



EXPLORATION

Equity

Readings

Equality is treating everyone the same. But equity is taking differences into account, so everyone has a fair shot. Unknown



Photo by Nathan on Pexels

1. *Created Equal?*

Since “absolute” equality is impossible, is equality possible? Thomas Jefferson thought, “Yes,” writing, “All men (sic) are created equal.” Equal only due to unalienable Rights. Unalienable is not unlike our assertion of “inherent” related to worth and dignity. Jefferson articulated three Rights. “Life” is being alive and being able to live. “Liberty” is freedom unconstrained by government and being “equal” before the law. The “pursuit of Happiness” is the right to pursue personal fulfillment and well-being without undue interference.

The inference is that “we” had equality of opportunity. But who was “we?” “All men” was not a universal term. It did not extend to women, enslaved people, Native Americans, or white men who did not own property, i.e., the poor and indentured. In fact, it only applied to the privileged and powerful white men who owned land. And what percentage of the total population did these men represent? Less than 20% of the total population, if that, were deemed equal and had unalienable rights. To universalize this concept of equality is barbaric, given the hundreds of years of struggle that were necessary to secure rights, a struggle that is ongoing in so many ways.

While we still cannot speak of equality in any meaningful way because of the continuing concentration of power, privilege, and wealth, especially of the

1% or even the one-tenth of 1%, the expansion of rights over time has been significant. A precious gift born of struggle, of a centuries-long pursuit of equity. As Shafin Verani correctly writes, “We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality.”

Source: [Touchstones](#)

2. *The Strange Problem of Entitlement* by Christine Pohl

Years ago, Paul Tournier observed that “no gift can bring joy to the one who has a right to everything.” While there is a healthy interpretation of entitlement that is tied to a sense of dignity and equality, when it is exaggerated, it brings continual dissatisfaction and an inability to be thankful for anything.

...If we think that we deserve the gifts and blessings we have received, it is easy for us to become greedy for more benefits and to overlook the needs of others. We cultivate a capacity not to notice when “our benefit has come at someone else's expense.” Dissatisfaction as a way of life is encouraged by a consumerist culture that feeds notions of entitlement. We want more, and we want better — better bodies, newer cars, bigger churches, more beautiful homes, finer coffee. Somehow wanting these things morphs into the sense that, really, we deserve them. A cycle of generalized dissatisfaction fuels envy, striving, and buying.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/22546>

3. *A Vocabulary Against Inequity*

Equity, within a liberal theological context, transcends the presumption of mere equality. It acknowledges and addresses systemic disparities and injustices that hinder individuals, groups, and communities from accessing equal op-

portunities. Equity also secures rights that were theoretical and makes them actual.

Nina Jablonski writes, “Inventing new vocabularies to deal with human diversity and inequity won’t be easy, but it must be done.” The UUA’s Article II Study Commission’s proposed values offer the start of such a vocabulary.

Drawing on these values, equity seeks to dismantle structures of oppression and privilege, advocating for the empowerment of marginalized individuals and communities. These values offer important guidance.

1.) Love compels us to truly see those who have been failed by the myth that all are created equal and calls us to love our neighbor by offering our hearts and hands like a Good Samaritan.

2.) Interdependence reminds us that our profound connection with everyone, including the least of these, is a call for solidarity.

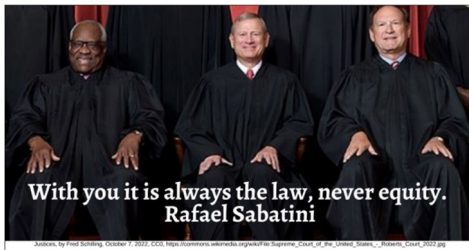
3.) Pluralism asks that we “embrace our differences and commonalities with love, curiosity, and respect,” acknowledging, as Richard Gilbert writes, that “we are all more human otherwise” despite or because of our diversity.

4.) Justice insists that we use all of the tools available to us, including prophetic witness, advocacy, social action, legislation, coalition building, protesting, voter registration and turnout, etc., to change the system that protects the status quo that supports inequity.

5.) Transformation is a means of deep change, transformation of oneself, the opposition, and those for whom we seek equity, and, finally, transformation of the system itself.

6.) Generosity asks that we rejoice rather than resent the resources that must be provided to those who require tailored support to achieve equal outcomes.

These values form the foundation of



how and why to speak on behalf of diversity and in opposition to inequity.

Source: [Touchstones](#)

4. *Entitlement vs. Humility*

by Robert A. Emmons

If humility is the antidote to entitlement and a lack of gratitude, how can we get more of it? It is almost a contradiction to try to be humble. If we set humility as a personal goal and then succeed at it, would we not be proud of our accomplishment and thus not humble? As Ted Turner once remarked, 'If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect.' Humility appears to be so little, so meek, so unassuming, so well, humble. But we should not be deceived. The more I contemplate the requirements for cultivating gratitude, the more I am convinced of the necessity of humility. In gratitude and humility, we turn to realities outside of ourselves. We become aware of our limitations and our need to rely on others. In gratitude and humility, we acknowledge the myth of self-sufficiency. We look upward and outward to the sources that sustain us. Becoming aware of realities greater than ourselves shields us from the illusion of being self-made, being here on this planet by right — expecting everything and owing nothing. The humble person says that life is a gift to be grateful for, not a right to be claimed. Humility ushers in a grateful response to life.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/24818>

5. *Better Together: DEI*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs have been advancing equity in many organizations and for countless people. Their emphasis on equity instead of equality has been transformative. Various initiatives, programs, and legislation have shaped their emergence since the 1960s. The historical

challenge to their creation was the assertion that a system that benefited white males, based on Enlightenment values and enshrined in 1776 in America's *Declaration of Independence*, was fair to people of color and women. The myth of color blindness and gender blindness has sought to protect white male supremacy. This status quo has been protected by systemic discrimination, implicit bias, hostile work environments, inequitable policies and practices, gender and cultural insensitivity, exclusion, and more, all tools of the Good Old Boys network.

Many efforts and legislation in both America and Canada over many years have slowly chipped away at the status quo. Affirmative Action programs begun in the 1960s and 1970s in America sought to promote opportunities for individuals and groups who had been marginalized and oppressed, particularly in education and employment. Canada launched Affirmative Action programs in the 1980s. These led to Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in academia, corporations, and other institutions.

These developments are laudable and have created opportunities that would not have otherwise existed, but there has also been opposition and challenge at every turn. Implementing DEI programs has been frustrated by things like resistance to change, implicit bias, the near invisibility of micro-aggressions, structural inequities that are almost impossible to dismantle, cultural differences, limited resources, the challenge of measuring impact, and legal and compliance risks. At the head of this list is a lack of leadership buy-in, resistance from dominant groups, and tokenism. When DEI is viewed as a zero-sum game, change becomes very difficult.

Nonetheless, DEI programs are considered very beneficial in some quarters. In 2021, a nonprofit Council on Education said, "Diversity brings with it a number of educational benefits, including improved racial and cultural awareness, enhanced critical thinking, higher levels of service to community and a more educated citizenry."

Unfortunately, since 2021-22, a growing effort has emerged in the

U.S. to dismantle DEI programs in academia and corporations. It is too soon to gauge the effectiveness of the forces of power and privilege in this arena. Since diversity is a fact and equity for the excluded has not been achieved, diversity, equity, and inclusion are as important as ever. Opponents of these initiatives must be vigorously opposed

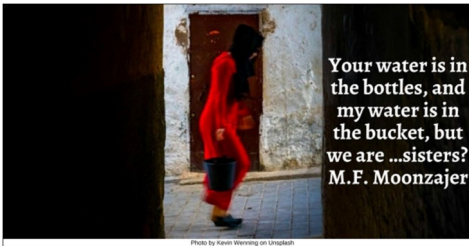
Source: [Touchstones](#)

6. *The Myth of Human Supremacy* by Derrick Jensen

The supremacist side ...believes that members of "our" category — whatever that category may be — are superior to all others, and that this superiority entitles us to exploit them. In fact, our exploitation of these others is ultimately the primary way we know we're superior. This side believes that difference leads to hierarchy. Men over women. Whites over non-whites. Civilized over indigenous. Humans over non-humans. Animals over plants. Plants over rocks. Mind over matter. ...This side in this war believes all life is war, and that the point of life is to defeat others in this war, to scratch and claw and bite, and then to stab and shoot and bomb and poison your way to the top of the hierarchy you've set up ...and then from the top to exploit all those below you, not merely so you gain the benefits from being so marvelous, but to maintain your position "at the top of the food chain." ...

The non-supremacist side in this war believes that difference leads to complexity and community. A forest wouldn't be a forest without the contributions of everyone who lives there. It recognizes that the exploitation of some other is no validation of superiority, but merely the exploitation of some other. It believes that life is not a war, but rather simply life, and the point of life is to live and die, and to do so in such a way that you contribute to the overall health of the community. The worldviews are simply that: worldviews. They're not reality. Reality is more complex than any worldview. These worldviews have consequences for reality....

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28167>



7. *Worth, Dignity, and Equity*

The UUA's Article II Study Commission linked worth and dignity to equity, connecting our first and second principles. Worth and dignity are intrinsic values, while equity is an instrumental value necessary to secure, defend, and extend those intrinsic values. One word you will not find in our existing principles and sources, nor the Commission's articulation of their proposed values, is equity.

In a society marked by discrimination, oppression, marginalization, exclusion, poverty, and more, the insistence that people have equal rights and opportunities is a fiction that is compounded when the dispossessed are blamed, despite the odds, for not living up to their potential. The absence of equality is marked by racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism, and more, all of which intersect and further oppress many.

What good is inherent worth and dignity if a society conspires against certain individuals and groups so their worth and dignity are never made manifest? Just because a person has worth and dignity does not mean they will experience or act upon it.

Equity takes a playing field with walls, chasms, glass shards, dead ends, barbed wire, and more and levels it. Actually, equity goes further, providing ramps, lifts, handrails, and other accommodations to foster success. Equity seeks to both honor and make manifest a people's inherent worth and dignity so that they are not the least of these but people who, operating from a sense of wholeness and competence, are good enough.

This is a world of Special Olympics where everyone is special, where a runner falls down, and two other runners stop and go back to help that athlete up and then support her as they cross the finish line together. Equity is not neces-

sarily winning, but it is being able to cross the finish line. That is what worth and dignity are all about. That is what makes the race fair.

Source: [Touchstones](#)

Wisdom Story

Crossing the Finish Line Together

Based on a true story during the 1976 Special Olympics in Seattle, Washington.

Years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants lined up at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the sound of the starting gun, they all started off in their own way, making their best effort to run down the track toward the finish line. That is, except for the one young boy who stumbled soon after his start, tumbled to the ground and began to cry. Two of the other racers, hearing the cries of the boy who fell, slowed down and looked back at him. Then without hesitation, they turned around and began running in the other direction—toward the injured boy.

While the other contestants struggled to make it to the finish line, the two who had turned around to run in the other direction reached for the boy and helped him to his feet. All three of them then linked arms and together they walked to the finish line. By the time the trio reached the end, everyone in the stands was standing and cheering, some with tears rushing down their faces. Even though by turning back and helping the boy who fell, they lost their own chance to win the race, they all had smiles on their faces because they knew they had done the right thing.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveconnects/session4/161765.shtml>

"What if we measure the radicalism of

keeps people the same, keeps people enslaved by their racist ideas and fears, conserving their inequitable society?"
Ibram X. Kendi

"You can strive to make every conversation one that dismantles white supremacy and systems of oppression. Every conversation can contribute to building a more just and equitable world, a world in which every person's full humanity is centered and seen, a world in which conversations are bridges to connection and healing." *Elena Aguilar*

"Your water is in the bottles, and my water is in the bucket, but we are brothers? / I am collecting garbage, and you are in the bed, but we are sisters? / My fingers are broken, and your hands are so soft, but we are family? / Your God is like an angel, and my God is like an evil, but we are equal? / My stomach is empty, and your stomach is so big, but we are humans?" *M.F. Moonzajer*

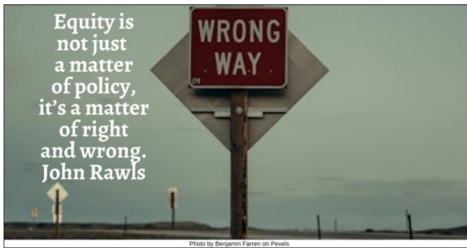
"I have lost track of the number of times when I chatted with DEI professionals or even diversity hires of different races and backgrounds who painfully told me that they are put in a position that makes them incapable of making any meaningful changes in their workplace. That their job is primarily to be tokenized and make the institution look and feel good, but in reality they—and any diverse person in their workplace—feel totally paralyzed in environments that look good, but are in fact extremely controlled by the few privileged at the top." *Louis Yako*

"Equality does not see color, therefore, contributes to privilege. Equity sees color, recognizes systemic forms of racism and actively provided resources to level the playing field." *Sope Agbelusi*

"A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. An antiracist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups. By policy, I mean written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a nonracist or

Snippets

speech by how radically it transforms open-minded people, by how the speech liberates the antiracist power within? What if we measure the conservatism of speech by how intensely it



race-neutral policy. Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups.” *Ibram X. Kendi*

“For a lot of us, it doesn’t always feel like you’re banning the book itself. Sometimes it feels like you’re banning the people that those books are about, like, that you’re saying that those lives are lives that should only exist in the shadows, that those lives, though they’re 10 feet away, no matter which direction you turn, you keep looking over them.” *Jason Reynolds*

“Rapid growth in wealth inequality results in the inevitable isolation of a very small, very rich, very privileged section of the community from the material experiences of everyone else. And when this out-of-touch minority group is enfranchised to make the decisions on behalf of people they don’t know, can’t see, have no wish to understand, and think of entirely in dehumanized, transactional, abstract terms, the results for the rest of us are devastating.” *Sally McMannus*

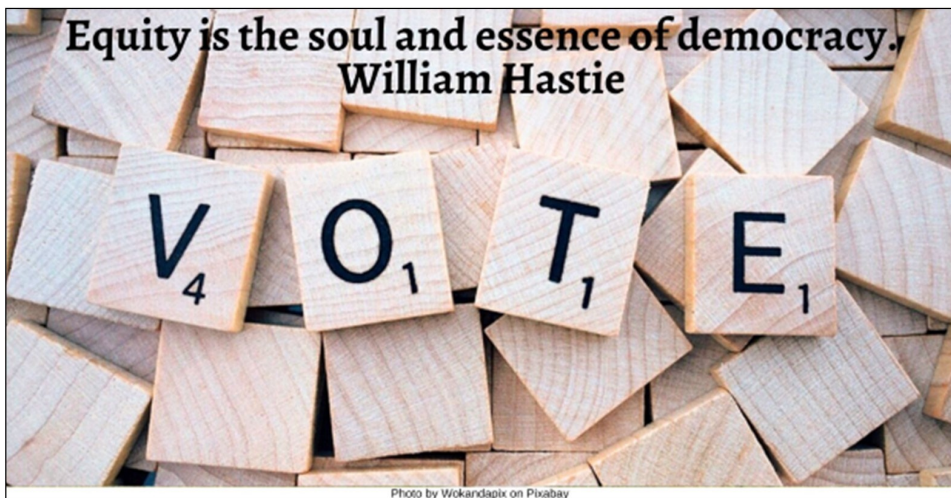
We have to be willing to embrace the full autonomy of people who are less privileged and understand that equity means making access to opportunity easier, not deciding which opportunities they deserve.” *Mikki Kendall*

Regarding social justice, equity seeks to make opportunities accessible by providing support and resources to those who cannot compete equally because of discrimination, poverty, and other factors beyond their control. While equality focuses on opportunities, it is useless if someone cannot access them. By contrast, equity focuses on outcomes. When competing when disadvantaged, what does a person need to

achieve an equitable outcome? Given the chasm between the haves and the have-nots, the idea that they have the same opportunity is a fiction. In many ways, equity makes a “good” a “common good” when that good is distributed to those who otherwise would not possess it. *Touchstones*

Questions

1. In reading #1, the idea and ideal of equality is questioned. Do you believe that all people are created equal? Why or why not? If equal, in what ways? If unequal, in what ways? In our tradition, we assert equality in our first principle, which is equal due to inherent worth and dignity. Is there any problem with this? Why or why not? What does it mean if someone is so oppressed that they can not access or experience their inherent worth and dignity? Shafin Verani writes, “We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality.” Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
2. In reading #2, Christine Pohl writes about the problem of entitlement. Have you ever felt entitled? If yes, what did it feel like? What did it mean? If not, have you seen people who act entitled? In what situations? What was positive about it? Negative? She tempers her concern about entitlement by writing, “... there is a healthy interpretation of entitlement that is tied to a sense of dignity and equality.” How might this be the case? Pohl writes that our consumerist culture “feeds notions of entitlement.” How might this happen? She concludes, “Somehow wanting these things morphs into the sense that, really, we deserve them. A cycle of generalized dissatisfaction fuels envy, striving, and buying.” Do you agree? How is this problematic?
3. In reading #3, it is suggested that the other six values proposed by UUA’s Article II Study Commission assist in promoting equity. How could love do this? Interdependence? Pluralism? Justice? Transformation? Generosity?
4. In reading #4, Robert Emmons sees humility as “the antidote to entitlement and a lack of gratitude.” Do “entitlement and a lack of gratitude” usually go together? Why or why not? He suggests that gratitude is a gateway to humility. How might this be true? What are the benefits of humility? The limitations? Emmons writes, “In gratitude and humility, we acknowledge the myth of self-sufficiency.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How might the myth of self-sufficiency undermine belief in the importance of equity? Emmons also writes, “Becoming aware of realities greater than ourselves shields us from the illusion of being self-made, being here on this planet by right — expecting everything and owing nothing.” How might the view of “expecting everything and owing nothing” cause a person to reject the need for justice or equity?
5. In reading #5, the myth of color and gender blindness is challenged. How does the assertion of color and gender blindness support the false statement of equality? Does the Good Old Boys network still exist in some areas? If yes, where and how? Is it trying to reassert itself? What have been the benefits of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs? Who do they benefit? Why? Why would some people try to undermine DEI programs? What can be done to ward off these attacks?
6. In reading #6, Derrick Jensen contrasts the forces of supremacy with those of non-supremacy. The goal, he states, of supremacists is to exploit others by whatever means necessary to retain power and “stay the top of the food chain.” Do such forces exist? Why or why not? What percentage of the population might be supremacists? What sway do they have over policy? Why would they be opposed to equity? For Jensen, “The non-supremacist side in this war believes that difference leads to complexity and community.” His inference is that these are good things. Part of the complexity



is diversity. How would you judge non-supremacists? Jensen writes that the point is to live life “in such a way that you contribute to the overall health of the community.” How might they react to the need for equity?

7. In reading #7, the UUA Article II Study Commission linked equity to worth and dignity. How can we work to make things more equitable and affirm worth and dignity? Why might equality be absent from our principles and the proposed values? Can equity level the playing field for those who are disadvantaged? How? Do you agree that “Equity seeks to both honor and make manifest a people’s inherent worth and dignity?” The reading concludes, “Equity is not necessarily winning, but it is being able to cross the finish line. That is what worth and dignity are all about. That is what makes the race fair.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, compares radicalism and conservatism of speech with the former “liberating the anti-racist power within” while the former keeps people “conserving their inequitable society.” How does racism undermine any idea about equality? How does it make clear the need for equity for those oppressed by racism?
9. Elena Aguilar writes, “You can strive to make every conversation

one that dismantles white supremacy and systems of oppression.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How could this be done in at least some situations? How might doing this advance the cause of equity?

10. M.F. Moonzajer’s reading compares profoundly different realities, one disadvantaged and one privileged, writing, “Your water is in the bottles, and my water is in the bucket, but we are brothers?” How do such differences call into question the notion of equality? How do they advance the need for equity?
11. Louis Yako writes about the difficulties that DEI professionals experience: being tokens, incapable of making meaningful change, making the institution look and feel good, and being controlled by the privileged at the top. Have you known about such situations? How do these undermine the spirit, purpose, and goals of DEI?
12. Sope Agbelusi asserts that because equality is colorblind, it contributes to privilege. Do you agree? Why or why not? He then continues that because equity sees color and racism, it seeks to create a level playing field. Do you agree? Why or why not?
13. Ibram X. Kendi addresses how racist policies lead to racial inequity and how anti-racist policies promote racial equity. He concludes, “There is no such thing as a non-racist or race-neutral policy.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Since racism can be covert or overt, cov-

ert policies can be harder to evaluate. Given this, in some quarters, is racism becoming more overt? Why or why not? If yes, how does this further undermine equity?

14. Author Jason Reynolds writes that when you ban books, “you’re banning the people that those books are about.” In what ways does book banning promote inequity?
15. Sally McManus writes that the rapid rise in wealth inequality has created a small ultra-rich minority that has the power to make decisions on behalf of a majority they can’t see or care to understand. Do you agree? Why or why not? How does this lead to greater inequality and inequity?
16. Mikki Kendall writes that the privileged must make “access to opportunity easier [for the less privileged], not deciding which opportunities they deserve.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How does deciding which opportunities the less privileged deserve further oppress them?
17. The last piece asks, “When competing when disadvantaged, what does a person need to achieve an equitable outcome? What examples of equity are you aware of? What differences do they make? The piece states, “While equality focuses on opportunities, it is useless if someone cannot access them. By contrast, equity focuses on outcomes.” How can we shift our focus to outcomes? Specifically, what would it mean in public education to be driven solely by outcomes? How would it benefit children who are disadvantaged?