A native of Texas, Anna Chavez has served the church as a pastoral minister for more than 25 years in Latino and immigrant communities. She brings extensive experience in catechetical leadership and youth ministry as well as in pastoral, spiritual, and leadership formation. She facilitated workshops and retreats on multiculturalism, evangelization, and social justice throughout the U.S. as an adjunct faculty member at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio.

Most recently, she served Catholic Relief Service Southwest as the Border Project coordinator, consulting for relationship building and education to promote global solidarity through advocacy for policy reform on hunger, health, and immigration issues. She holds a master of arts degree in theology with a concentration in cross-cultural ministry from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and a bachelor’s degree in religious studies and anthropology from the University of the Incarnate Word.

Anna is the proud mother of two young adult sons, Levi and Steven. She has a great love for learning and is most passionate about promoting social justice and peace in the church and society through social analysis, education, reflection, prayer, and advocacy. Anna’s greatest desire as an educator and peace builder is to empower and motivate others to live their faith in action and prayer.
Got Privilege? —Continued from page 1

The Truth and Consequences of White Privilege

This contradiction permeates U.S. life. “My white wherewithal,” explains the Protestant theologian Jim Perkinson, “is constituted in Afro- (as indeed Latino- and Filipino-, and Aboriginal-, etc.) American impoverishment. Their loss is my gain. The relationship is utterly asymmetrical and the asymmetry is utterly relational.”8 Too many of us remain oblivious to the following indices of persistent racial inequality:

• On average, black males die in the U.S. at the age of 64.3 years old, often of stress-related diseases—before receiving a single dollar in social security. By contrast, white males live beyond age 74. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies finds that racial minority patients receive a lower quality and intensity of health care and diagnostic services across a wide range of procedures and disease areas. Minority patients procure the worse outcomes in many cases.9

• Although whites make up 70 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 35 percent of all drug users nationally, blacks are 11 percent more likely to receive a higher sentence, and 55 percent of all drug convictions, and 75 percent of all prison admissions for drug offenses. Human Rights Watch and the Sentencing Project extensively document these inequalities.

• A 2006 Center for Responsible Lending study found that when income and credit risks were equal, African-American and Latino borrowers were more than 30 percent more likely to receive a higher rate loan than whites.10

• An extensive study of hiring outcomes in Milwaukee, Boston, and Chicago reveals that white applicants with a criminal record were just as likely to receive a callback as a black applicant without any criminal history. Despite the fact that white applicants revealed evidence of felony drug conviction and reported having returned from one and a half years in prison, employers viewed them as no more risky than a young black male with no criminal record.11

• Fifty years after the Supreme Court decided that school segregation was unconstitutional and “inherently unequal,” resegregation of the nation’s schools shows that “white students remain the most segregated from all other races in their schools. Whites on average attend schools where less than 20 percent of the students are from all of the other racial and ethnic groups combined. On average, blacks and Latinos attend schools with 53 percent to 55 percent students of their own group.” Gary Orfield concludes that “research consistently shows that segregated schools are usually isolated by both race and poverty, and offer vastly unequal educational opportunities.” Southern states are losing their leadership as the nation’s most integrated schools.12

The New Racism: “Racism without Racists”

Nevertheless, despite glaring racial disparities, we now live the absurdity of “racism without racists.” Not only do whites tend to deny any responsibility for a society that systemically benefits whites to the detriment of people of color, too often whites name people of color as racist. An example of this absurdity is U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions’s argument that Judge Sonia Sotomayor’s judicial philosophy “conflicts with the great American tradition of blind justice.”14 For the sake of argument, suppose that Senator Sessions was not voted down by the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1986 for the federal judgeship because of his own record of racism.15 It is curious how Senator Sessions, and more than a few white Americans, do not see the proverbial white elephant in the middle of the room—the fact that 106 of 110 U.S. Supreme Court justices have been white males whose racial practice of “blind justice” remain unexamined. The Supreme Court has never defined “white,” despite the fact that the Court consistently measured who is not white to evaluate citizenship appeals. The legal scholar Ian Haney Lopez’s analysis of 52 cases decided between the Civil War and 1952 reveals how the Court decided who should or should not become a citizen.16 Justices relied upon unscientific rationales of common knowledge that appealed to popular white racial conceptions. The failure of U.S. courts to define “white” is one powerful way our system maintains white as natural and, simultaneously, the perversity of white ignorance. Although the irony will likely be lost on Senator Sessions, a “wise Latina” Supreme Court Justice may be exactly what a multicultural, democratic society really needs.

A Post-Racial Society?

Given Barack Obama’s historic election and the fact that Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian peoples are projected to represent a majority of the U.S. population by 2042, some argue that the U.S. is a post-racial society free of racism. Others argue that the new influx of Latinos threatens white European American culture and the nation’s political integrity. Neither view accurately describes reality.

The sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva persuasively argues that the U.S. is “evolving into a complex and loosely organized triracial stratification system similar to that of many Latin American and Caribbean nations.” Roughly stated, (see Bonilla-Silva’s full analysis), the three groups in order of relative power are 1) whites; 2) lighter skinned Latinos, and Japanese-, Korean-, Chinese-, and Middle Eastern-Americans; and 3) blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos, and Laotians. Although the emerging order will be more pluralistic and exhibit more racial fluidity than before, it “will serve as a formidable fortress for white supremacy.”19

New forms of white racism do not depend upon the overt racism of Jim Crow. Instead, white colorblind ideology adapts four tropes or strategies to maintain privilege: 1) Utilize an abstract liberalism that rhetorically supports equal opportunity but opposes any policy to alleviate persistent inequality; 2) Explain away race by claiming it is natural; for example, segregation occurs because “everybody is attracted to people who look the same”; 3) Claim inequality is due to cultural difference, for example, “Mexicans don’t value education as much as Japanese”; and 4) Minimize racial consequences by arguing, “It’s past—get over it.” Whites use these tropes consciously or not to form an ideological wall that may be more difficult to dismantle than Jim Crow.
Got Privilege?
—Continued from page 7

This ideological wall becomes impenetrable by employing a safe, colorblind way to state racial views without appearing to be irrational or overtly racist. The wall is further reinforced as whites adapt the four tropes, often in tandem, to project racial innocence and avoid the absolutism of Jim Crow.

A deeper irony for whites concerns how we dehumanize ourselves as we collectively deny complicity in racial oppression. Most whites have yet to explore the profound damage racism has done to us and the way we need people of color to become authentically human.20 As both Reinhold Niebuhr and Catholic social teaching recognize, there is a way beyond American irony through two wells of transformation: God’s love and those whom we oppress. Dare we drink from these wells?

4 Ibid., Church and Racism, No. 18.
16 Sam P. Huntington, Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).
17 Ibid., Racism without Racists, p.179.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.