



The Heroic Journey We Encounter & the Benefits

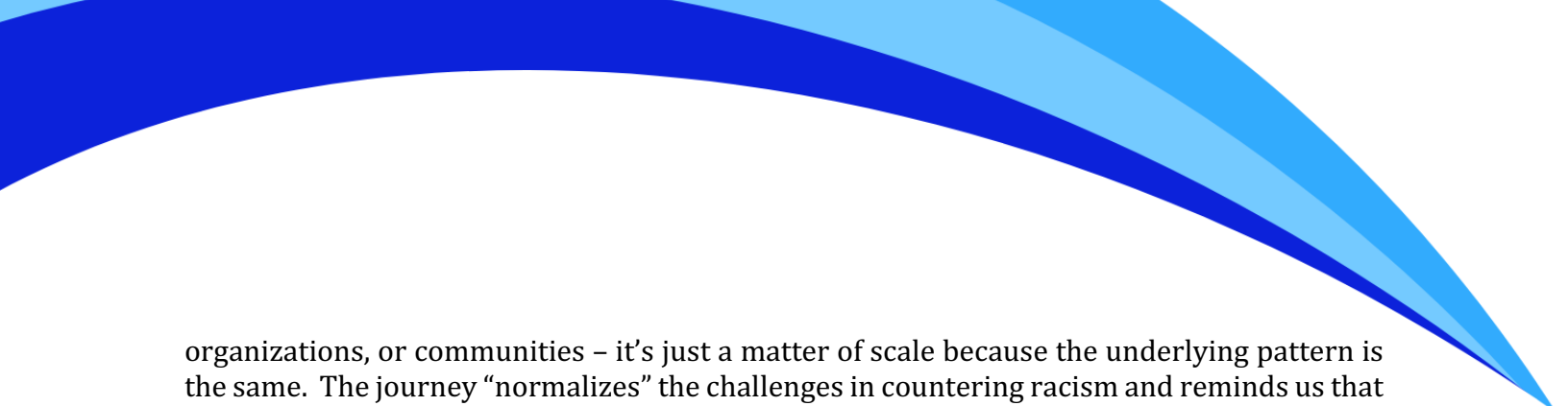
Why a Heroic Journey?

The heroic journey is a roadmap for us because it is THE fundamental story of change – from individual to organizational to community. The heroic journey provides a clear and honest model of the challenges before white people who genuinely step up to confront racism – whether systemic or personal. It provides a very clear picture of what to expect on the journey as well as guidance about how to manage the journey.



The Natural Benefits of the Journey

The heroic journey can provide a tremendous amount of guidance and confidence in managing our experience in countering racism. It can guide individuals, groups,



organizations, or communities – it’s just a matter of scale because the underlying pattern is the same. The journey “normalizes” the challenges in countering racism and reminds us that we have navigated journeys of change before and that we have the capabilities to be successful.

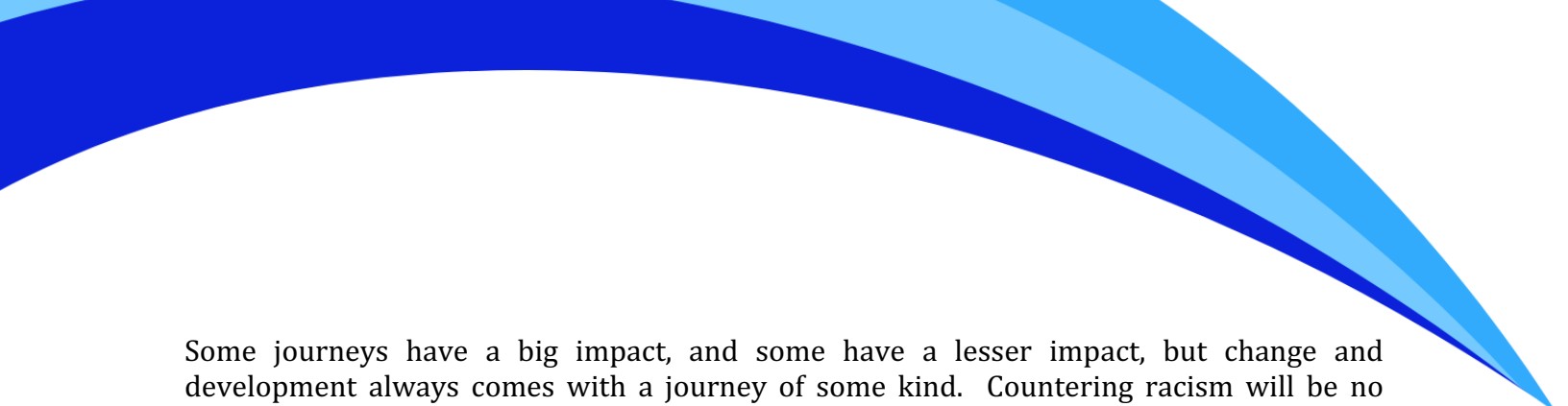
The classic heroic journey provides a set of benefits that no other single model or framework can match.

1. It tells the truth about major change, whether individual, group, organizational, or community.
2. It provides a framework for anticipating and understanding the experience.
3. It provides guidance in choosing strategies and actions.
4. It provides a map for maintaining direction and orientation.
5. Others have “gone before”, so we have examples and role models to follow, whether in our myths and movies or people we know or know of.
6. It is inherently ennobling and calls forth our best – and we find new bests on the journey.
8. It is our story as human beings: the path to self-knowledge, the discovery of the gifts we have to bring to the world, and true maturity and wholeness. It is the affirmation of our life and creativity.
9. It provides extraordinary common ground even for diverse groups in organizations and communities - it is a common human story.

It Really is Our Story

We are not strangers to the heroic journey, although it may seem strange to hear that. Almost every culture throughout time has used the heroic journey to teach its members how to create a life or establish, save, or renew a community. This is not about being grand “larger than life” heroes and having parades in our honor. It’s a journey that will entail going beyond the current norms, leaving the known world of our “current reality” and crossing the threshold into a land with a great deal of the unknown.

When we say “yes” to the journey we leave our known world and go forth into the unknown where we are tested and grow in the process. We might be tested intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually and those are the levels on which we might grow. We will let go of old ways, discover new ways and deal with “inbetweenity”, the weird sense of being in-between the old known world we left and the new one we are creating.



Some journeys have a big impact, and some have a lesser impact, but change and development always comes with a journey of some kind. Countering racism will be no exception, so expecting a journey makes it much easier to manage and it can make it an exciting vs. anxious experience.

Sometimes We are Heroic and Sometimes We are Not

Almost all of us, at various times in our lives, have taken the risk to be heroic (we said “yes” to the heroic journey). They were the times when we were confronted by a major challenge and went forth from our known world or comfort zone into unknown territory where we were tested, saw certain aspects of our lives end and new ones begin, and thus came away significantly changed. We also came away more mature and more whole and with more to contribute, more to offer the world.

Those challenges may have been solely personal or may have played out in family, work, social, or community settings. In many cases they probably overlapped several of these settings.

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.

Anais Nin

We Have All Said “No”

At other times in our lives, we were confronted by opportunities of major change and did not respond by saying “yes” to the heroic journey. We may have refused the opportunity or the call, choosing to not take the risk or leave our comfort zone. We may have started out strongly and been turned back by fears, despair, or mistakes - or were simply worn down before completing the journey. If thrown into a change, we may have taken the role of victim and made the best of it, which may or may not have been very good.

Many of us have led changes where we have called others to follow or thrown them into a journey. In some of those situations we have probably followed our own heroic journey and been able to guide others through the collective journey, whether organizational or community. In other changes we probably did not choose to follow the heroic pattern and, consequently, could not truly guide others along the path.

Few, if any, of us can honestly say that we have always lived heroically in our personal lives or that we have always led collective change heroically. The truth is probably that we have varied, perhaps radically, in our approach to change, whether in managing our own personal change, following others, or leading others.

The question is, “How are we going to act now in countering racism?”

Intentional committed action is required to counter racism and that will probably require some form of journey for most of us. Staying on the sidelines believing or saying, “I am not a racist”, passively supports racism, but does not require any journey. So, we either say “yes” and go forth to make a difference, being challenged and growing in the process – or we stand on the sidelines. There is no middle ground.

May your choices reflect your hopes and not your fears.
Nelson Mandela

Our Story Can Play Out in Multiple Settings

Making the commitment to be an anti-racist naturally starts a journey, which can play out in one or more parts of our lives. All of our life journeys combine to create our life path and to become an anti-racist adds to that

Individually

As individuals we experience journeys throughout life that may be journeys of normal development or journeys occasioned by some event or situation. Normal developmental changes range from adolescence and establishing ourselves in work and family to learning what it means to be human and finding our place in our world. Situational journeys can be precipitated by any significant change, from promotions, career changes and job loss to changes in relationships, major injuries or illnesses, or changes in family makeup.

Countering racism can impact both developmental or situational journeys and can bring challenge and growth in many parts of our lives, from identity and sense of place in our organization or community to our relationships and capabilities.

In Our Communities

Countering racism in our communities – from neighborhoods to nationally – will require leaving our known worlds, dealing with the unknown, and developing new capabilities for most of us. In our communities we can be called to make a difference in an extraordinary range of issues. For instance, we may be called to make a difference in our educational system, the way we govern ourselves, how we develop our youth, or how we maintain the health and well-being of the people in our communities. We may also be called to deal with issues of safety, justice, economic health, neighborhood development, or caring for the environment.

Each person has inside a basic decency and goodness. If he listens to it and acts on it, he is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs most. It is not complicated but it takes courage . . . to listen to his own goodness.

Pablo Casals

In Our Organizations

In our organizations we are called, and very often thrown into, major changes that fall into an equally impressive array of categories. In terms of specifically countering racism, DEI initiatives (diversity, equity, and inclusion) can stretch us and offer opportunities for significant personal growth. Those initiatives can be formal organizational initiatives or informal efforts that you execute.

In almost all cases where we are engaged in organizational or community journeys of countering racism we will also find ourselves on an individual journey.

The Nature of the Heroic Journey in a Little More Detail

This is not about being grand “larger than life” heroes and having parades in our honor. It’s a journey that will entail going beyond the current norms, leaving the known world of our “current reality”, and crossing the threshold into a land with a great deal of the unknown where we will be tested and grow.

What the world needs now, more than ever before, are everyday heroes who are ready, willing, and able to make a difference.

Greg Hickman

“Being the Author” – The Heart of the Journey

At its heart, the heroic journey is about "being the author" (even when thrown into a journey not of ones choosing); having the courage to take full responsibility for choices and behaviors, develop self-knowledge, and become increasingly mature as a human being. Being the author means saying “yes” to the journey as well as initiating and taking responsibility for actions – and reactions.

*You are the author of your life. Write with bold strokes and bright colors,
and add only those characters who make it better.*

You can't erase mistakes, so let them go and just keep writing.

Unknown

There are Two Journeys

This process will play out in both an external journey dealing with the challenges of countering racism in our world and an internal journey of change precipitated by the experience of the external journey. Both journeys can require extraordinary effort, the willingness to take risks, a great deal of consistent and sustained effort, and a foundation of courage, perseverance, and resilience. We usually have more responsibility for and influence over the internal journey.

There are Three Acts and Three Types of Test

In its simplest form the heroic journey (external and internal) involves three acts: Act I involves beginning by leaving a known world; Act II involves traveling a path of tests and trials with three types of test - letting go of old ways, discovering and mastering new ones and dealing with "inbetweenity"; and finally Act III involves a completion or “return” in a changed state – hopefully wiser, more whole, and more resilient.

The Tests and Growth Can Be on Five Levels

On any journey we can be tested and grow on potentially five levels – physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and/or spiritually. Going forth to counter racism is no different.

More on Act I - Going Forth

The classic heroic journey begins with the crossing of a threshold, leaving a known world or comfort zone. That journey can begin in four different ways. A person may "heed a call" to

go forth and accomplish something worth doing; he or she may be thrown into the journey; they may be lured in; or even blunder into a journey.

Two Common Ways to Begin - Answer the Call or Be Thrown in

The two most common ways to begin a journey to counter racism are to "answer a call" or be thrown into some form of change initiative. Those two beginnings are very different experiences, but the challenge is the same in both cases, to be the author of the experience as much as possible. If we are "answering a call", we will already be in the author posture. If we are thrown into the journey, the first challenge is to get into the author role as quickly as possible.

Right at the beginning we confront what are called "the guardians of the threshold", which we must get past to cross the threshold and go forth. These guardians are designed to turn us back if we are not ready for the journey.

For White people countering racism there are three natural and inescapable guardians – a sense of indictment; the fear of a range of potential losses; and the specter of incompetence. These three guardians are addressed in a separate section on barriers because of their importance. They are quite capable of turning us back right at the beginning.



More on Act II – On the Path

Moving through the land that lies on the other side of the threshold we are faced with tests and trials that usually require new or altered ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting. As Alice found, things often aren't what they seem and what worked before is no longer effective and can, in fact, be counter-productive or dangerous.

The journeys will entail a series of tests or trials and we grow by taking on these tests. These tests will not only challenge current strengths and capabilities, but also require new behaviors, new skills, new relationships, and new ways of seeing our world. There are three types of test.

#1 Letting Go

The journey will require tests of letting go - letting go of many, though certainly not all, old ways in order to give birth to the new. We may need to let go of beliefs or ways of thinking, our picture of the world, some behaviors, some relationships (with individuals or groups), and even of some aspects of our self-image.

#2 Discovery and Mastery

The discovery of the new ways and their mastery presents a second type of test. We may need to learn new skills, acquire new knowledge, develop new relationships, and even create new pictures of how we see ourselves and our world. And we do that in the midst of a great deal of unknown on the journey.

*You're not going to master the rest of your life in one day. Just relax.
Master the day. Then just keep doing that every day.*

Unknown

#3 "Inbetweenity"

The third type of test will involve dealing with the uncertainty, disorientation, and ambiguity of the land between endings and beginnings ("Inbetweenity"). This "inbetweenity" is characterized by a set of pushes and pulls or "dynamic tensions" that don't easily resolve. For instance, common tensions are between clarity and confusion, excitement and anxiety, confidence and self-doubt, etc.

*The moment in-between what you once were and who you are now
becoming is where the dance of life really takes place.*

Barbara de Angelis

The Good News About the Tests

The good news is that it is through being tested that we grow and develop – becoming more whole and more mature. The tough part is that all three types of test will be in play at the same time throughout the journey.

*Life will always find ways to test you. The goal is not to weaken you,
but to help you discover your strengths.*
Unknown

More on Act III – Completion or “The Return”

For those who successfully meet the challenges of the journey the final phase is some form of completion or “return” (in the myths). In terms of our inner journey, we “return” with the gifts that we have discovered, whether new knowledge or truths, new abilities, new “ways” of seeing the world or new relationships. In the classic myths the hero returns with what the community needs. This is the purpose of the heroic journey and the health of individuals, groups, organizations, and communities relies on it. They always have.

How Others Respond

The challenge is that on the external journey we will have caused change in various ways and that will have a “ripple effect.” Completing a journey (any part of significant change) may be the most difficult part of all. That is because the impact of a person’s, group’s, organization’s, or community’s changes may not be look upon with great favor by others who are impacted.

We, and perhaps our organization or community, will be changed and that will require changes in others because relationships are about “fit”, and we will have to find a new “fit” in often surprising areas. Our changes may also be models for others who are not ready to go forth and that can be unsettling for them. Our changes can ripple out in many directions and for long distances.

Sometimes in the classic myths heroes are welcomed and celebrated at the end of a journey. Sometimes they are ignored. Sometimes they are even shunned, reviled, or attacked (even crucified). This phenomenon is real in our world also and holds true whether the “kingdom” is a family, an organization, a corporation, or a community (regardless of size).




Thus, there are major challenges facing us in beginning the journey and crossing the threshold, in traversing the unknown and facing the trials and tests that are found there, and in returning and dealing with the impact of our return.

The Importance of Connecting – “Heroes Don’t Go Alone

Although the heroic journey is ultimately an individual one, it is never traversed alone. In the myths and movies heroes never go alone and it’s always obvious how others have made a difference in their journeys. Heroes don’t make it without others and that is true for us if we take on the journey involved in making a difference in countering racism.

If traversed successfully, a journey will be made with companionship, guidance and challenge, teaching, support, encouragement, and healing. On almost all journeys there are helpers of various sorts who can provide direction, knowledge, tools, nourishment of various types, encouragement, and coaching in finding our way and staying healthy on the journey. The nature of the roles of these helpers and healers and their importance will vary widely, but they will always be present in some form on successful journeys, and we must find them if we are on a journey to counter racism.

We can also often find companions with whom we can travel for all or parts of our journey. Companions are essential. Sometimes they are obvious and readily available. At other times they take some work to find and stay connected with. Other characters, such as tricksters, jokers, enemies, opponents, and such can also be encountered, but they can be dealt with if we are connected to others.



*Alone we are strong...
together we are
stronger*