

ONE STEP FORWARD ON THE PATH TO LIBERATION:
White anti-racist Organizing and its role in the struggle against the White Supremacist System
(Chapter for Catalyst book)

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AWARE-LA views the current historical context in the United States thru the lens of how it has been shaped by the white supremacist system. The foundation of our approach is the clear understanding that this country and all systems of oppression are built on the foundation of slavery and genocide. The establishment of capitalism as an economic and political system, we hold, is inherently based on the principles of exploitation and oppression. Holding this, we also see that since the founding of this nation there has existed strong multiracial resistance to the white supremacist system. Significant gains have been made; the establishment of an eight-hour work day; the creation of social security and labor protections; some protections of voting rights. The gains of the New Deal Era in the 1930s, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, along with many other movements for justice, have been continuously under attack. In the 1980s, the Reagan Revolution began the most recent efforts to roll back any progress that has been made through struggles for justice. The passage of racist criminalization laws, along with consistent attacks on affirmative action programs and protections, and the most recent legislative attacks on undocumented immigrants, are but a few of the overwhelming examples of the strengthening momentum of the White Supremacist System (intrinsically interwoven with capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and all other systems of supremacy).

Through mainstream media and devolving social “norms,” white people are becoming more and more conditioned in this current racist environment to tolerate and embrace racism and the white supremacist system. In the US, we encounter severe levels of segregation, racism, white supremacy, blatant imperialism, perpetual war, and a creeping police state all under the guise of a supposed “war on terror.” Two questions for white anti-racist and radical white people are: *What should we do? What are our roles?*

AWARE-LA was founded November 2003 to create a space for white people to take responsibility for working with ourselves and with other white people to uproot racism, confront white privilege, and take action to dismantle the white supremacist system. We began as a small monthly dialogue group at a local church in Los Angeles, focusing primarily on supporting white anti-racist folks working in different fields of social justice (teachers, social workers, activists, organizers, artists, etc.). In the early work of the organization, we strived to build skills and capacity for being effective white anti-racist allies.

The impetus to create AWARE-LA came from many years of experience working in the social justice community in Los Angeles as white people. In doing our personal work of coming to terms with the realities of racism in our engagement in social justice work, were told repeatedly by our friends of color that a critical part of our work is to engage white communities to create change. Within this process, we also recognized that there are no communities where those who struggle for justice work only as individuals. In this light, we found that white anti-racist folks also need a community from which to sustain ourselves in social justice work and in active alliance with people of color. With this as the premise, AWARE-LA built a core group of white anti-racist members and developed its own unique model from which to engage in white anti-racism organizing: the Radical White Identity model. This serves as the foundation for our work.

The structure and model of AWARE-LA is based on the theory of Radical White Identity (RWI). Radical White Identity is the notion that white anti-racist folks committed to the struggle for racial, economic, social, and environmental justice must be fundamentally rooted in healthy and holistic racial identity work. The Radical White Identity model serves to transform white peoples’ conscious and unconscious perpetuation of white supremacy into a set of practices in which reclaiming our humanity serves as an important part of our stake in uprooting the white supremacist system. Here, it is important to note that we embrace Critical Race Theory in its analysis that race is socially constructed; we do *not* believe in the biological basis of race. Because we are raised to be white within the context of racism and white supremacy, we need a new form of socialization to be anti-racist and fully human.¹ As white people we live the contradiction of being raised to be racist, unconsciously acting out white privilege and supporting the white supremacist system. We want to move past racial identity but we cannot do it without shifting

¹ We recognize that all racial identities are socially constructed and that race does not exist except as a social construct, which have major real life implications for all people living inside and outside the US.

and redefining the meaning of whiteness. We use our whiteness as the basis for a common experience and from there we adopt the RWI model to transform in order to become fully human.

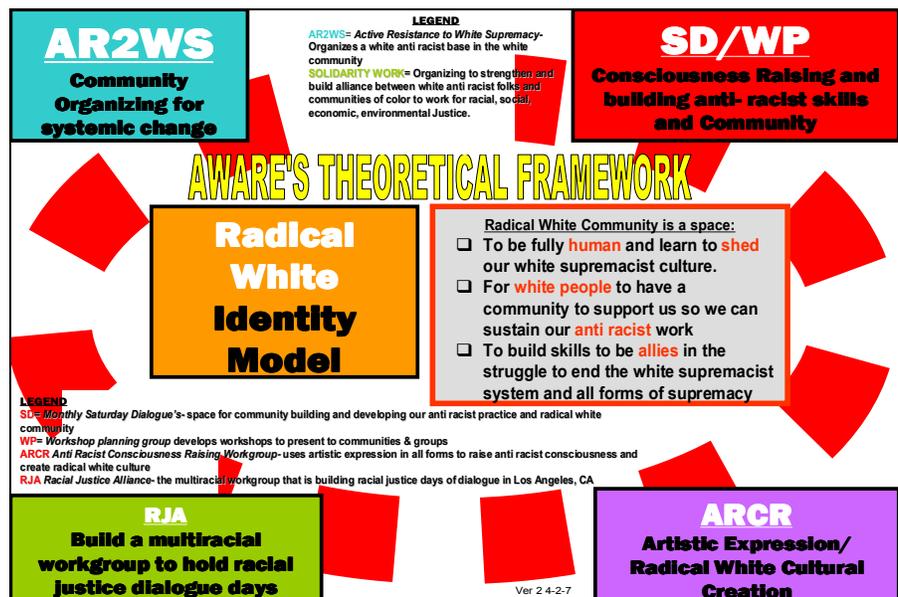
At the core of the RWI model is the analysis of the white supremacist system. We begin by redefining the relationship between racism and white supremacy. In a traditional liberal analysis, racism is seen as the source of racial oppression. In this liberal model there are two roles: oppressor and oppressed. This traditional model places white people within the role of oppressor, having no common bonds with people of color and no stake in changing a racist system. In AWARE-LA's Radical White Identity model we define racism as a *tool* of the larger white supremacist system. The white ruling elite has power and class interests in keeping white people and people of color divided. When the system is hidden, it obscures the role of the white ruling elite, the complexity of difference amongst white people, and the power of white people and people of color uniting to create a road to fundamental change. With a clear understanding of the white supremacist system, a white person can also see that ending the system's control allows for the fullness of our humanity, because in denying the humanity of another we also deny our own.

While AWARE-LA focuses on white supremacy as the primary focus on which we place our energies and organize, we also recognize the interlocking systems of oppression and supremacy at the root of the problems the world faces today. To be effective anti-racists we must operate from, and apply in everyday life, an analysis that includes an understanding of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, adultism, and all other forms of oppression as well as unsustainable planetary practices. We recognize the need for a complete transformation of this society. At this time, strategically, we are focusing on working against white supremacy, as it is useful and necessary to reaching our goals.

We also recognize that too many white anti-racist models are constructed from a deep level of guilt and shame. We believe that feelings of guilt, as one begins to fully realize the extent of the realities of racism, are an important part of a heartfelt process of conscious development. For us, guilt is a place to visit, not a place to live. When guilt and shame become the operating force of white people's involvement in anti-racist work, their work and relationships are negatively impacted. Two clear examples of this occur when white people place people of color on an unrealistic pedestal and when we disassociate from whiteness and white people.

Often we have witnessed conscious white people who are aware of racial difference and understand racism, but deny that they are white or have no connection to other white people based on the guilt and shame they feel associated with what it means to be white in the United States. White people can be anti-racist, but we cannot stop being white. To effectively resist the white supremacist system, white people need to engage in anti-racism work from a place of true authenticity and humbleness as well as work for the liberation of all people, people of color and white people.

AWARE-LA and the RWI model² are built on the belief and experience that white people need a positive white anti-racist identity that moves us through guilt and shame and reconnects us with our fundamental humanity. It is not enough for white people to simply recognize white privilege and racism; we need a way forward, a foundation from which to take real action against white supremacy as white anti-racist people. Without offering an alternative, positive, white racial identity of resistance, we risk leaving white people



² See paper - "Towards a Radical White Identity". See www.aware.revolt.org

stuck in guilt and shame with no other way to be white in the world other than racist. When white people are stuck it leads to passivity, inaction, and paralysis. It prevents us from realizing our stake in ending white supremacy: restoring our humanity.

Only as whole, healthy human beings can we build authentic relationships with ourselves, people of color and other white people and work in unity against racism and white supremacy. From this place of wholeness, white people can begin to build community with other white anti-racists, creating radical white communities and a white anti-racist culture as an alternative to the dominant white supremacist culture. Creating radical white community reduces the isolation so often felt by white anti-racists, provides the opportunity to bring more white people into the struggle, and builds our strength to sustain this work for the long haul.

AWARE-LA was created as a vehicle to put this model into practice for white people to be transformed through Radical White Identity, and as a catalyst for white people to come together and take up the struggle for racial justice alongside other white people and people of color. AWARE-LA engages in this work on several levels, providing multiple points of entry.

We have found that we can engage far more people in anti-racist work when we offer folks varied ways to become active. This includes: consciousness-raising and skill building through workshops and dialogue as well as alliance building work with people of color through building local and national alliances. Ultimately, no work in the white community can ever be complete without being active in larger multiracial movements to organize for systemic change. At the root of this work is our commitment to serve as a vehicle for white people to be fully human, learn to shed our white supremacist culture, have a supportive community to sustain our anti-racist work, and build skills to be allies in the struggle to end the white supremacist system and all forms of supremacy.

White people are uniquely situated in this system to make choices that can either contribute to or undermine the white supremacist system. During the slavery and civil rights eras, there came a tipping point when mainstream white society was forced to take a position – were they for slavery, or abolition? Were they for segregation, or integration? It is time once again for white people to take an **active and visible stand** against the white supremacist system by utilizing anti-racist community organizing strategies to create systemic change.

Anti-racist white people need to join together to do anti-racist organizing within key white communities to build anti-racist alliances with white people. We need a white anti-racist movement in the US that is able to engage white people to assist in the realization that they have far more in common with the interests of people of color than the white ruling elite. White anti-racist people must form alliances with people of color that serve as a basis for creating massive social change. We need to actively use our white privilege to visibly express opposition to the white supremacist system.

It is important to stress again and recognize that movements in the white community must collaborate with and be guided by mass movements led by people of color. Given the historical context, we see the need to organize a **strategic anti-racist wedge** within the white community to engage every white person if they are anti-racist or not, and to stand allied with people of color who we share a common agenda and fate.

Based on this analysis, of the white supremacist system and the need for white people to contribute to social change, AWARE-LA developed a Theory of Social Change. This is our model for how we work to abolish the white supremacist system. It is based on four social change goals: First, to move white people to take an *active role* in undermining the white supremacist system. Unless anti-racist white people are willing to stand against racism, things can never really change.

The second goal is to assist in creating a visible and organized *strategic wedge* of white anti-racist opposition in this country. If the white anti-racist activists and organizers across the country come together we can organize a base of at least 20,000 white anti-racist activists across the country. It is with this base we can form a real wedge in the white community.

Third we must build STRATEGIC ALLIANCES with people of color to work for racial, social, economic, environmental justice. Whatever work happens in the white community must ultimately lead to linkages with struggles in communities of color; we must work to unite with folks of color to form a powerful enough block to create real change in this country.

Our fourth goal is to work to increase the capacity for *movement building* among white anti-racist grassroots groups. AWARE-LA works with groups across the country to collaborate and share resources and build local capacity. For example we offer a

training institute to explore our anti-racist community organizing model to support groups to figure out how to apply anti-racist organizing model in their local community. From these goals we have developed four key strategy areas:

1. Build anti-racist power- White anti-racist need to get organized into a active base which can effectively engage the larger white communities. Without a base of members and supporters it is impossible to organize white people. We need to move from a framework of activism to one of organizing. This means that it is not enough to mobilize with our friends and allies to actions and demonstrations and meetings. We need to organize ourselves into a base that can effectively do work in the white community.

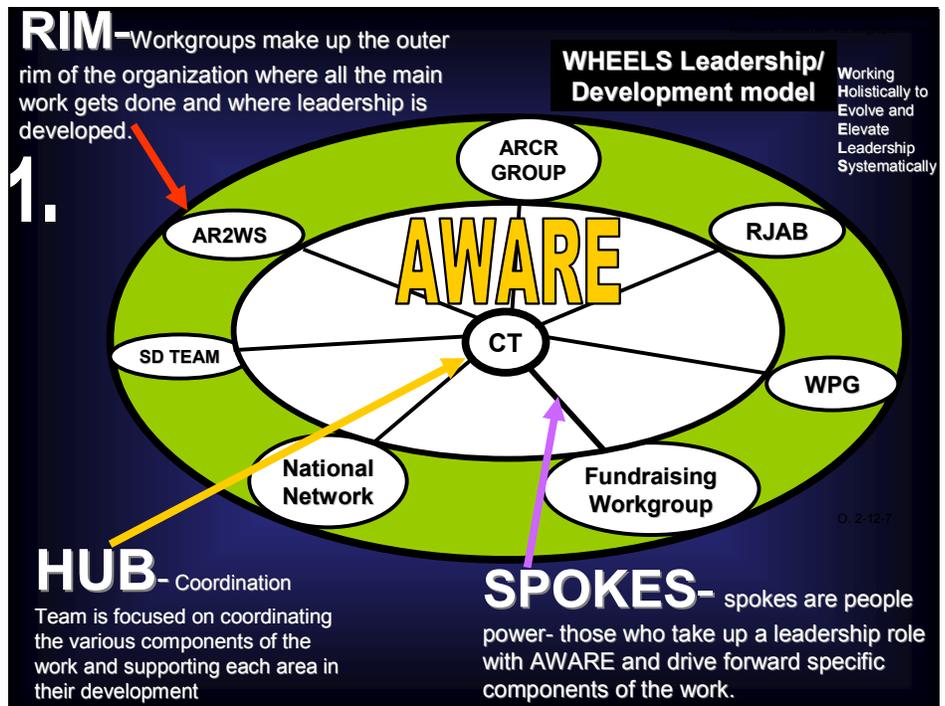
2. Political education- Raise anti-racist consciousness through politicized artistic expression and political education with white people to engage white people so the question their role in the white supremacist system. .

3. Alliance building work- Once we have a base of white anti-racist folks we can work with local struggles and work of people of color groups and communities by participating in multiracial social justice movements. We are working to identify issues within the white community that are impacting people of color and then building relationships with specific groups and organizations working in communities of color.

4. Organizational development- Develop an organizational structure that effectively works toward systemic change goals, embodies the RWI model and anti-oppression values and practices, and provides a leadership structure that creates a sustained pool of volunteer staff/leaders to drive the work forward. We must work to continually expand our leadership capacity. In April 2007, 17 members of AWARE-L.A. went to the White Privilege Conference in Colorado Springs- these folks were identified as 2nd line leadership- basically our potential leaders. We contribute to the Conference because it serves to deepen folks' commitment and investment.

After the conference every one who attended was encouraged to join a work group. They were offered roles within the workgroups that would help expand and maintain the organizational leadership capacity necessary to sustain the work over the long haul.

At this point we would like to spend more attention here on the fourth strategy of building the organizational structure. From the beginning, the challenge we have faced is how to move our work forward in a way that is effective, accountable, and embodies the goals and values of the organization. To address the needs of the organization we place a significant emphasis on leadership development.



We have developed a leadership structure/model we call WHEELS: Working Holistically to Evolve and Elevate Leadership Systematically. The model is based on the principle that leadership development is a systematic process that provides people opportunities to grow and develop new skills, then offering space to apply those skills through leading various components of the organization. We use the analogy of a wheel to describe our organizational structure.

The rim is made up of the workgroups. This is where the vast majority of the work gets coordinated and carried out and where leadership is developed. AWARE-LA currently has seven workgroups. Active Resistance to White Supremacy is the component that focuses on our community organizing work, Saturday Dialogue Facilitation Team is the component that coordinates and

plans the monthly Saturday Dialogues, and the Workshop Planning Group develops workshops and curriculum. The Anti-Racist Consciousness Raising group develops artistic expression and radical white cultural creation, the Racial Justice Alliance leads our multi-racial work, the Fundraising Group coordinates fundraising efforts, and the finally the National Network team is responsible coordination our national work.

The individuals who provide leadership within AWARE-LA act as the spokes in a wheel. Spokes are what hold the rim and hub together and make the wheel possible. It is the spokes that serve as the people power for sustaining the organizational leadership needs and drive forward all the components of the work.

Finally, the hub of the wheel coordinates the various components and supports each area of the work in its development and growth. The CT (Coordination Team) is charged with overseeing the coordination of the various pieces of the organization and carrying out work not housed within existing workgroups.

The CT fulfills an organizational management role of bringing new leadership to expand workgroups and supporting the maintain, cohesion, and direction of the works. This means that Coordinators have to make sure their workgroups are non-oppressive, hold the culture of Radical white community and get work done. The CT supports the Coordinators in building healthy, effective work groups.

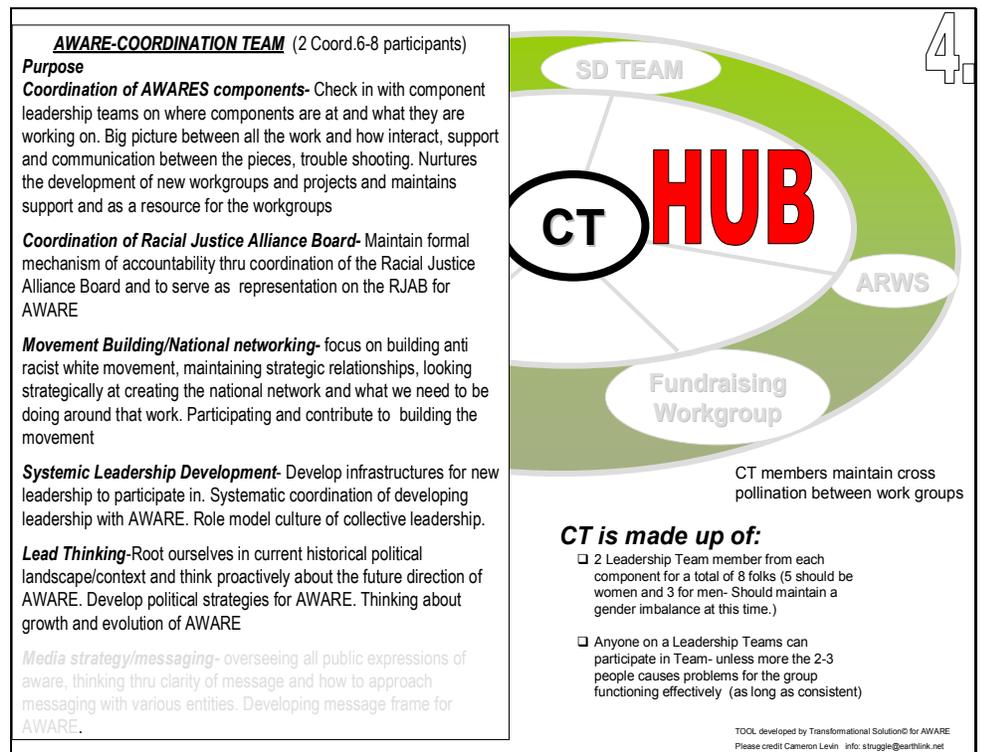
There is a critical role for lead thinking by the CT, entailing a few areas. The CT ensures that the organization stays on track with its larger goals while also thinking forward about the strategy and direction of the work. It serves as space to think about the big picture and provide that thinking to the rest of the organization to provide their feedback and thoughts. The CT then uses this framework to guide and shape the priorities for the organization and the work. All groups need leadership and vision, and the CT serves as a vehicle for collectively holding the vision and model and providing concrete direction for the components to build from.

Building AWARE-LA has been a steady process that began over four years ago. The first four leaders grew from creating the opportunity for them to facilitate the Saturday Dialogues.

While we had a vision early on of building a much larger organization, we first wanted to build a strong foundation from which we could sustain the organization for the long haul. Slowly, the monthly Saturday Dialogues developed a consistent group of regular participants.

In AWARE-LA's first year, 2003, four to eight people attended monthly, and by March, 2007, 25 to 30 regular participants came to Saturday Dialogues each month. The community space created by monthly dialogues provided a pool of potential leaders who could be encouraged to step up their involvement and leadership within the organization.

To develop leadership in others it is necessary to take explicit steps that allow someone to gain new skills and build capacity to do work effectively. The CT or Workgroup coordinators identify folks who demonstrate a commitment or willingness to get involved. We then offer them opportunities to step up by taking on small roles within events or meetings and by partnering them with existing leaders in workgroups. Through this experience a relationship is built and the organization gets a sense of what this new potential leader is capable of doing. Thru this initial project or task a dialogue takes place where the new person is engaged about their investment and whether they are willing to become more involved. If so, we work to get folks to lead new



projects or workgroups thru taking on more and more responsibility and demonstrating consistency and a shared commitment to the strategy and goals of the organization.

The AWARE-LA organizational structure and leadership development model ensures that the organization can grow because it emphasizes the development of members into leaders. We honor and acknowledge that leadership comes in many forms and styles, and do not place a higher value on leaders that enjoy speaking out in front of groups over those that prefer to work 'behind the scenes.'

Healthy collective leadership is built through engaging and affirming diversity in leadership, rather than making everyone take on the same roles in a cookie-cutter way. AWARE-LA provides opportunities for people to fill leadership roles that both affirm their particular passions and skills while providing a space to stretch and develop. We never force members to take on leadership roles or stay in roles they feel they have outgrown solely based on the needs of the organization. Instead, we blend and balance the work that needs to get done with the capacity and self-determination of individual members.

For example, recently AWARE-LA held a dialogue to explore with each member of the leadership team where they would like to see their work in the organization heading in the next year. It became clear that three of our core Saturday Dialogue facilitation team members saw themselves moving on from that role, and that we would need to develop almost a whole new team within one year. Instead of using guilt or pressure to try and force them to stay in their roles, we responded as a collective to find ways to encourage the team members to fulfill their individual goals while working collectively to figure how the work would still get done. In addition, leadership team members avoid frustration and burnout because our individual growth, development, and interests are encouraged and supported through constantly providing new opportunities for leadership. By blending individual self-determination and creativity with a shared sense of collective responsibility AWARE-LA can remain strong in its flexibility.

Core to our success is the practice of Radical White Culture to guide our principles and practices for creating a non-oppressive and inclusive space for all group members. We work to shed white supremacist, patriarchal, classist, culture, and to do this we need to create new forms of relating that are not based in expressions of privilege and supremacy. We start by asking everyone to think about the needs of the collective and how we can support each individual's ability to participate in the group to the best of their ability. We practice engaging one another's ideas with respect and consider each idea on its merits.

We support a culture of appreciation by valuing each other's contributions, ideas, and accomplishments. We create space for this appreciation at the end of meetings, during one-on-one communication, and through email. The meetings are structured with an initial space for check-ins where we go around the circle and invite everyone to talk about how they are doing personally. Occasionally when someone needs an extended check-in we provide the additional time and support or process they request. After each meeting we provide an opportunity for final thoughts, feelings or general feedback for improving the meeting process.

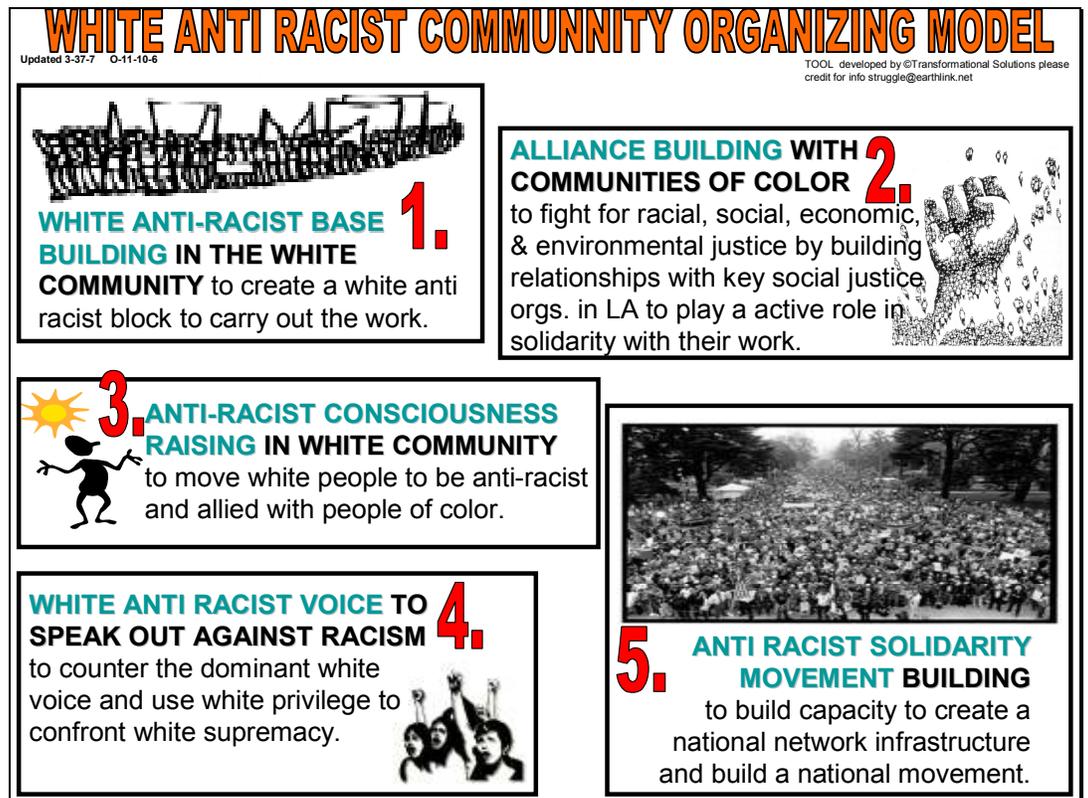
To be sustainable as individuals and a group we prioritize people taking care of themselves. Whenever one person becomes overwhelmed by tasks, the collective responds to their needs by taking on portions of their work. We ask folks to be proactive by verbalizing their needs before something does not get done. We have open dialogue when we as individuals act out white supremacist culture or enact unconscious privilege in any form. When someone makes a mistake they do not try to hide it in shame, instead we discuss it as group and see what we can all learn from the experience while providing the support for that person to heal and not remain stuck.³

³ These practices are spelled out in the document AWARE's Leadership Guiding principles.

After we had built a effective organization, sustained core membership and leaders we began to explore how we could apply traditional community organizing models which have been used by oppressed communities to secure resources and power for change. We started with the question: what role was there for community organizing with a privileged group?

At first the answer seemed- there was no real role. As we reflected on the history of people of colors social justice movements in the US we understood that

white people had played a critical role in these struggles. We know in this historic context there is a critical role for white anti-racists to play in organizing in white communities and building alliances with larger people of color struggles. With the radical white identity model and this analysis new possibilities for how to apply a community organizing model emerged. The model we created is a hybrid community organizing model that is based on five strategies:



1. Base-building in the white community to create a white anti-racist block to carry out the work. In order to have a significant impact it is necessary to build a group and a larger base of supporters. An active base of members and supporters provides a vehicle to engage the larger white communities and simultaneously work in alliance with communities of color. It is important to remember it takes time to build a base of hundreds of members and supporters. Initially a group may only be able to mobilize 10-20 folks to actions however over time you use the work to build the base and expand capacity ultimately to the point where a group can take on campaigns in collaboration with other groups.

2. Alliance building with communities of color to fight for racial, social, economic, & environmental justice by building relationships and organizing with social justice organizations in Los Angeles. Instead of going and providing support to people of color's work we focus on engaging the white community on the issues that impact people of color and white people. We can use white privilege to be able to easily enter into the white community and engage the white community in being active and allied with people of color for justice.

What does this model of alliance building look like? For example: A social justice organization in East Los Angles runs for a position on the Los Angeles Unified School Board (the body that governs the 2nd largest school district in the US). The group is running their member, who is a person of color, for school board and part of the district where the election will be held is in a predominantly white neighborhood. We join the campaign and focus our energy on the white community. As anti-racist white people, we engage the white community and ask them to support the person of color candidate who is from the aforementioned social justice organization. We are well equipped to talk to white folks and likely can use some of our shared experiences as white people to move them to support the candidate of color.

Another example is around the issue of gentrification. When communities of color try to resist gentrification it is almost always white folks who are part of the process of gentrification. A white anti-racist group can take on the role of engaging other white

people about what it means to gentrify the community and engaging these folks as white people for their implications of the displacement that is created when they come in with class and race privilege which contributes to pushing out the existing community. We don't want to blame the white people who help to gentrify communities of color however we do want them to be accountable for implications of their actions.

Our practice of alliance building is to develop relationships through an organic process in which organizations see a need and a role for white anti-racist folks in their work. Too often well intentioned and deeply committed white people rush out and impose ourselves on groups. We can seek to build relationships and we need to do it in a way that does not impose our agenda on their groups. We have to be consistent with our work once we do partner with groups. We cannot make empty promises or fail to follow thru on any commitments. We work to demonstrate our reliability and ability to bring out an active base.

We believe that successful alliance building work can only happen when real relationships exist between groups and individuals. In AWARE-LA our core leadership has a long-standing history of working closely with local social justice activist groups and non-profit organizations in Los Angeles and across the country. It is through these relationships we can begin to build toward alliance building work. Many of these relationships have been built by working with groups and different local community causes and campaigns. Other folks have built relationships by working as staff members within non-profit social justice organizations.

In the summer of 2007 AWARE-LA held a community open house. The larger social justice and progressive arts communities were invited to come learn about AWARE-LA and get to know us better. The event further demonstrated that we could host successful and well attended events. The event also established our presence in the larger social justice movement in Los Angeles. The event provides an opening to build greater awareness about our work and model and for more people to begin to know us. We also wanted to engage a larger white community of activist and artists. We recruited 10-12 new folks from the open house. The event also served to raise consciousness among white activists about their need to have an anti-racist practice. The open house could only be organized after we had established ourselves as a consistent and reliable organization and we had built up a base of folks who regularly attended Saturday Dialogues and identified with being members of AWARE-LA.

3. *Anti-racist consciousness-raising in the white community to engage white people about white privilege and racism.* This work is the same as discussed earlier. Through street theater and spreading creative messages that are thought provoking we can help move white people to be more conscious of racism and white privilege. Some examples of this include doing street theater in areas that are predominately white (like popular shopping or restaurant areas), and using 'phantom art' to spark a buzz and interest among multiple white audiences. For example we can create a skit that a group of 5-10 people can act out in a public space to promote awareness on a issue.

4. *Raising a white anti-racist voice to speak out against racism to counter the dominant white voice and use white privilege to confront white supremacy.* When white people are silent about racism, and white supremacy, we let all white people remain hidden and unaccountable. When anti-racist white folks step up and speak out against racism, this action exposes all white people and requires them to declare where they stand. We have to take the anonymity away from white people. When we do, we also create the opportunity to bring more white anti-racists out of their silence and isolation and give them a way to lend their voice to the collective voice of white anti-racism.

Too often it is assumed when racist incidents happen that white people are not affected or concerned or willing to stand up. When we use our anti-racist voices publicly, we lend support not only to people of color; we also demonstrate an appropriate response to racism for other white people. If use the massive immigrant rights mobilizations that spread across the country in the spring of 2006, we saw that in the main stream media and the public debate on immigration white people were the unnamed supporters of racist immigration policies like the Sensenbrenner bill. If there had been a national effort by white anti-racist folks to speak out in a coordinated fashion we could have had two impacts. First, it would have exposed all white people and forced them to be responsible for the racist policies that they were supporting. Second, it would have demonstrated that there is a white anti-racist base in this country that is opposed to these racist policies and willing to stand up and speak out.

3. *Anti-racist solidarity movement building must be the goal of our efforts to organize a white anti-racist base in the US.* There is a long road to getting to this point. Currently the strength of our combined groups is hardly a few thousand people, if that. There are very few groups that have a focus on anti-racist organizing in white communities, perhaps a few dozen at most. We believe there is a need to spend a great deal of energy building up our local capacity to organize in our own communities.

We also have to realize that we have significantly limited resources and no capacity to project on national level that reaches mainstream “white America”. At the current level of movement capacity the first step is to get ourselves organized and prepared to do the work ahead. We need to develop various strategies for how to organize the white anti-racist community and we need vehicles for sharing resources and building capacity to grow our local work.

In this final section we will share some lessons we have learned to contribute to the collective knowledge. Before we get to the lessons, we must stop and acknowledge some realities. We recognize there is a great deal of middle class bias rooted in the dominant mainstream white anti-racist models and approaches to anti-racist practice. AWARE-LA’s model is created in the context of Los Angeles, California – one of the most diverse cities in the country. The majority of white people who live in the city of Los Angeles are middle and upper class. Our models are not intended to be applied in a cookie-cutter style. Each region has to develop models and strategies which are applicable to the area, the community, the social realities, and the historical context.

We share our models to offer inspiration and ideas but we have no illusions about their limitations. We are particularly conscious of the fact that the strategies and models we promote are not structured in the context of organizing in white working class or poor communities. In the future AWARE-LA hopes to expand its work to working class white communities in the outlying regions of Los Angeles County and Riverside County in California.

Lesson: We need to be organizers

For AWARE-LA organizing is the belief that you have to build a sustained base that stays active from issue to issue and is connected to the long term struggle. Organizing means building relationships with folks that you organize and being invested in knowing them and them knowing you. This work is hard and slow. It’s not fun and sexy like going to a protest, although it definitely includes protesting. However if we are going to succeed we have to move from a activist/mobilizing framework to a organizing and base building model.

Lesson: Patience and persistence is the only path to success

We approach this work with the idea that we are running a marathon not a sprint. That means we have to take the long view and understand that to build successful alliances with people of color and a sustained base of white anti-racist activist it takes time, and lots of it. The time it takes to build a base, credibility, and relationships should be understood as years not months. If we are going to see this work thru the next 20 years it is going to be necessary to build strong organizations which takes time to build and this does not happen overnight. It is also important to build enough capacity to take on the each new step. We would not be where we are today if we had not first built the sat. dialogue group and created a base of active members. It took us 4 years to get to the point where we can actually start organizing white folks and build with folks of color.

Lesson: Create the right structure for the work

As experienced community organizers we recognize that to be successful we must create a well organized group with a defined organizational and leadership structure with clear goals and strategies. Too often volunteer-based groups have loose structures that are unaccountable, ineffective, fail to develop an expanding pool of leadership and can only manage one task at a time. AWARE-LA is structured to be highly efficient and involve collective participation, while at the same time being capable of meeting its goals and objectives. These structures and processes allow for collective accountability which so often volunteer groups struggle with.

AWARE-LA seeks to build upon the strengths of the non-profit organizational structure along with the best qualities of volunteer-based organizational structures. We use a hybrid model which focuses on using strategic planning models to develop the organizational structure that is efficient and effective and is working towards its long term systemic change goals. ⁴ AWARE-LA holds a retreat every six months during which we develop yearly goals and six-month work plans for all workgroups and the organization as a whole. We expect volunteers to treat their responsibilities in AWARE-LA as if they were paid staff and their job and community depended on it. We call ourselves staff/volunteers and people live up to the expectations that are set.

AWARE-LA uses the tools of a ‘formal’ nonprofit, but keeps the flexibility of a volunteer organization. Volunteer structures are highly fluid and are only limited by imagination. While it is essential to have an organizational structure that can effectively carry

⁴ One member of Coordination Team is a strategic planner for non-profit social justice organizations.

out the work and has the people power to produce results, it is also necessary to have the flexibility to be able to move and shift. The organization can grow as fast as it has the capacity to grow and sufficient leadership to sustain it.

Lesson: The nexus of theory and practice is how we create effective models and organizations.

All of AWARE-LA's growth was made possible by the development of the Radical White Identity (RWI) model. In the second year we created the RWI theory and model as well as wrote the paper, "Toward a Radical White Identity." In writing this paper, we set out to build a radical white community and promote an analysis that offered an alternative to the dominant mainstream white anti-racist approach to anti-racist practice. We focused on a healthy and whole white anti-racist racial identity as the bedrock of an effective anti-racist practice. Rooting our individual and collective process in a model that moves us away from guilt and shame and affirms our humanity as white people is what makes our work transformative and sustainable over time. By applying the RWI model we have been able to create our community organizing strategy, and our Theory of Social Change and our strategies for our work.

In closing, AWARE-LA is rooted in the belief that when we come together we can inspire white anti-racist folks around the country to share a vision for building an anti-racist solidarity movement. It has only been through the courage of a few white people who have been willing to stand with people of color against white supremacy that white people have ever successfully organized ourselves to stand united with people of color against racism.

Today, we stand upon the shoulders of those who came before us -- white anti-racists from the abolitionist movement to the civil rights movement and every other struggle in which white anti-racists have stood up against the white supremacist system. Now it is our turn to have a chance to make a contribution to the struggle for justice. We share our experiences to offer an example and inspiration, not the only path. We hope to stimulate dialogue, thought, and most importantly growth and unity in the white anti-racist community.

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