longer protected and that their rights to privacy have been violated.

In the future it would be wise to have any and all petitions delivered directly to the County (who are funded, prepared, and experienced) to handle all chain of custody issues necessary when accepting responsibility to protect petitioners - for their privacy and legal rights – as established and tested by existing state law. It is their absolute domain. I'm troubled, as well, as to why the District assumed responsibility for the fees owned by the petitioners? If, as is customary, the petitioners would have followed the correct process, this alarming and gross mistake would have been averted, as the County would have done what they do best and protected the district and more importantly, the public. All this would have been possible without exposing the district to publicity both from the sponsored public ceremony hosted by you for the delivery of petitions, and now, unfortunately, the present time and resources that will be wasted to correct these avoidable misjudgments on your part.

Your confirmation of receipt, immediate actions, and response is required in this matter.

Thanks. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

To: Jason Yamashiro <jyamashiro@dixieschooldistrict.org>  
Cc: commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 10:01 PM

Jason,

It's very disheartening to learn tonight the process of choice to provide public comments to the Dixie School District board have chosen to experiment with provides zero protections for petitioner and the public. Tonight I urgently emailed the board and superintendent to inform and warn that petitioners personal identity details were exposed and unprotected on the district website.

The petitioners information was promptly removed. Thank you Jason! I hope it's scrubbed of personal identity details permanently and that responsibility for safeguarding it is handed over to the county who has the proven expertise, history, and professionals who are paid to operate in that domain.

Unfortunately, I'm compelled to write to you again because I'm dismayed that the contents of my letter were published in less than 128 minutes in an article this evening by the Marin IJ. I can affirm I did not provide this information outside the circle of Dixie Board Trustees or Superintendent Yamashiro. Ms. Keri Brenner affirmed she was unable to reach Jason and I must believe her to be an ethical & professional to her craft. This can only mean it likely was shared by a board member, which should be shocking to the majority, if not all. This level of involvement to shape and influence the process is unprecedented and frankly abuses the trust our community has put in the board. Ask yourself how the average citizen must feel about a process which invites immediate media exposure and public scrutiny. Our neighbors were not elected to face this level of judgment. Try to consider how this looks to folks that want to share their feelings or thoughts with you.

I believe the first day of this process has been an utter failure for the community and implore you try harder, we expect much better from our elected trustees.

Thanks... [REDACTED]

On Jan 24, 2019, at 5:04 PM, Jason Yamashiro <jyamashiro@dixieschooldistrict.org> wrote:

Hli [REDACTED]

I have bcc'd board members since you raise an important issue that they will want to know the answer to. Upon communication from the Elections Department we did remove petitions from the website for now, but it is important for you to know that at the open session the Board discussed this and directed me to post the petitions. I confirmed this with them, in public, at the time.

Based on communication from the County I checked with legal about the posting of petitions and legal confirmed in more than one email that it was legal.

Still, for the moment, while there is additional follow up, the links to the petitions have been pulled.

Jason

[Quoted text hidden]

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Dr. Jason Yamashiro  
Superintendent, Dixie School District  
(415) 492-3701

*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*  
Nelson Mandela

Please consider the environment before printing this email.

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Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

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## Dixie district name

1 message

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 9:13 PM

To: commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org

I have been a homeowner and resident of the Dixie School District for 17 years. My two children attend Vallecito and Miller Creek Schools. I have been a supporter of the district via Can Do! since my firstborn started kindergarten.

Like many, I primarily associate the Dixie name with quality schools, great teachers, involved parents, dedicated administrators, and the students we all care so much about. I don't know of anyone who has ever used the Dixie name with any kind of bad intentions.

However, I am very sympathetic to those for whom the name brings forth bad connotations, whether they are currently residents of the district or potential future residents. I believe those concerns are valid, they are strong and heartfelt, and the seriousness of those concerns far outweighs the mild attachment many of us have to the name with which we have all grown familiar.

Therefore, I strongly support a name change. Our school district will continue to be just as great with its future name, and the future name will grow to carry the same connotations of great schools (and high property values), with none of the negativity of the present name.

On the practical side, I believe that, if we fail to change the name now, eventually we or our successors will inevitably change it. The name change will never be cheaper than it is today. The best time to change it may have been twenty years ago, but the second best time to change it is now. Let's get it done.

I don't have strong feelings about what the new name should be, but I do have a mild preference for Big Rock Elementary School District. Big Rock Ridge is one of the most prominent natural features in our area, visible from most of the district. If the name motivates just a few of our children to get some exercise by hiking the trails of that beautiful ridge, that's a great bonus!

San Rafael, CA



Comment on petitions <[commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)>

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## Dixie Name Change

1 message

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 7:29 PM

  
To: [commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)

Dear Trustees,

I encourage you to reject all 13 names that have been proposed for the name change. I am firmly opposed to the bullying and horrific display by a board member's husband, and representatives of their group. It's disgraceful and appalling.

I urge the Board to engage with the community and determine what, if any action needs to be taken on this matter.

Sincerely,





Comment on petitions <[commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)>

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## No district name change

1 message

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 7:07 PM

To: [commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)

Hello,

I am firmly opposed to changing the name of the Dixie School District, especially if it diverts even \$1 away from our children's education. I'm an accountant by trade and can imagine it would be very expensive to do all of the rebranding necessary to change a district name. Where would the district come up with funding for such an effort? By taking money away from our children, I assume?

A lot of the proposed names sound like metaphors for a penis to me as well. Who suggested 'Mary Dixie'? That name doesn't seem to help the non-existent problem. Please keep singular 'Wood' out of a district name filled with middle and high schoolers.

I agree with this quote "The reason we voted for all the parcel taxes (in the past and one earlier this year) is that we had the feeling that the Dixie school board are very good stewards of our tax money," said Jessica Freilich, whose children graduated from district schools. "But I have to tell you, if you guys spend one thin dime on this ridiculously stupid proposal, I'm going to have to question whether you really need that money the next time you come up with another parcel tax."

Thank you,



[Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)

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## Dixie Name Change

1 message

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[REDACTED]  
To: [commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 5:24 PM

I am a resident and have 3 children in the school district.

Keep the name Dixie School District but on signs and their website write something that says:

"Dixie School District dedicated to Mary Dixie a local Native American and member of the Miwok Tribe".

This way the name can stay the same and the meaning of the name is made clear.

[REDACTED]



Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

**RE: name change**

1 message

[Redacted]

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 4:53 PM

To: "commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org" <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

Mr. Brad Honsberger, President

Dixie School District Board of Directors

380 Nova Albion Way

San Rafael CA 94903

Dear Mr. Honsberger,

There are three reasons we protest a name change for the District or the school at this time:

1. The petitions that were recently proffered, have one common fault: they say little or nothing about why they want to change the name or what is wrong with the existing name. These people knew they were going to do this six months ago, and now they are totally unprepared.
2. The word, "Dixie", is NOT a racist word, any more than the words, "chicory", "Gumbo", "Mint Julip", or "South Africa". It was and is a nickname for a large area of the United States, some of which tolerated slavery and some of which did not. For example, most men in Tennessee, including my great grandfather, fought for the North. It has been said this is a teachable moment; if some people, black or white, believe this word is racist, maybe now can be THEIR teachable moment. It is preposterous that they can submit Mary Dixie as a proposed name if Dixie is a racist word!
3. We loathe and despise the underhanded, deceitful and corrupt way this issue has been pushed.

We moved from Mill Valley to Terra Linda in 1976, and raised one son there. He went through Dixie, Vallecito, Miller Creek and TL, graduating in 2000. He and his wife and our two grandchildren (Vallecito) now live in our old house on Woodbine Drive.

Very sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

[Redacted address]

[Redacted address]

[Redacted address]

[Redacted address]



Comment on petitions <[commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)>

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## District name change

1 message

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 4:46 PM

To: [commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org](mailto:commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org)

Cc: [REDACTED]

Dear Dixie School District Board,

As a Dixie Resident and parent, I am 100% fine with changing the name of the school district.

While the Dixie district's excellence has infused the Dixie Brand Name with cachet that probably supports home values, it's not the name but the district's excellent service to our children that matters and will endure. A district by any other name would rate as highly.

Whether the actual history of the name has ties to the confederacy is irrelevant to me. "Dixie" as a name, to any American ear, evokes the confederacy. If it were "Jefferson Davis" school district, even if not named after the confederate president, but a different person, perhaps even a little-known abolitionist: We'd still cringe at the name and wonder if we should change it. And we should.

And since the name itself implies (even if incorrectly) endorsement of the worst values of the Old South, and since such an endorsement offends our modern sensibilities, and harms our values of inclusion and acceptance and equality under the law, we should change it.

To what? As long as we've dropped "Dixie", I'm fine with it. Skywalker, Miwok, Live Oak: All lovely. Though I think we should ask the Miwoks how they'd feel about that, and seek their approval, and perhaps their guidance on how they'd prefer we spell their name. There are many federally recognized Miwok tribes, I'm not sure whether one should seek approval from all or one before proceeding. We'd do well to be very considerate in switching from one reminder of the country's history of treating non-white folks poorly for another. Though it is an admirable intention to honor and acknowledge the pre-European contact inhabitants of this land.

I know this is a difficult issue. You will have my family's support if you change the name.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Mary Silveira parent

--

"Me not always eat cookie. But when me do, me prefer DOS cookies."-- Cookie Monster

25 January 2019

To: Dixie Board of Trustees  
380 Nova Albion Way  
San Rafael, CA 94903

From: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Yosemite Road  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: Change the Name of the Dixie School District

Members of the Board of Trustees,

Thank you for embarking upon this important process and for listening to the concerns of the public.

Although this is a high-energy, emotional subject, it is paramount that the Board of Directors demonstrate the leadership necessary and that they (you) make a well rationalized, thoughtful, but timely decision.

I was honored to speak at the Board meeting on January 15th and I hope to reiterate a few of the items that I believe are important to consider.

The majority of the discussion has been about the NEED to ***Change the Name***, and in some cases how to go about funding the costs associated with making the proposed change. I believe the cost issued was adequately addressed at the meeting.

As I mentioned at the Board Meeting, I have worked in the Fire Service here in Marin for over 30 years. I am a retired Fire Captain from the Marinwood Fire Department and the current Vice President of the Marin Professional Firefighters and Chair of the Political Action Committee. I am a graduate of Terra Linda High School, a homeowner/taxpayer/voter and have lived and worked within the boundaries of the Dixie School District since 1974.

My point that I attempted to make at the Board meeting was just this; the logistics involved with making the Change may seem daunting and that there are some who may be concerned about the loss of 'identity' associated with changing the name. It may be anecdotal, but I do have a lot of history and experience with this same issue and I firmly believe that it's a non-issue.

Much like the school districts, public safety is funded by taxpayer money. We have to pass Tax Measures, float Bonds, and elect our Boards in the public arena.

We also have been around a long time. The Sausalito Fire Department for example was founded in 1893 and operated continuously until 2012 at which time it ***Changed its Name*** to be part of the Southern Marin Fire District.

Those of us in the Fire service are very proud of our history. We have dedicated our lives to the service of the communities and put everything we have into them. Much like the dedicated teachers and staff within the School District.

But, in the name of progress, we have time and time again chosen to ***Change the Names*** of our agencies to meet the needs of the communities and to adapt to the new fiscal and operational realities. *At no time did these name changes get pushed out to the public for consideration; rather the Elected Officials who held office at the time recognized that it is exactly for times like these that they are chosen to make the tough decisions.*

Sausalito Fire, Alto-Richardson Fire, Tamalpias Fire, Fairfax Fire, San Anselmo Fire, Sleepy Hollow Fire, Ross Fire, Larkspur Fire, Corte Madera Fire, Twin Cities Police and the Terra Linda Fire Department have all faded into the rear view as time as passed.

They have not been forgotten, nor have they failed to provide the highest levels of service to the public and communities they represent, they simply are continuing their long traditions under a new moniker.

The students, teachers, and staff will go to bed one night under the banner of the Dixie School District and wake up the next morning under a new banner. It's just that simple.

Yes, you will need to change the names on the School Buses, just like we did to our Fire Engines and Police Cars. There will be new ID's and credentials, new stationary and envelopes, and big new fancy signs in front of the campuses just like there were at our Fire Stations. Everyone will take pictures and likely have a renewed sense of pride in whatever name is chosen. These things are all just the trappings of change and signs of progress. They should be embraced rather than used as yet another red herring to argue against the push to ***Change the Name.***

I personally do not feel strongly about any of the proposed names that were submitted via petition. As a public entity I would caution against using the Skywalker name without having addressed the potential intellectual properties concerns via your legal counsel. If I had to choose one, I would like to support eh name "Miller Creek School District". Miller Creek itself, as well as its tributaries, runs throughout Lucas Valley, Marinwood and Terra Linda. All of the other elementary schools funnel their students into Miller Creek Middle School. Much like having a Dixie School within the Dixie School District, the same could be done with Miller Creek.

I do strongly believe that time is of the essence. I know you are aware of the three-ring circus that this has become. The best way for everyone to move forward is for the Board to make a decision, stand by your decision, and work on ensuring the plan will be successful. Ideally the changes could be made over the summer, and when the kids return to school in the Fall they will be helping to usher in a new era and they will be writing new chapter in the history of the school district.

I know it may not feel like it at times, but you are fortunate to be in a position where you can make a real difference in the lives of the community and can positively effect the reputation of the school district and neighborhood.

Embrace it.

Respectfully submitted,

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Camino Road  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



Comment on petitions <commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org>

## White Privilege and Facilitated discussions

2 messages

Thu, Jan 24, 2019 at 11:10 PM

To: commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org  
Cc: Jason Yamashiro <jyamashiro@dixieschooldistrict.org>

Dear Board,

As you consider the name change yourself, the weight of the divisive name, and how it may impact minorities in our community, I invite you to peruse this piece. As part of some committee work I was given this document by a progressive facilitator at the county. As the Supervisors support the name change I guess it should have come as no surprise I got this from a County employee, but I admit I was pleasantly surprised.

Given your current position and the surprising clinginess "Dixie" has held in our community since the Civil War, I thought learning a little more about white privilege might lend some perspective to why the name seemed so harmless to so many in our community for so long. I believe this helps explain some of why the name honoring the confederacy has been allowed to stand for so long in otherwise-progressive Marin. White privilege is obviously just one of many variables. But I do hope you start to dive in and try to understand the bigger picture.

You might consider having a facilitator present during your upcoming board meeting, too, as tensions have certainly escalated as the board has remained tight-lipped about which way it's leaning. You saw some emotion at the last meeting... and that was when "the other side" decided not to show up. You can imagine if everyone showed up to the next meeting. By not signaling that you would follow the advice of the "Big Gun Politicians" who recently wrote in, by not listening to the pleas of the CTN group for the second half of last year, you have inadvertently set the stage for a major showdown. And by not allowing previous testimony to be considered you essentially mandate that we all come back for the next round to retell our heartfelt testimony. This painful process has dragged on for 22 years already... how much more must we endure?

The somewhat cumbersome process you have provided also requires I resend all my previous comments so they'll be trickling in as I find them in my email inbox. This will surely be one of many pieces of information you receive in the coming days. Take the time to read and digest each piece. You have volunteered for this important role and helped define this process at this historic time, and you owe it to the community to read everything we submit.

In return, we owe you a great debt of gratitude for your service leading the community to a better future... where we remember, but not honor, the wrongs of slavery, segregation and racism. I trust you will make the right decision when the time comes... be it in this 40-day period, or the next, or the next.

Thank you for your careful consideration and thoughtful leadership during the next few weeks,  
Alex Stadtner

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.pdf  
483K

Fri, Jan 25, 2019 at 2:06 PM

To: commentonpetitions@dixieschooldistrict.org

Sorry to repeat, just submitting again to ensure this got delivered.  
Understanding white privilege is an important part of the race puzzle.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Alex Stadtner <astadtner@gmail.com>

# White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

By Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from Women's Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way

to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women's Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive.

I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us."

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case *attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come

Wellesley College  
106 Central Street  
Wellesley, MA 02481-8203  
Tel 781 283 2399  
[www.nationalseedproject.org](http://www.nationalseedproject.org)

into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who

can cut my hair.

10. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven’t been

singled out because of my race.

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me, white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are

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true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. *My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make.* I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made inconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn,

upon people of color.

For this reason, the word “privilege” now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply *confers dominance* because of one’s race or sex.

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an *unearned entitlement*. At present, since only a few have it, it is an *unearned advantage* for them. This paper results from a process of coming to

see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

The question is:  
“Having described  
white privilege, what  
will I do to end it?”

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what will we do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color, they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages

associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a “white” skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool

here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that *systems* of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

\*This is an authorized excerpt of McIntosh's original white

privilege article, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” Working Paper 189 (1988), Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, MA, 02481.

“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” first appeared in *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, July/August, 1989, pp. 10-12, a publication of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Philadelphia, PA

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## Some Notes for Facilitators on Presenting My White Privilege Papers

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1. My work is not about blame, shame, guilt, or whether one is a “nice person.” It’s about observing, realizing, thinking systemically and personally. It is about seeing privilege, the “up-side” of oppression and discrimination. It is about unearned advantage, which can also be described as exemption from discrimination.
2. Please do not generalize from my papers. They are about my experience, not about the experiences of all white people in all times and places and circumstances. The paragraph in each paper before the list begins says this, and also allays fears of white people that a paper on white privilege will call them racist.
3. Keep “the lists” in their autobiographical contexts. It is a matter of scholarly integrity and accuracy not to claim more than I did. I compared my own circumstances with some of those of African American women I worked with. Being clear about this will actually increase your effectiveness as a facilitator. You can say, “This is from just one white woman coming to see she’s white in her time and place and workspace. . . .She’s writing about herself, not you.”
4. The work goes best when you draw on participants’ own personal experiences, not their opinions. Opinions invite argumentation. Telling about experience invites listening. Opinions tend to bring on conflict, whereas shared experiences tend to elicit curiosity and empathy. When participants move from experiential testimony to opinion, bring them back, knowing that most schooling discourages testimony.
5. When exploring privilege, it is useful to use “Serial Testimony,” a disciplined mode in which each participant gets to respond in turn, uninterrupted, for, say, one minute, timed. I call this “the autocratic administration of time in the service of democratic distribution of time.”
6. But without rigorous use of a watch or timer, Serial Testimony can be as undemocratic as any other form of discussion.
7. Understand that every participant has an intricate “politics of location” (Adrienne Rich) within the systems of social power. For example, all people in a workshop or class will have a lifetime of experiences of both advantage and disadvantage, empowerment and disempowerment, overwhelming or subtle, within many different systems of power.
8. Recognize that all people are both located in systems and also uniquely individual.
9. Co-presentations and panels of people speaking about their experiences one after another can be very effective. I do not usually arrange for “dialogues,” since I feel they are often a veiled form of debating and fighting, rather than listening and learning. I discourage “crosstalk” after panels unless it further clarifies and respects what the panelists have said. This is what Peter Elbow called playing the “The Believing Game.”

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10. My lists of the unearned privileges I have relative to my colleagues are not “check lists” or “questionnaires.” They are not “confessional readings.”

11. Please draw attention to the specificity of “my sample.” I compared my circumstances only with what I knew of the circumstances of my African-American female colleagues in the same building and line of work. This sample is very specific with regard to race, sex, region, location, workplace, vocation and nation.

12. Behind and within my examples are institutions that bear on my experience such as schools, the police, the IRS, the media, the law, medicine, business.

13. Do not get trapped in definitions of privilege and power. They lack nuances and flexibility.

14. Invite people to make their own autobiographical lists of privilege, for example, about:

Sexual Orientation	Employment	Families' relation to
Class	Physical ability	education, money
Region	Handedness	housing and
Religion	Language	neighborhoods
Gender	Nation of origin	Families' languages of origin
Gender identity	Ethnicity	

15. Beware of gym-exercises which position people in only one aspect of their identities, asking them to step forward or backward from a baseline at a given prompt.

16. Urge participants to avoid self righteousness and preaching to family and friends about privilege, especially if it is something they have just discovered themselves.

17. Explain the word “systemic.” Help participants or students to think about what it is to see society systemically, and structurally, rather than only in terms of individuals making individual choices.

18. Think about why U.S. people, especially White people, have trouble seeing systemically. Explain the myth of meritocracy: that the unit of society is the individual and that whatever one ends up with must be whatever that individual wanted, worked for, earned, and deserved. Why do you think this myth survives so successfully, suppressing knowledge of systemic oppression and especially of its “upside,” systemic privilege?

19. Help participants to strengthen three intellectual muscles: a) the ability to see in terms of systems as well as in terms of individuals; b) the ability to see how systemic discrimination, the downside, is matched by systemic privilege, the upside; c) the ability to see many different kinds of privilege systems.

20. You can argue that work on privilege in schools and universities makes people smarter, not necessarily better. Academic institutions do not claim that making us better is their primary goal, but accurate thinking is a goal they claim to foster.

**When I present, or co-present with a person of color, on Privilege Systems, whether or not I am the first to speak, I usually:**

- tell how I came to see men’s privilege and their obliviousness to it, which made me see laterally to my own race privilege and my obliviousness to it;
- read some examples from my white privilege list, and sometimes read some of my heterosexual privilege list, class privilege list, Christian privilege list, and lists of privilege relative to Asian Americans, Indigenous people, Latino/as, etc.;
- analyze some of the different misreadings of my paper by white people and people of color;
- raise the question of how I can use unearned advantage to weaken systems of unearned advantage, and why I would want to.

**The co-presenter and I take equal time to testify about how we came to see privilege systems in and around us. After this, we use Serial Testimony. We form either small circles of people, or pairs, to respond, in turn, uninterrupted, for one minute each, to the following prompts:**

Round one: What are one or more ways in which you’ve had unearned disadvantage in your life?

Round two: What are one or more ways in which you’ve had unearned advantage in your life?

Round three: What is it like for you to sit here and talk about and hear about these experiences of unearned advantage and disadvantage?

Round three is like a debrief in itself. Any further debrief should be only on new learnings from the exercise. Random discussion of the exercise usually leads away from experience to generalizations and repetitions of the same opinions people came into the session with.

Some people “get” the idea of systemic privilege and ask “But what can I do?” My answer is, you can use unearned advantage to weaken systems of unearned advantage. I see white privilege as a bank account that I did not ask for, but that I can choose to spend. People with privilege have far more power than we have been taught to realize, within the myth of meritocracy. Participants can brainstorm about how to use unearned assets to share power; these may include time, money, energy, literacy, mobility, leisure, connections, spaces, housing, travel opportunities. Using these assets may lead to key changes in other behaviors as well, such as paying attention, making associations, intervening, speaking up, asserting and deferring, being alert, taking initiative, doing ally and advocacy work, lobbying, campaigning, protesting, organizing, and recognizing and acting against both the external and internalized forms of oppression and privilege.

Mr. Brad Honsberger, President  
Dixie School District Board of Directors  
380 Nova Albion Way  
San Rafael CA 94903

Dear Mr. Honsberger,

There are three reasons we protest a name change for the District or the school at this time:

1. The petitions that were recently proffered, have one common fault: they say little or nothing about why they want to change the name or what is wrong with the existing name. These people knew they were going to do this six months ago, and now they are totally unprepared.
2. The word, "Dixie", is NOT a racist word, any more than the words, "chicory", "Gumbo", "Mint Julip", or "South Africa". It was and is a nickname for a large area of the United States, some of which tolerated slavery and some of which did not. For example, most men in Tennessee, including my great grandfather, fought for the North. It has been said this is a teachable moment; if some people, black or white, believe this word is racist, maybe now can be THEIR teachable moment. It is preposterous that they can submit Mary Dixie as a proposed name if Dixie is a racist word!
3. We loathe and despise the underhanded, deceitful and corrupt way this issue has been pushed.

We moved from Mill Valley to Terra Linda in 1976, and raised one son there. He went through Dixie, Vallecito, Miller Creek and TL, graduating in 2000. He and his wife and our two grandchildren (Vallecito) now live in our old house on Woodbine Drive.

Very sincerely,

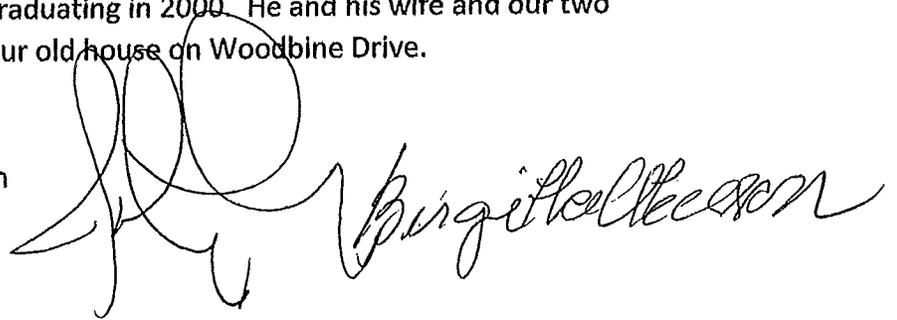
Jerry D. Moore and Birgitta K. Akesson

443 Calle de la Mesa

Novato CA 94949

[perfinhole!@yahoo.com](mailto:perfinhole!@yahoo.com)

(415) 884-0659

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Birgitta K. Akesson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and is positioned to the right of the typed name.