



The Damascus Road
Anti-Racism Process

Damascus Road Newsletter

For connecting, resourcing, growing teams and individuals in the Damascus Road network

Vol. 4, No. 2 July 2001

REPARATIONS

By Daniel Grimes

In the current discussion about race in America, one would be remiss if a substantive discussion on reparations to the descendant of slaves was omitted.

Many of us in the African-American community have talked about getting our forty acres and a mule for generations. However, within the past few years many leaders in the African-American community have been fervently calling for a serious national discussion on true reparations. One of these key leaders is Randall Robinson, the founder and president of Trans-Africa. Robinson is the author of a recently published book entitled *The Debt: What America owes to Blacks*.

Before one reaches conclusions about what if any debt is due, one must first fully understand the issue at hand. In *The Debt*, Robinson paints a picture of history and human development that few of us ever learned in school. Those committed to anti-racism owe it to themselves to become better educated about how the inhumane practice of slavery was justified, and became accepted in American society. A part of this process was to deny the human dignity, history, and culture of those placed in chains. This denial and revision of what life was like in Africa was not limited to the attitudes of Europeans, but was also extended to what Africans thought of themselves as all knowledge and linkage to their past was forcibly removed. It is this lack of linkage to the past that separates the descendants of slaves from the rest of society. To assume that the link is unimportant is to misunderstand the development of the human psychic, and the profound impact cultural pride and well-being have on socio-economic advancement.

The denial of worth and rendering invisible the contributions of persons of African descent to the advancement of society is not limited to generations past, the denial continues today. Last summer our family had the privilege of touring various sites in Washington, D.C. including the U.S. Capitol Building. During our tour, one of the first things I noticed was the absence of any black faces on the many paintings in the Capitol rotunda that depicted various scenes from American history. It was as if slavery had never existed and our over 350 years of contributions to America counted for nothing. The only reference to our existence was a lonely unimpressive and sad bronze bust of Martin Luther King. I found it eerie to read about Robinson's reaction to the

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Looking at the Broader Picture

By Michelle Armster

As the newest member on the Damascus Road Core Trainers Team, I looked forward to attending the Anti-Racism Table gathering. I was curious about the people who have committed themselves to pray for and support this very hard and, oftentimes, contentious ministry. As we discussed the vision of the Racism Awareness Pro-gram (RAP)- "...a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language...(Rev. 7:9)"- I was moved by the affirmation, enthusiasm and encouragement. How wonderful to know that as you do the work that God has called you to do, there is a dedicated cluster praying and standing in the gap.

As the church merges into one ART reviewed the history of its own merger. Originally two advisory councils, the Racism Awareness Program Reference Group and the Damascus Road Steering Committee, provided accountability & direction. The councils merged into one the Antiracism Table. This merger has provided a stronger base for the work of the Racism Awareness Program. The group serves as an advisory council, accountability reference and spiritual mentors. The group is constituted by members from all areas of the church body.

The two days brought many visions, challenges and hopes. From the vision of a "Restoring Our Sight" reunion to the challenges of the internal MCC institutional barriers to the hopes for the persons going to the World Conference Against Racism in Durbin, South Africa, all saw the need to continue to support and become more actively involved in the work. However, caution was expressed that the work be "smarter and not harder" so as to not be caught up in the "culture of overwork".

ART was introduced to the development of the IRO workshop. Internalized Racist Oppression was discussed both in its meaning and implications. It was agreed that before the IRO workshop is brought under the RAP umbrella, a framework be developed to protect IRO work from being subsumed into Damascus Road. The hope is that, eventually, the IRO work can become an accountability mechanism for RAP.

The ART gathering has challenged the Damascus Road co-coordinators, Brenda Zook Freisen and Conrad Moore, to take conscious steps towards prioritizing their work and utilizing the skills and talents of the ART members. Therefore encouraging them to: • review the work of the past- what has worked and what hasn't worked, • reflect on the lessons learned, • refocus their attention from how it was done to how they want to do it, • resource with people that they trust and are willing to be there for them, • open up to reap the blessings that God is already giving in this work.

When I left this meeting, I was refreshed and filled. Meeting, eating and worshipping with ART has strengthened my spirit to face those spiritual, personal and emotional struggles, that will happen, as I work at dismantling racism.

Beyond scratching the surface: Moving toward a multicultural society

by Pat and Art McFarlane

During a bus ride to a regional high school basketball game, a parent turned to an ex-mission worker and asked, "The Miller who pastors the urban church in Philadelphia - is he black?" The former mission worker responded, "No. He's as Mennonite as they come."

Despite all the rhetoric about multiculturalism in the church, many Euro-Americans still confuse ethnicity with faith. And though this conversation was between Mennonites, similar experiences happen in other settings. In this case, a person of color who was doctrinally Anabaptist was not accepted as a "real" Mennonite - a brother equal in the sight of God and Euro-American church members.

Though we've made advances in discussing racism, the problem remains. Sociologists define racism as "the belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another" (Sociology, Macdonis, p. 352). But what does racism really mean on a daily basis in the absence of people of color being called derogatory names or being excluded from organizations?

As members of a multicultural, multiracial family, we have experienced both racial discrimination and wholehearted acceptance at the hands of other Christians. Unfortunately, the pain of discrimination - with its economic and emotional toll - too frequently outweighs moments of true acceptance.

Racism also patronizes. The individual who offers solicitous help to the quite capable young Chinese student may not be aware that she has begun to treat another differently than she might wish to be treated herself. While patronization occurs in many situations, it may be a particular temptation to Euro-American Mennonites. We are a good people, and we like to help others. But these beliefs could describe a number of ethnic groups and - if believed to be indigenous to Mennonite faith and life - they may result in a patronizing racism that presumes superiority and privilege.

Racism often denigrates personhood. In one of its ugliest forms, racism says, "I will never accept you for who you are. So, to me, you have no value as a person." With the removal of Jim Crow laws, the perpetrator of racism today may refuse to ride in the same carpool, work in the same department, eat at the same table, or talk on the phone with the object of his or her racism.

Racism often stereotypes others. For example, people often say, "All Mexicans are . . .," or "All blacks are . . .," as if all members of an ethnic group display similar characteristics.

Racism also creates victims - twice, asking not only for the individual to have endured the racism but also to have forgiven it without the one who had wronged him making it right. He was thus to endure and forgive without question or confrontation. He was indeed victimized

twice, asked to bear the burden of the wrongdoer and the wronged.

Racism often masquerades as "concern," particularly in the church. For example, an individual may express a concern about using someone from another race or ethnic group in the local church or business setting. Since "good" Christians know they should not be openly racist, they may raise a "concern" that will effectively bar that person from a church position or promotion in the organization.

Organizations cannot be against racism in general if we are not against racism in particular. It is in the naming of racism - specific acts by specific individuals or institutions at specific times - that we are empowered to eradicate this evil. We must identify racism as a named sin rather than a casual misunderstanding between believers. We must stop calling it something else.

How do we model a truly multicultural church and community? Admit the problem: Euro-American leaders need to examine themselves to determine whether they have a Eurocentric mindset that enhances the perspectives, lifestyles, religious expressions and careers of fellow Euro-Americans. This often leads to the exclusion and oppression of minorities as leaders seek out people who are most like themselves to fill key roles. While often masked as finding people who are the "correct fit" for the organization, this tendency is nothing more than a cloak for institutional racism.

Churches must acknowledge and confess the white and ethnic privilege that often means minorities are asked to represent other minorities within churches and institutions but are rarely given positions with any real power within the larger white-dominated organization. Allow public lamentation: We must be willing to hear the stories of pain within the church family in much the same way that we have needed to hear the stories of abused and mistreated women. Story is a way of knowing, of coming to terms with the reality of our lives.

Cultivate multiculturalism: Leaders of churches and church institutions need to put in place procedures to ensure the advancement of multiculturalism. In his book, *Dismantling Racism*, Joseph Barndt points out that no church or church institution can be neutral on the issue of racism. "A person or institution acts in a way that will either promote or combat racism," Barndt writes. "As long as there is racism to contend with, a policy or practice of the church will be either racist or anti-racist in its intent and effect."

Leaders of churches and church institutions need to seek heterogeneous rather than homogeneous representation in their positions of power. The mere existence of minorities in congregations and institutions does little or nothing to advance the cause of multiculturalism. The acid test of true integration is a positive response from a minority churchgoer, student or employee to the following question: "Do you feel that you are a vital part of the institution?"

Actively working at a multicultural church and workplace will not always be easy. Yet, in doing so, we are modeling the kingdom of God spoken about in Revelation 7:9-10.

Patricia Lehman McFarlane is professor of communication at GC and Art works at Boger, Martin, Fairchild & Co.,

U.S. Capitol building, since I discovered that they paralleled mine. Only Robinson was astute enough to realize that the bust of Martin Luther King had him looking downward with an air of dejection.

Another rather astute observation Robinson notes is that “ancestor worship” is very much alive and well in America as European-Americans place pictures, statues, and monuments of their ancestors throughout prominent places in America. These items are varied and range from our grandest monuments, down to the common everyday penny. These acts help to reinforce the dominant place white ancestors have in society and our debt of gratitude to them. It is this lack of connection and homage to the past that helps foster self-hatred and low self-esteem in persons of African descent.

The socioeconomic gap between black and white America cannot be eliminated by simply focusing on the monetary differences, though this must not be abandoned, but must also focus on the psychological damage that has been done to us. It is only through the combination of the two that any wrongs can be righted. Therefore, the starting point for any discussion on race and reparations must include the entire story of our cherished democracy, destroying the legends and myths society tries to pass off as reality to school children. Similarly, any solutions must include specific measures that narrow if not outright eliminate the obstacles and differences that result in unequal educational and economic outcomes. However, it must also be devoted to cultural and societal changes that include the truthful retelling and depiction of our history in order for our memories to be purified, and our true sense of worth to be restored.

Like so much of our anti-racism work, the subject of reparations is complex. However, those of us in the anti-racism community cannot afford to be uneducated and misinformed about this topic. Sweeping the things we choose not to deal with under the rug only serves to make the pathway bumpy. But on the Damascus Road, we need to work to make the pathway smooth.

A Letter to the Editor

Thank you for your work with Damascus Road. I appreciate your newsletter. It always stimulates my own journey and reminds me to keep you and the core trainers in my prayers.

A friend recently asked me in a letter, “What challenges do you/does the church face in the ‘problems of race relations?’” On a personal level my most immediate challenge is how to develop relationships with people of color. At our first 3 hour workshop, Noel Santiago brought out the point that we are all created in God’s image. Therefore, to know more people and their understanding of God is to grow in the knowledge of God. I want to have more friends that are people of color. There are lots of people of color in Souderton, but my circles are so limited I do not know how to get into their circles. I would welcome suggestions from other DR people on how they have expanded their circles.

On a congregational level, I think we need to recognize and acknowledge the differences we have trained to see. To recognize how our structures give power and privilege to certain people and oppress and put down others. We need to hear the experiences/ feelings/ dreams of a variety of people in order to work together to create structures beneficial to more people. Relating to others as teammates will build bonds of connection; similar goals will bring us together. Our brain will create new trails of synapses that trigger positive associations instead of distrust or fear. What a wonderful place the church would be if we could each feel understood and respected.

I feel called to share my inner confidence that things can get done. I need to discover and to share my privileges, to break the cycles that exclude, to open up communication and access. Dismantling racism is so huge. I cannot do it even if I work hard. However, if we work hard together and the Lord guides the steps, we have hope.

Berdine Leinbach Blooming
Glen Mennonite DR Team

FINDING BREAD FOR YOUR TEAM’S JOURNEY

Looking for some “next steps” anti-racism organizing training now that your team has been together for a while? Damascus Road offers Bread for the Journey, a one-day event that can refresh and revitalize your team’s life and energy.

Bread for the Journey equips teams to continue building on the ground work they have laid for dismantling racism in the Anabaptist institutions (congregations, conferences/districts, schools, denominational boards, service agencies). Each training is led by a DR Core Trainer and a member of an active DR team. Emphases include: increasing our understanding of the analysis of systemic racism, developing and implementing strategies for applying the analysis to the task of dismantling racism in the team’s institution, net-

working with other teams and trainers in the DR Network, nurturing team members in their faith walk and strengthening team relationships.

Bread for the Journey events are designed to bring teams together for mutual sharing and learning. Regional events are a great way to bring this Damascus Road resourcing to your area. Teams serving similar institutions can also gather together as a way to address issues unique to their context.

Bread for the Journey trainings scheduled for 2001:

Central States DR Teams, Newton KS
September

East Coast DR Teams, Souderton, PA—
Saturday, November 17, 8:30 am - 5 :30 pm



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Editorial

This is a time of transition, and transition makes people uneasy because the system is changing. At the same time, I keep hearing from people about their struggles to relate to people of color. I have also listened to those who have been in the mission field and how they felt powerless and needy at their new environment. It was because they acknowledged their need that they were able to establish long lasting relationships with the local people.

When individuals and congregations embark in DR work, I wonder if they are in touch with their need. What is it that they are missing because of racism? How can they let others know of their need?

Like in the mission field, this is new territory for all of us and we must be aware of our mutual need. If we humble ourselves before God, He will show us new and creative ways of relating to each other that the system has not contemplated, but we have to be very intentional in following through.

I encourage others speaking from their own settings to let us know about their struggles and the new ways that they have found for doing anti-racism work.

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Martin Luther King, Jr.,
The Trumpet of Conscience, 1967.

Found a good book or magazine other Damascus Road members might find helpful? Send a note about it to Zulma Prieto P.O.Box 553 Goshen, IN 46527. The newsletter also welcomes stories about Damascus Road members or information about what your team is doing.—*Editor*

Join the Damascus Road Listserv!

Are you a part of the Damascus Road Listserv? It's our quick connection for news, prayer requests, DR team reports, resource reviews, pertinent TV shows—whatever we want to share with each other. The listserv is open to anyone who has participated in a Damascus Road training event.

To sign up, send this message from the computer you wish to receive messages on:

To: requests@listserv.goshen.edu

Subject: [leave blank]

Message: subscribe drlink-1 [The 1 is an L, not a 1. Also, do not sign the message]

You will receive more information about how to use the list: how to send a message, how to unsubscribe and where to get more information. Remember to add the new address you receive to your Address Book! We look forward to meeting you in DR cyberspace!

Many thanks to Goshen College for hosting the DR Listserv!

The Damascus Road Newsletter is published quarterly by the Racism Awareness Program of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Editing and layout are by Zulma Prieto. Contact Zulma with your comments, inquiries or submissions at P.O. Box 553, Goshen, IN 46527. <jzprieto@sbt.infi.net>. Subscriptions are free and limited to members of the Damascus Road network. For address changes, contact Damascus Road at P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500, 717-859-3889, <tms@mccus.org>.

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