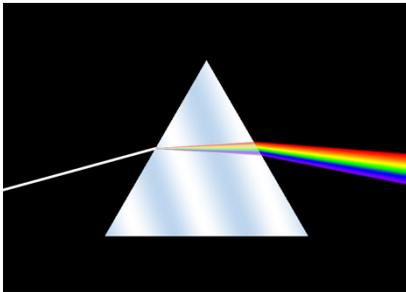


What Is PRISMS?

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”

Chief Seattle



The **PRISMS** acronym was the brainchild of the San Diego Peace Campus leaders, Pastor Sara Haldeman-Scarr of the Church of the Brethren, Pedro Rios of American Friends Service Committee, and Mariah Gayler of the Peace Resource Center of San Diego. It arose out of their efforts to help people connect the dots amongst the issues of Poverty, Racism, Immigration, Spirituality, Militarism and Sustainability. To some, these connections are clear, but for others, it may take some explanation and elucidation.

In this document, we will refer to the PRISMS lens. What we'd invite you to do with each part of PRISMS is to ask yourself how the pieces interconnect. We'll be providing examples, but the discussion here will be far from comprehensive.

U.S. Policy = Structural Violence

Looking at U.S. policy, and starting with the budget, it's easy to see where the priorities of our representatives lie. Twenty-five percent of our \$3 trillion plus budget is expended on current military, including procurement, personnel, research, homeland security, and nuclear weapons, for example. Nineteen percent is spent on veterans' benefits and interest on the debt incurred by military spending¹ Adding insult to injury, the Department of Defense has not been audited in decades². Despite talk of a “peace dividend” by Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama, we now have a larger military budget than we did during the Cold War³. So, a first step in connecting the dots can be made in recognizing that “billions of dollars are spent annually on militarism and corporate tax breaks while families and communities across the U.S. experience cuts to essential services like education, housing, healthcare, and worker protections.”⁴ *This is structural violence.*

What Is Militarism?

Militarism is a philosophy of using force over other alternatives⁵. This philosophy underlies our military budget and enormous worldwide military presence. But, in subtler ways, militarism pervades our daily lives, has huge implications for how young people are raised (think first person shooter video games), and how we feel and think about the world. As news outlets emphasize the dangers our enemies pose to us, our fears can lead us to support more military buildup and aggression. While there are plenty of profits to be made from weapons manufacturing and military contracting, these benefit company shareholders much more than ordinary workers. Using prisons as a solution for undocumented immigrants and drug addicts is militarism too. Rather than keeping us safe, police in many places have responded to peaceful protests by showing up in riot gear bearing high-powered weapons. Something is wrong.



[For More Information on Militarism, click here](#)

Poverty

Who is poor in this country? What are the effects of poverty? What strategies are effective in alleviating poverty? What prevents us, as a country, from addressing these problems? Information from the U.S. Census published in 2015 reveals no surprises. While 14.8% of the population is below the poverty line, the poverty rate for African Americans and Hispanics is 2½ times that of poor whites⁶.



One “solution” to poverty that youth often turn to is the military. A 2008 study by Lutz confirmed that those with lower incomes are more likely to join up than their more fortunate counterparts⁷. And yet, military families and veterans are relying on food banks in order to get by⁸.

When we put the PRISMS lens on poverty, it’s easy to see that when schools are underfunded, higher education is too expensive for the average person, and infrastructure is crumbling, that our spending priorities could be much more humane.

[For Resources on Poverty, click here](#)

Racism

It was recently revealed that the Nixon Administration began its War on Drugs with the intention of disenfranchising African-Americans⁹. (Nixon also targeted “hippies”, but that’s another story.) Their plan succeeded in mass incarceration for people of color, what Michelle Alexander calls “The New Jim Crow”¹⁰. Is this related to militarism? Think the prison-industrial complex, which profits from building and running prisons across the U.S. Since 1989, the two biggest for-profit prison companies have spent more than \$25 million in lobbying Congress to keep people locked up¹¹. Imagine whole communities functioning without father figures and second wage-earners.

Of course, Racism is bigger than this. Redlining, youth unemployment, the school-to-prison pipeline, voter suppression, the achievement gap, the wealth gap, all are examples of institutionalized or systemic racism¹². What can be learned as we apply the PRISMS lens?

[Find Racism Resources here](#)

Immigration



Much of what can be said about immigration issues may echo conversations about race. For instance, roughly a third of the federal prison population is Hispanic¹³, although they make up only 17% of the US population¹⁴. In addition, those without documents can easily be caught up in the prison-industrial-complex, except that the preferred parlance for their incarceration venue is “detention center”. A study by the American Immigration Council showed that Border Patrol agents can act with impunity¹⁵. In 2015, there were at least 9 deaths of people in Border Patrol custody, but there is little transparency about the deaths and injuries that occur¹⁶.

What allows U.S. politicians and citizenry to “otherize” those who were born outside our borders? And what happens to our own humanity when we “lose touch with their humanity...see them through a black and white pair of glasses. ... With this two-dimensional view, you can’t sense the struggle that they’re going through or the authentic values that fuel their passion.”¹⁷. This question provides a pertinent segue into the first “S” of PRISMS.

[Information on Immigrants, click here](#)

Spirituality

At a Worker Justice Forum on the Peace Campus, Rabbi Laurie Coskey talked of *Shalom*, typically thought of as “peace”, but translated from the Hebrew, the word means “wholeness”. One question that we might ask when using the spirituality lens is “Can we be whole as a community when there is so much brokenness among us?”

Each of us defines for ourselves what spirituality means. How some define it may reference a religious belief, and for others spirituality transcends religion. Either way, delving into our spiritual selves, we may ask, “What is deeply and essentially important, and what gives one’s life meaning?”

If you use a spiritual lens to evaluate your priorities and decisions, how would you connect that to the PRISMS issues? One blogger on the subject says, “Spiritual activism invites us to embrace the unique and powerful role each of us has to play in the unfolding of justice and peace, to be a force for cultivating what we want, not just stopping what we don’t want.”¹⁸ Do you agree?



[For More on Spirituality, click here](#)

Sustainability

"People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise marginalised are especially vulnerable to climate change" says a 2014 UN Climate Change report¹⁹. Food shortages due to crop failures, deaths from heatwaves, flooding, and fires are likely to impact the poor more than those whose energy use has fueled climate change.

Thanks to *An Inconvenient Truth*²⁰, and other media, we understand the science of this man-made disaster. Even so, there has been very little policy change in the U.S., lawmakers have instead denied the science and pushed back on efforts to curb carbon emissions. As individuals, we can ride bikes, purchase electric vehicles, dry our clothes on a line and change to LED bulbs, but Climate Change is a problem that requires governments to make big policy changes in order to make a real difference. (An example would be the Dutch parliament proposal to permit only all-electric cars on their roads by 2025²¹.)

What would happen if we were supporting more alternative energy think tanks, converting government buildings to solar, giving tax incentives to companies to develop renewables? What if vocational schools were training solar installers and electric car mechanics, and foundations gave scholarships to promising students interested in renewable energy? What if people of faith formed a giant coalition that demanded that Congress act decisively on climate change?



[Click here for Sustainability Resources](#)

Join Us!

In the age of the tweet, **The Peace Resource Center of San Diego** is committed to its enduring mission of peace education. Finding solutions to the challenges to peace, justice and sustainability requires that we understand the complexity of the issues. We hope that you will delve into our resources and share them, as well as participating in our forums, discussions and other events. Check out our Facebook page to stay connected to current offerings.

“An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight.” – Thomas Jefferson

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