



The Damascus Road
Anti-Racism Process

Damascus Road Newsletter

For connecting, resourcing, growing teams and individuals in the Damascus Road network Vol. 5, No. 1 March.2002

A Time of Danger

by: Titus Peachey

This is a time of danger. The horrific attacks of September 11 have put our country on edge. Sensing danger all around, we have come together to love and support those who grieve. Some communities have organized to protect those targeted for harassment. We have provided food and shelter to those displaced by war. In times of crisis and danger, this is what our faith calls us to do.

But we are facing danger of another kind, a danger which threatens the integrity of our faith.

Our nation's political and military leaders urge all of us to join the battle against terrorism. Daily we hear the spiritual language of "evil" to describe the threat to our nation. Like some great national orchestra we are called to play a symphony of war, with the President holding the baton. With our soldiers in harm's way and the security of our nation in question, discordant notes are not welcome.

Herein lies a serious question for the religious community. Will we play the empire's music or the music of God's reign on earth? Will we follow the beat of the President's baton, or the rhythm of Christ's way in our world? Midst calls for national unity, can the faith community still claim its first allegiance?

Our President has repeatedly referred to the evildoers and the axis of evil in his descriptions of the dangers we face. This evil is portrayed as a threatening force from outside our country. There is no suggestion that we examine our own nation's complicity in this evil.

Jesus always challenged his listeners to self-examination, so that they would address their own sins. Further, Jesus challenged his disciples to consider God's goodness and compassion in the outcast and the enemy. The story of the Good Samaritan astonished Jesus' followers, because it challenged the goodness of the community of faith, and affirmed the Samaritan for his act of compassion. According to Jesus, no people are immune to the temptation to do evil, and God's grace

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The Race to the Bottom

by: Conrad Moore

In recent weeks I have heard rumors of a "New Black Power." A recent article in Newsweek magazine highlights three African-American corporate giants who are clear examples of "The New Black Power." All these men say that race played no part in their careers. Race neither held them back nor moved them forward. They are men who are where they are based on merit and character alone. These African American men have etched a place for themselves in history books by taking the helm of major corporations like American Express, Merrill Lynch, and AOL Time Warner. According to some, this is a clear indication that a new level of opportunity has opened to talented, dedicated people of color. The author Johnnie L. Roberts calls his article "The Race to the Top."

One problem I have with this approach to the complex issues of access and control is the assumption that because there are a few people of color who are high achievers (The Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby syndrome), we should assume that the playing field is leveled. If other Blacks would just shake off the lazy, shiftless attitudes that have held them back for so long, they too could reach great heights.

Another problem I have with this approach is how it separates people of color groups.

Asians, African Descendants, Latinos, and other nonwhite people groups have some similar challenges in the US including housing, employment, unemployment, and healthcare. History has shown that at any given time one of these nonwhite groups is the "Flavor of the Year." The assessed needs of the people with access and control of systems and institutions determine the flavor chosen. This is also determined by which industry needs people. The legacy of the race construct has led us to believe that certain people groups are best suited for specific things. With the white establishment in full control they pit nonwhites against one another in a race to the bottom. They are forced to compete with one another. The winner is the group that will work the most for the least money. Sometimes this means taking

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Welcoming Our New Core Trainers

by :Sharon K. Williams

We are happy to introduce three men who have joined the Core Trainer Team of Damascus Road: Harley Eagle, Porcupine, S.D.; Felipe Hinojosa, Brownsville, Texas; and Rick Derksen, Lancaster, Pa. They joined the current group of eight core trainers at an Anti-Racism Trainers Intensive, held January 10-14 at the MCC's Welcoming Place in Akron. This event was the first of its kind for Damascus Road and is part of an effort to mentor new trainers.

They will spend one to two years as "apprentices," learning to facilitate anti-racism trainings and team orientations around the United States and gaining an understanding of the broader work of the MCC's Anti-Racism Program. Harley is program coordinator for MCC's work with the Oglala Lakota

Nation, while Felipe is the MCC Central States Southern Tier staff associate. Rick is a full-time parent with life-long ex-rience in international missions. We are very excited about and grateful for the spiritual gifts, talents, experience and cultural diversity that Harley, Felipe and Rick offer to the Core Trainer Team and to the whole Damascus Road Network. Please join us in supporting these brothers in prayer and fellowship.



MCC US Anti-Racism Program Core Training Team: (from left to right) Sharon Williams, Michelle Armster, Brenda Zook Friesen, Conrad Moore, Iris DeLeón, Felipe Hinojosa, Rick Derksen. (seated) Tobin Miller Shearer, Harley Eagle, Regina Shands Stolfus (not pictured) Phil Brubaker.

Holy Ground

Tammerie Spires /Dallas.TX

Participants in the Damascus Road network met in mid-December 2001 in Akron, PA, at the MCC Welcoming Place to begin "spirit-storming" a part of the training to be focused on internalized racist superiority. The work began and continued with an awareness of how odd it felt to be among white brothers and sisters only; and yet we developed a deep sense of appreciation for the work to which we felt called by our brothers and sisters of color.

My experience of the weekend was that we should have taken our shoes off. It was holy ground to stand on together, as we shared ideas, dreams, stories, tears and laughter. We spent time Friday night in worship, prayer, and reviewing seminal concepts from the Damascus Road racism analysis and anti-racism

organizing model. After Saturday morning's worship, we spent time using Open Space facilitation/organizing techniques to identify and work on particular topics.

Some of the questions we wrestled with included "What would an authentic identity — not reliant on white power and privilege — look like?" "How has white perfectionism robbed us of spiritual gifts and connectedness?" "How do we overcome the 'ignorance is bliss' effect, and help white people learn to focus on white privilege rather than only on how racism affects people of color?" "How do we deal with Internalized Mennonite Superiority and the way it compounds IRS?"

Damascus Road core trainers took the group's work products, wonderings, hopes and dreams in hand to continue to build an offering to the larger anti-racist community, with the intention of transparency and accountability to communities of color as development continues.

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extends to all, including the enemy. In this time of crisis, can the faith community offer our nation a clear call to repent of its own evil?

Our nation confronts the evil it perceives with weapons of war. Our leaders have declared their intention to destroy evil through superior firepower. U.S. firepower has encircled the globe, poised and ready to strike. Jesus invites us to overcome evil with good, and to confront evil with non-violent love. The

methods are different because in Christ's reign, true power is in the resurrection, not in the threat of death. The evildoer is not destroyed, but transformed.

In this time of crisis, can the faith community invite all Americans to trust in the God of life, rather than in weapons of death?

The danger faced by the faith community in this time of crisis is one of identity. Will we speak with a voice which reveals our allegiance to God and the worldwide body of Christ? Or will our voice join the voice of empire? We have a choice to make.

advantage of undocumented workers or other poor. It works the same everywhere.

Granted, some corporations have let profits outweigh the natural tendency toward corporate racism. However, the accomplishments of these few men should not be used to invalidate the experience of thousands of nonwhites all over America who are forced to sue major corporations like Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Texaco, as well as various police departments and government institutions. The Social Security Administration just settled a 7.7 million-dollar Employee Bias suit. Many of these disillusioned people of color believed the American lie that education would level the playing field. Rather than getting bogged down with the issues of injustice that other people of color faced, they set out to prove that America is a different place. They have been determined to get to the top based on the merit of their accomplishments and the content of their character. These unfortunate people have all the academic credentials required to excel yet they have found another force at work in the background: Racism. The assumption of a level playing field insults the reality of these men and women. Some, I'm sure agonize over the need to sue. They did so only after it became painfully clear to them that racism was the hidden factor at play in the struggle to reach the top.

A question for people of color today is whether or not acquisition of wealth and personal ambition has caused us to lose sight of the struggles we have in common. Though many ambitious individuals achieve personal success, most of us still face the same types of race discrimination our ancestors faced.

Thinking among people of color is as diverse as it is among any other people groups. There is as much diversity of thinking in any given group as there is outside the group. There will always be folk who see things differently. Yet it becomes problematic when we allow racism to use us against one another. A classic tactic of racism is to use the achievements of certain among us to invalidate the legitimate complaints of racism made by others.

One mistake that the men in this article make is to pretend that the exception is the rule. Seeing the world through the lens of their narrow universe, they project their ideas of success onto the rest of their communities. They then stand shoulder to shoulder with whites who ask, "if he can do it why can't you?" We must be careful not to fall into the same trap as the people who believe there is a "New Black Power." Continued success for individuals was, and still is, connected to the educating and organizing efforts of all people who see the magnitude of the problem of racism. Until we as people of color in America recognize our common struggle, we will continue to battle one another in this race to the bottom.

New Members at the Anti-Racism Table

Over the past few months, the MCC US Anti-Racism Program has invited two new people to serve on the Anti-Racism Table. We welcome this opportunity to introduce them to you.

As the support and advisory body for the MCC U.S. Anti-Racism Program, the Anti-Racism Table (ART) plays a significant role in the creativity and growth of the Damascus Road programs and network. Prem Dick and Marcia Stoesz accepted positions on ART this year.

Prem Dick is the assistant director for the Human Resources department of MCC Bi-National offices in Akron, PA. He has been involved in the anti-racism process since his first anti-racism training in the early 1980s and has served on the MCC Bi-National Anti-Racism Team for 2 years. Prem finds many valuable resources for the Damascus Road staff in his daily newspaper readings. He is the husband of Janet and they are the parents of two teenage sons - Sunil and Sanjay.

Marcia Stoesz works for Project SEED, which is a national organization that places mathematics and science professionals in urban elementary school classrooms for supplemental lessons. She comes to ART with a significant background in anti-racism work, having first attended an anti-racism training in May of 1997 in Dallas, Texas. When she and her husband, John, moved to Philadelphia in August of 2000, she naturally became involved in the Damascus Road Anti-Racism Team for Franconia Mennonite Conference/Mennonite Resources Network.

We are very excited to welcome Prem and Marcia onto the Anti-Racism Table.

Reflections on IRO Training Development

By: Dionicio Acosta

In February 2001 a small group of people of color met in Cleveland for a week to develop a definition and analysis training for Internalized Racist Oppression. Dionicio Acosta was one of those who attended that gathering. He shares some thoughts about it but wants us to know that these brief paragraphs can in no way reflect the deep feelings he still experiences when he remembers those five days.

The Internalized Racist Oppression training in Cleveland, Ohio was a time of pain, a time of joy, of anger, and frustration; a time of coming together of People of Color who have different, but at the same time, similar experience. It was a good time. I love the people I was with and the struggles we dealt with together. We struggled with our own internal pieces of racism that we battle with daily...struggles given to us from our parents and society, plus the ones created by ourselves.

I didn't mention this above, but the IRO training was also a time of healing. A time of healing from the wounds that we inflict on ourselves from believing what racism says of who we are as People of Color. The IRO training was a time of reclaiming and renaming our own existence as children of our Creator. I am and was committed to going to the training because I am an anti-racist. Making that claim is part of the healing and in some sense, right now as I write this, I'm empowered by my own words. My healing continues.

We spent five days looking at the history racism has played in this country and how racism plays itself out in the lives of People of Color. Our main goal was to come out of this time with an IRO workshop model that could be used for People of Color to deal with this issue. All of the participants, Regina Shands Stolfus, Iris de León, Felipe Hinojosa, Michelle Armster, Conrad Moore, are all anti-racist who believe in the importance of freeing our people from the oppression of racism.



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Editorial

As Anabaptist Christians we must take a stand against war. But is not enough to claim a non-violent position. We must work within the system. The system is not only the systemic expression that appears at work, it is also the family system, the neighborhood system, the church system. Many times we continue to have the conversation among us. We spend our time ‘preaching to the choir’, instead of broadening the scope knowing we will find opposition. When the United States system sends out a racist message both at home and abroad, we must answer accordingly. We must oppose war and racism at home.

As the war and occupation in Afghanistan continues, the Bush administration has sent troops to the Philippines, and has increased their support for the Colombian government’s intensified war against the Colombian people by sending more military aid.

At the same time there is a dangerous racist war drive that threatens the people of the planet, there is an effort to dismantle rights, criminalize dissent, and investigate and imprison people based on racial and religious profiling.

The fight on terrorism is concentrating on foreigners, especially those from Middle East, but if it includes other areas of conflict it will also include people from philippines, Korea and Colombia. And how will they find the Colombians and Koreans — by sifting through the huge Mexican, Central and South American and Asian populations? There are several million aliens; there are several others who are citizens or legal residents, and many others who might look like aliens. If the criteria to choose the enemy is the color of the skin, we can safely say that war has heightened racism in United States.

On the other hand, we can say that the same system that holds the power in the country is also going abroad to wage a war on territories that had been previously targeted because they represent an invested interest of the global economy versus the well being of oppressed indigenous groups all over the world.

In Colombia the military operation in the rural areas was named “Thanathos” (from the Greek word for “death”), but Jesus teachings are those of life and love. I believe this gives us a distinctive way to choose from. May peace be with you all.

Join the Damascus Road Listserv! Let’s continue the dialogue about the newsletter articles !

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-l [The l 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!

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