

BOUND TOGETHER ©
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Liberating the Souls of White Folks: A Primer.
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(Note: Working Definitions used are listed on final page.)

INTRO/OVERVIEW:

In his book *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis, progressive evangelical minister and editor of *Sojourner's Magazine* cites a speech by Howard Dean as one of the most important [and overlooked] characterizations of racism as a divide and conquer tool that benefits the power elite. Wallis also notes the positive reactions reported by some of the Black press, that this was the “first time a white man told it like it is for a long time.” Similar points were made by author of award-winning *Uprooting Racism* Paul Kivel, in his new book, *You Call This a Democracy?*

In short, these author/activist/organizers point out that instead of the collective *majority*¹ of the U.S. population working together on any number of social and economic issues that deeply impact most of our lives – racism and classism are the convenient tools of the wealthiest minority (the +/- 20% that owns 91% of the wealth)², because these serve to keep:

- 1) Working class people fighting over the leftover “crumbs” (via resentments over immigration and affirmative action, etc.)
- 2) The middle class identifying with the upper class, and acting as their gatekeepers, often with aspirations that they too could become very wealthy and powerful – although the odds are increasingly against them, as well.

Various historical sources confirm that this divide and conquer strategy has been at work throughout our nation's past, which, as Jim Wallis wrote in “America's Original Sin” was “established as a white society, founded upon the genocide of another race, and then the enslavement of yet another.” The vast wealth of the few has been built as through the exploitation of many others as well: indentured servants, Mexicans, Chinese immigrants, poor working class immigrants, and so on.

¹ The U.S. is now comprised of 31% [self-identified] POC, with 11% of the population being foreign born. Projections are that we will become a “majority minority” society by 2050. (ARC Study)

² Paul Kivel uses four terms to differentiate economic distribution amongst the wealthiest: The “Owning Classes” is given three categories: a) The “Ruling Class” is the 1% of the population that controls 47% of the net financial wealth with assets over \$2 million and average incomes above \$373K; b) The “Managerial Class” is the 19% that controls 44% of net financial wealth, assets over \$100K and incomes over \$94K; and c) The “Power Elite,” refers to the “several thousand people, primarily white men... who run the largest and most influential institutions of our country in business, finance, philanthropy, academia, the media, policy formation groups, think tanks, and the government... Act as agents of the ruling class and make decisions which impact the rest of our lives.” He continues:

The ruling class and the power elite are two separate but overlapping groups. Membership in the ruling class is determined by wealth, whereas membership in the power elite is determined by participation in, and influence on economic, political, and cultural decision making. People are members of the power elite because of the institutional power and wealth they direct, not because of their personal assets. They use their institutional power in the interest of the ruling class. The power elite includes many members from the ruling class but also many business and political leaders who are from the managerial class, and even some who grew up in families with few economic resources. (p2)

The primary assertion of William Julius Wilson's *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*, is that Americans of all races and classes need to coalesce around issues of shared concern. He also believes that the state of our economy and some of the mechanisms that have brought us to that point *can serve as that unifying issue*. "Multiracial coalitions are essential ... and could become the building blocks for progressive social change."

(pg#)

A recent study on multiracial coalitions conducted by the Applied Research Center summarized that beyond labor or electoral politics, multiracial coalitions have been *largely overlooked* "for their potential role in a broad-based movement against economic inequality."

There have been many incidents, especially during specific periods, when Whites, POC, working and some middle-class people have found common cause and organized for social and economic change and have sometimes made strides. But inevitably, these coalitions have broken down – often due to *intentional fomenting* by the power elite of racist, xenophobic, and classist fears that have separated and divided us against one another.

Special Note to Readers:

The following paper is not intended to be exhaustive, the subject requiring an entire book, but rather attempts to provide an overview of:

- a) The urgent need for multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-class coalitions in order to build the critical mass necessary to make *any* significant gains on social, economic, and environmental equity and justice;
- b) Some historical examples of such coalitions, while recognizing that movements to bring justice to POC (Abolition, Reconstruction, and Civil Rights) often served as the *launching points* for movements that benefited other oppressed groups (women, labor, GLBT's. etc.);
- c) Why these coalitions broke down, and lessons to be gained;
- d) A suggested framework for understanding the interdependence of laissez-faire economic exploitation [of the working class] that is made all the more possible by the scapegoating of POC and recent immigrants;
- e) An overview of some current models of multi-racial coalitions around shared economic equity, access, and justice concerns;
- f) And the need for middle-class Whites to 1) work on unlearning their racial and class conditioning and 2) to add the racial and class lens to whatever social justice organizing work that they are doing – thereby laying the foundation toward coalition work.

In summary, building these lasting coalitions is not simply a matter of "wouldn't it be nice if..." -- I am convinced that, just as Dr. King said, it is a matter of *necessity*, that for the sake of our mutual survival "We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools."

I. THE PROBLEMS -- SEPARATENESS:

- A. POC suffer disproportionately in all of the areas that impact the vast majority of U.S. citizens: access to quality healthcare, affordable and fair housing, quality and/or affordable education, equal pay and opportunity for women, freedom from domestic violence, environmental injustice, etc.
- B. Many well-intentioned, dedicated European Americans guided by conscience, work diligently on a number of these issues, yet often do not find POC proportionately represented in the organizing networks that they work in. POC tend to do their organizing work within/among their own communities. If and when Whites notice the absence of POC in their activities, they generally extend invitations to POC to please "come work with us" – instead of seeking to support the efforts of POC in their community organizing efforts.

- C. Many POC and working class people report not feeling welcome and/or comfortable organizing with middle-class white people. And many of the issues that directly impact them (racism, economic exploitation, classism) do not seem to be of concern to middle-class Whites. And so, there is a tendency for them to do their organizing work among other POC, poor people, and/or in their own communities.

These are problems because:

1. By not working together, we are not building the numbers, the critical mass, and the needed “tipping point” to build the movement necessary for substantive social-economic changes.
2. Middle-class Whites miss the golden *organizing opportunity* that would be available by unraveling the *linked* oppression together in partnerships with others.
3. And we miss the opportunity to build relationships and know one another through working together toward common cause – thereby also *healing together*.

II. SOME CAUSES -- WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF WORKING TOGETHER?

- A. Most Whites want to believe that “things are better now” and resist accepting that legal integration did not eliminate racial inequality. A “colorblind” ideology has emerged as a strategy to counter many of the gains of civil rights now considered to be “divisive,” and so “structural racism has grown simultaneously less *visible* and more destructive.” (ARC study, p90)
- B. Most European-American middle-class people are unaware of the existence of “white culture.” It is especially difficult for good people to accept that they have their own blind-spots related to race and class when they perceive themselves to be nice, kind, open-minded, and even progressive people. Whites are often oblivious to the myriad ongoing incidents of racism and classism with which millions of their fellow citizens must deal on a daily basis.
- C. There is a very long and tragic history in the U.S. of which most Whites are unaware: That when Whites, POC, and poor working class people have coalesced around common cause issues, **middle-class Whites have consistently abandoned POC and working class allies**. These patterns existed in the movements of Abolition, early Women’s Rights/Suffrage, Reconstruction, the Labor Movement at the turn of the 20th century, 1970’s/80’s Feminism... and it continues.
- D. POC are often far more aware of this history than are Whites, providing them with yet another reason to be wary of throwing their lots in with White middle-class activists who are repeating patterns that they are unaware exist.
- E. Hubris often prevents middle-class Whites from even recognizing how very dependent the successes of their organizing efforts are upon building strong partnerships with POC and the working class. As if middle-class Whites can “save the day” on their own, or at least their corners of it – when there *are* no separate corners in this deeply interconnected socio-economic system in which we all live.
- F. POC consistently report that White people have a tendency to patronize, dominate, and take over organizing efforts. As veteran white Civil Rights organizer Anne Braden said, “We Whites are used to being in charge.”
- G. White women have a tendency to blame white men for much of the power dynamics in the history of racial and economic oppression – instead of taking ownership of their own perpetuation of these systems, as in the Suffrage and more recent Feminist movements – thereby missing the opportunity to do their own unlearning, and to help serve as models and catalysts for significant cultural change.

- H. There is confusion by Whites around the meaning of the phrase “accountability to” and partnership with POC – confusion that often paralyzes many Whites from taking initiative. (AWARE-LA, a white allies organization in Los Angeles, is one organization working with POC to develop an alternative, more accessible model.)
- I. Relationships and trust have not been built before diving into agendas, thereby allowing the inevitable emergence of “Identity politics” (spiritual/ religious beliefs, heterosexism, ageism, ableism), internalized superiority, and power dynamics to become more divisive than they need to be.

III. SOME SOLUTIONS

- 1) White people must commit to their own re-education work, awareness building, unlearning, and historical re-education.... An ongoing, lifelong process – lest they continue to keep POC at bay as potential allies and friends.
- 2) This includes learning about the inextricable linkages between economic exploitation, racism and classism that allows this inequality to flourish, unchecked.
- 3) White middle-class people must add the anti-racist and multi-class lens to the activism work that they are already doing. When we work on housing discrimination against POC, we are working on fair housing for all; with equal health care access for POC, access improves for all; environmental justice – environmental issues improve for all, etc. And in the process, coalitions can result, as well.
- 4) Due to the long history of Whites abandoning their working class and POC coalition partners and the resulting mistrust, it is incumbent upon Whites to *prove* that we are trustworthy and in it for the *long-haul* – that we will not retreat when the going gets tough and/or we have had our immediate goals met (such as in coalitions that form to get a candidate elected *around a particular longer-term platform*).
- 5) There are many white liberals and progressives (as well as some conservatives) who have rejected Judeo-Christian traditions from their own personal belief systems for various reasons. And there are many social change agents, some of them being POC, to whom Judeo-Christian language offers meaning and inspiration. Understanding and respecting some of the cultural contexts can lessen some of the related friction that sometimes arises here.

Just as with “non religious” Jews who consider themselves to be “culturally Jewish,” not all who identify themselves as Christian fully believe or embrace all of Christian theology or feel compelled to proselytize, but who may retain some of its traditions because they offer a sense of cultural and familial identity.

Just as most would not ridicule the Jewish holy days and those who observe these traditions, the same level of respect should be accorded to those who identify with Christian language and symbolism. It is also helpful to appreciate that these symbols have helped Jews, African Americans, and other POC to survive psychologically and to thrive throughout centuries upon centuries of unimaginable persecution and oppression.

- 6) Relationships and trust must be established before diving into agendas, (or at the very least, as in intentional and separate process in the course of). Strong interpersonal relationships will help to provide a foundation of trust that will support the group as it works through the issues of identity, internalized superiority, and power dynamics as they inevitably emerge. And these issues must be addressed, lest they fester and inevitably cause divisiveness. (ARC study)

- 7) After some basic ally-ship/anti-racism/racial justice training, Whites need to familiarize themselves with what POC activists are engaged in local communities and ask [humbly] what support and help is needed (even if it's "mundane" but needed support).
- 8) Seek to join forces with POC working on "race-neutral" economic concern issues (livable wage campaign, full employment, affordable housing, healthcare access) while *including* a racial justice/equity lens – and understanding that the outcomes benefit *all* working and middle class people.
- 9) In addition to supporting the civil, human, and economic rights of POC, Whites need to commit to doing anti-racism and racial justice work not just because it is the only right thing to do – but also for their **own benefits** -- for their *own* psychological and spiritual liberation. Thereby, they will place less baggage, expectations, and additional burdens on POC, which often happens when coming from the unconscious approach of doing this work solely for the benefit to [and for the approval of] POC.
- 10) For the sake of clarity of objectives and process, become familiar with various models of multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition work, such as the six models identified in a recent Annie E. Casey Foundation Study conducted by the Applied Research Center (MultiRacial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change), as well as Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's four prerequisites for viable coalitions. Know where you want to go, and what it will look and feel like once there, and along the way.

IV. WHERE WE ARE NOW: SOME FOUNDATIONS FOR ORGANIZING AROUND COMMON CAUSE

Again, in *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*, Wilson asserts that "multiracial coalitions are essential ... and could become the building blocks for progressive social change." (p4, ARC study). He believes that the state of the American economy and some of the mechanisms that have brought us to this point can serve as a rallying point to bring all races and classes together (the 81% of the population being negatively impacted in various ways by the current status quo) and to propel us forward in making some deeply needed systemic changes.

Wilson, a sociologist (and author of other known works such as *Power, Racism, and Privilege* (1976), *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), and *When Work Disappears* (1996)) writes "The experience of prolonged earning declines and rising inequality in the context of job growth and economic expansion is unprecedented in U.S. economic history." (p30) Americans now work more hours than most Europeans, even the diligent Japanese.

During times of economic anxiety, people are more susceptible to simplistic rhetoric of a few influential hate-mongers. (p33) As the economy has tightened since the 1970's and placed increased stresses on all middle and working class families and communities in the U.S., "some communities have attempted to unite white Americans around anger at the government and racial minorities." (p13) Instead of associating citizens' problems with economic and political changes, "these messages encourage groups to turn on one another – race against race and citizen against immigrants."

History has shown that this is a common strategy of the wealthiest and most powerful – a tactic utilized in the backlashes against Reconstruction, the labor movements, and to take the wind out of the Civil Rights movement. Whenever African Americans, working class Whites, and newer immigrants have sought to organize together for livable wages, humane working conditions, equity, and access – racist and xenophobic rhetoric has been publicly espoused by wealthy industrialists, by many of the unions like the AFL that sought to gain graces with the Democratic party machine in the early 1900's and again in more recent times, and by many of the politicians and their "keepers of the peace" who earned the

good graces of the wealthy elite through helping to maintain the arrangements that exploited the working class and POC.

Our government, local and national, has often collaborated with industrialists or the ruling class and their power brokers to prevent multiracial, multi-class coalitions from gaining prolonged stability or ground. Throughout the labor struggles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the Great Depression, from the Pullman Strike, the Ludlow Massacre, from Haymarket Square, to Birmingham and Montgomery for just a few examples – there were the police and government marshals beating, imprisoning, and often massacring unarmed demonstrators or strikers demonstrating for livable wages and working conditions – and frequently, not because any laws had been broken.

Speaking to the current potential for coalitions, Wilson points out that there is plenty of agreement among racial and ethnic groups on many current social-political issues. A 1995 survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago found that on issues other than affirmative action and abortion, European Americans, African Americans, Latino/as, and Asian Americans express very little difference in their overwhelming support of congressional action on balancing the budget, changing the welfare system, less enthusiasm for cutting personal income taxes, reforming Medicare, and even less for business tax breaks.

The author points to the findings of social psychologists from 98 experimental studies of goal interdependence and interpersonal attraction. These reveal that **“when people believe that they need each other they relinquish their initial prejudices and stereotypes and join programs that foster mutual interaction and cooperation.”** (p81)

Wilson urges multiracial organizing around the economic issues that impact all – such as the “race-neutral” issue of the massive loss of jobs caused by free trade and the absence of a full employment policy. He sees the various problems resulting from urban sprawl as another multi-racial, multi-class organizing issue.

Though Wilson and some other social and political scientists differ from the following approach, he writes:

Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres argue that the most effective way to involve minorities in racially inclusive coalitions is to organize them first around political issues that are explicitly race-specific. They assert that racial minorities are less likely to respond to calls for coalition building if their leaders do not first speak to and organize them around matters that relate to their racial experiences. Only then, it is argued, would it be possible to get racial minorities to expand their concerns and embrace issues that interest all groups.

Wilson adds that this claim is reasonable, but there is little systematic evidence to support it. Indeed, none of the successful multiracial coalitions discussed later in this chapter used this two-step process of minority involvement. (p80) Political scientist Raphael J. Sonenshein points out that “the most effective coalitions are those that begin building in communities with strong political organizations already in place.” (p82)

Additionally, Wilson offers that various contributors state that it is important that differences (such as varying identities) are acknowledged so that these can become resources rather than liabilities, lest resentments fester and divisiveness result. This is where our continued education in multiculturalism and the various lenses of privilege can support our work in getting through potential misunderstandings and tensions.

In a 2001 interview, white civil rights leader Anne Braden was quoted:

For Whites, none of this will change until we deal with white supremacy. It's fine to sit and talk and get your heart in the right place, but it ain't going to have one bit of impact. Whites need to be visible and engaged. We have to break the solid white wall of resistance.

You have to attack the policies and practices of the society you live in. There are two different forms of attack: the common ground issues and the frontal attack on white supremacist policies and practices. In any community, you need organizations that are doing both. Living wage campaigns are common ground issues. Race and economic justice in this country are so intertwined that you can hardly talk about any economic issue where racism and white supremacy are not also involved. You can deal with a common ground issue and not only leave race out of it but also leave POC out of it. And then you don't win. We need an organization in every community that makes a frontal attack on white supremacy. Those organizations need to involve white people and be led by POC.

One danger in groups that are predominantly white, is that they break apart in "identity politics" (infighting around power and recognition with GLBT concerns, sexism, ageism, ableism, etc.). Anne Braden illustrates this in speaking of her experience leading the initially bi-racial and then overwhelmingly white SCEF (Southern Conference Education Fund):

When the movement won the lunch counter battle and voting rights, SCEF began to shift back to more economic justice issues, as the black movement did. But then SCEF broke up in 1973. I came to the conclusion that the basic weakness of SCEF was that it became overwhelmingly white. We got this great influx of whites, after SNCC (the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) told Whites to go organize Whites. SCEF became a battleground for white people to fight out their quarrels. The real purpose got lost.

I made up my mind then that I would never spend another minute of my life building something that was all or mostly white because it is not going to change anything. It is a waste of time.

She adds, "Principled back-white collations don't work unless there is a strong group in the black community first. The coalitions that fall apart are the white-dominated ones. Once the Blacks are well organized and they have their own organizations, the power relationships change."

In their extensive study on coalitions, The Applied Research Center (ARC) of Oakland, CA summarizes that "the most formidable barrier to building multiracial coalitions is the participation of Whites. In his 1994 study of NY City politics, Mollenkopf wrote that the primary obstacle to POC there gaining full political power were the Whites inside the power structures (city offices, labor unions, etc) feeling that collaboration with "minority outsiders were unnecessary or even threatening." (ARC study, p.93)

Anne Braden again, "We [Whites] are so used to running things. Those of us who are white have to be careful that we aren't trying to dominate. We need more Whites who are willing to take action and to serve in organizations with POC in the leadership."

ON ACCOUNTABILITY:

Regarding this latter point, with the greatest respect for and deference to Ms. Braden and other wonderful organizers for justice, I will suggest that we also need to be cautious and parse out exactly what "leadership" and "accountability" mean. The latter, in particular, has become a "catch" phrase and loose term that has served to stymie many white activists and organizers and bottlenecked more proactivity on the part of Whites who want to be allies. Some activists who are working on defining a more accessible model of accountability also see that there are many Whites who believe that accountability is an end in and of itself. That is an unfortunate misunderstanding, because it doesn't bring about the changes that we all need. In education and discourse, accountability may look different

than in organizing. But ultimately, education and discourse must serve along with accountability as means, tools, and inspiration to *organize* for justice and equity for all.

Yes, we Whites must be mindful of our tendency to take over everything and be willing to step back, and desire to learn from and integrate suggestions and feedback from POC. There are some situations that POC must continue to take the lead, and white allies support their efforts. And there are others in which we should seek a truly shared leadership model in our collective *organizing* work. And sometimes there are few POC in our communities, yet there is plenty of work that we Whites can do on our own with the aid of various resources: unlearning our conditioning, relearning our history, processing our guilt and shame and sorrow with one another, and educating other Whites. We must also beware of requesting the sometimes few POC who are available as resources and partners to continually overextend themselves.

It is also very important for Whites to discern exactly to *whom* it is that we should be accountable. Even POC involved with racial work (and we must be mindful that a great number are not) are no more monolithic than Whites are and are not in agreement about how we should all proceed. They too, may serve in a particular capacity or two, but not necessarily in all: educators and trainers; visionaries and catalysts; strategic organizers; and/or foot-soldiers.

But whatever the situation, Whites should not relinquish all of their initiative and suppress ideas and contributions, as often happens. A number of POC organizers have shared that they do not want yet another responsibility -- first to educate us Whites about ourselves and our dominant culture (a responsibility we need to initiate ourselves), and then to “lead us” [Whites] out of our white supremacist wasteland, as we wait for them to initiate and then “supervise” or “sign off” on all of our actions.

This particular white ally does NOT claim to have it all figured out. But “accountability” is far more nuanced than it is commonly presented. It is a balance -- accountability to, partnership with, humility, initiative, and action – a balance that we must learn to recognize, practice, maintain, and then relearn again. Having struggled with this issue myself, as I likely will again, I simply advocate that those of us who desire to be allies each explore the nuances and talk it through with our own POC friends, mentors, and allies. Each of us needs to be very clear with ourselves exactly which individuals or what groups it is that we are choosing to be accountable to, with an awareness that we will likely need to be revisit this again. Of utmost importance – the *most* vulnerable in our society do not want allies to sit still, waiting year after year for a chain of command to emerge and to receive our marching orders before we take any action.

AWARE-Los Angeles (a network of White Anti-racist allies) is currently working with POC on developing a more helpful model for accountability and shared leadership. I will continue to be interested in learning about other models that can help us to move forward together with more clarity and in fully engaged partnership.

Additional Factors re Current Conditions for Coalition Building:

We must also keep in mind that with the recent assaults on Latin American immigrants, Moslems, and those of Middle-Eastern decent – or who look like they are from any of these groups – that there are many potential allies from these groups who are afraid to participate in civil society. And so, we must all do what we can to work with their representatives to act as allies on their behalves, as best we can.

According to the ARC study, recent immigrants must play a pivotal role in future multiracial formations. Those of us who have been in this country longer must be also be cognizant that their social and political experiences in their countries of origin will influence how each group will work (Multicultural competence). Many of them do not have the same lens or understanding about racial oppression in this country, offering yet another challenge.

V. SOME CURRENT MODELS FOR MULTIRACIAL, MULTIETHNIC, MULTI-CLASS ORGANIZING:

In conducting their research for a 108-page study on behalf of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Applied Research Center (ARC) found a scarcity of “useful” multiracial coalition models, stating that they were generally limited to electoral or single-issue coalitions. “MultiRacial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change” (2003) explores six models for multiracial coalitions in depth, and summarizes that beyond labor or electoral politics, they have been *largely overlooked “for their potential role in a broad-based movement against economic inequality.”*

The ARC study reviews the strengths and weaknesses of several coalition efforts, including that of the Rainbow Coalition. It also summarizes some of the inherent challenges, and recommendations for fostering and strengthening their success.

Both the ARC study and William Julius Wilson hold up the four prerequisites for viable coalitions as the yet-to-be-improved-upon model laid out in 1967 by *Black Power* authors Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton:

1. Parties involved in the coalition must recognize their respective self-interest.
2. Each party must believe that it will benefit from a cooperative relationship with the other(s).
3. Each party must have its own independent power base and also control its decision-making.
4. Each party must recognize that the coalition is formed with specific and identifiable goals in mind.

Although the organizational imperatives for multiracial coalitions were identified forty years ago and have not changed, ARC states that what has changed is the “external political environment”:

As this report has illustrated, people of color are less politically unified now than when *Black Power* was written. White opposition bolstered by “colorblind” ideology, has made organizing more difficult and the changing composition of “Black,” “Latino,” and “Asian” groups, differentiated by both class and ethnicity, has further complicated the task of building political solidarity among communities of color.

WJ Wilson cites two current networks that he believes to be especially effective with multiracial organizing. The first is the SW Industrial Area Foundation (IAF), a collection of community organizations formed under the model created by Saul Alinsky, the man some call the “father of community organizing.” The second network he applauds is that of the Living Wage Campaign which has passed “living wage” ordinances in a 16 cities with campaigns underway in 17 other cities.

Wilson considers the Texas IAF as one of the best examples in the nation. He writes:

“Hispanic, African American, and white leaders are united in local IAF organizations but retain significant autonomy by also serving in other organizations or enterprises that address race- and neighborhood-specific issues that are not part of the Texas IAF agenda, ‘as long as they remain within the broad unitary framework of the IAF.’ Thus, the IAF follows a race-neutral strategy, ‘defining issues in a nonracial manner and emphasizing the potential benefit of its campaigns to all Americans.’” (p87)

One IAF leader, Mark Warren, writes that the “IAF does indeed take up very many ‘issues of race.’ Like poor schools, neighborhood neglect, health care shortages, and lack of economic opportunity. **But it frames these issues in nonracial terms, emphasizing the interest of the whole community in addressing them.**”

The ARC study lists some new multiracial formations to watch:

- The ACLU’s Racial Justice Project that focuses on racial profiling.
- The new Freedom Rides initiated by the AFL-CIO which includes Blacks and immigrants.

- JUMP (Justice is the Unifying Message), a fledgling national effort to address civil rights violations and illegal detentions of immigrants.

At first examination, some of the findings of the ARC study seem to contradict those by Williams (who advocates organizing around some race-neutral shared economic concern issues) – that of the coalitions ARC examined, they state that the strongest ones are built around explicit racial justice concerns – as in the case of the ACLU’s racial profiling campaign.

However, it may be as Anne Braden pointed out and the IAF indicated – that there needs to be a *combination* – there needs to be race-neutral organizing around issues that impact all, while the various member groups retain “significant autonomy by also serving in other organizations or enterprises that address race- and neighborhood-specific issues that are not part of the Texas IAF agenda,” – *with the interest and support of their allies*.

The ARC Study also suggests that:

- Issues-based coalitions tend to fare better in building multiracial unity than the shorter-term electoral alliances.
- There is no one best alliance structure – but that the ability to secure and allocate funding is important; the decision-making structure needs to provide for the voices of the less powerful in the group; and there needs to be a mechanism for the sharing of public credit and recognition.
- Multiracial and multiethnic *is not necessary multicultural* – allow space for people to use their own languages, expression, and processes.
- Process matters.
- Even multiracial formations can avoid issues of racial justice and internal racial and ethnic dynamics:

Unless the coalition leadership makes an explicit decision to address them they will much more likely be avoided – often to the detriment of the coalition’s overall efforts.... [and it] requires an additional level of political solidarity and campaign planning.

SUMMARY OF MULTIRACIAL ORGANIZATIONAL PROTOTYPES

© Applied Research Center (1993)

Formation Type	Key Characteristics	Examples
Single-Issue Mobilization (SIMs)	Temporary, ad-hoc organizations organized as a response to a specific policy or incidents(s).	Cmte Against Police Brutality (NYC); White Guys for Affirmative Action (Berkeley)
Grassroots Multiracial Organizations	Orgs w individual members; may be place-based or organized around specific issue	People United for a Better Oakland [CA] (PUEBLO), Direct Action for Rights & Equity-DARE (Providence, RI)
Electoral Alliances	Short-term electoral efforts built solely for the election of a specific candidate.	Coalitions featured in this report (L.A. CA; Providence, RI; Rainbow/PUSH)
MultiRacial Issue-Based Coalitions	The classic formation in this category is the “organization of orgs.” Other kinds of issue-based coalitions include elite leadership-based groups, and formation that include leaders of exiting groups, w unaffiliated ind’ls.	Wolf-Watershed Ed’n Project-WWEP (WI); ACLU Racial Justice Project (No. CA); Rainbow/PUSH
MultiRacial Networks	Permanent formations cmt’d to mutual assistance, organized to achieve specific political goals on a level not attainable by ind’l organizations.	Grassroots Organizing for Welfare Leadership (GROWL); Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ)
MultiEthnic Formations	Org’s that engage multiple ethnicities of established resident sand immigrants members of one (U.S. Defined) racial group around specific issues.	Asian Immigrant Women Advocates-AIWA (Oakland, CA); Coal’n Against Anti-Asian Violence – CAAAV (NYC); Homles Unidos (National)

Historical Background Material:

VI. CONDEMNED TO REPEAT THE HISTORY WE DON'T KNOW (DIFFERENT CENTURY, SAME... STUFF)

As Anne Braden said, “A lot of white working-class people have been turned off to our movements because they have been put down. There is an assumption among white intellectuals who think they are liberals or anti-racists that all working-class and poor white are flaming racists. An investigation of history clearly shows that working-class and poor whites have often found common cause with POC. – Until these partnerships are wedged apart, as they often have been, not by the groups themselves, but by some outside influences.” She adds, “The whole history of the south has been littered with the ruins of movements that brought disenfranchised Blacks and Whites together and broke up on the shoals of racism. When the chips were down, Whites always fled back the security of their White skins.”

In his 1971 *Rules for Radical*, Saul Alinsky shared Braden’s concern that white liberals often dismiss the working class: “They cannot be dismissed by labeling them blue collar or hard hat... If we fail to communicate with them, if we don't encourage them to form alliances with us, they will move to the right. Maybe they will anyway, but let's not let it happen by default.”

What follows is a brief sketch of some of the good, bad, and ugly examples of Multiracial and/or multi-class organizing in U.S. History:

1. Important Partnerships During the Abolition and Early Women’s Rights Movements: *Had White Middle-Class Women Not Betrayed Their Black and their Working Class Allies – Women may well have won suffrage 30-40 years earlier.*

As Industrialization of the early 1800’s provided readymade versions of the many of the essential items that women had previously made themselves in order to run their households (candles, soap, clothing, etc.), middle-class women became further marginalized and displaced from their roles as economic contributors. In *Women, Race & Class*, Angela Davis writes that as “industrialization robbed many white women of the experience of performing productive labor... the ideology of femininity ... was popularized... [and the] prevailing propaganda of both “mother” and ‘housewife” bore the fatal mark of inferiority.” (p12)

Some of them felt affinity with oppressed Blacks and found new roles and ways to contribute through involvement with the Abolition movement. In the process, they acquired organizing skills and a greater sense of their abilities to contribute to public discourse – all but for being silenced from speaking in public by white men, including by many of the male abolitionists. And thus, the “women’s movement” was born, with the first Women’s Congress was held in Seneca Falls in 1848.

In addition to luminaries like the indomitable Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglas, countless thousands of Black women and Black men were early supporters of the women’s rights and suffrage movements. The marginalization of women tended to be a white man’s issue. Through hundreds of years of enslavement and oppression of the descendents of Africa, Black men and women well knew to appreciate one another’s strength and need for solidarity towards collective survival and creating a better future for their families and people.

Yet despite that many of the Women’s Rights movement leaders had cut their teeth with Abolitionist activities, the Seneca Convention made no mention of the plight of Black women, and not one of them was in attendance. It would be two years later that Sojourner Truth, as the only Black woman present, made her voice resound with “Ain’t I a Woman,” at the National Convention on Women’s Rights.

Losing the Working Class:

The Seneca convention took place a full decade after working class women had taken to fighting for their lives in the textile tenements and slums of Lowell and other New England towns. In immediately pushing for the women's vote -- as though it would be the answer to all social ills, economically privileged Suffrage leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were so out-of-touch with the struggles for basic survival facing their factory sisters, of their dire poverty, starvation, soaring infant mortality rates -- that within a few years, many working class women became disenfranchised with the [privileged] women's rights movement, and certainly with the suffrage movement. After the middle-class leaders encouraged factory women to cross the picket lines of their own men and become scabs during strikes, Stanton, Anthony, and their peers were dis-invited from attending a major labor organizing convention and related gatherings.

To make matters worse, these women of privilege, blaming working class men for the rift, then hurled verbal assaults on them as "low-life brutes" intent on keeping their women down. It would not be until the early 1900's as the labor movement was picking up mass scale that working class women would begin to push for the vote -- and their energy added needed momentum to the effort that finally brought about the vote for women.

Ultimate Betrayal of their Black Allies:

After suffrage leaders agreed to put their organizing efforts on the back burner in order to support the Union's cause, immediately after Emancipation they rallied their troops to go back to full tilt for the achievement of the women's vote. Despite the entreaties of Frederick Douglass Mary Bethune McLeod and many others that it was imperative that the 14th and then 15th Amendments come first, these white women refused to yield to the urgency of Black men receiving the vote [along with poor Southern white men], in order to protect Blacks from a devastating backlash against the gains of Reconstruction.

These white women vehemently opposed "ill-educated, uncivilized" Black men getting the vote before women did -- adding that if any man were to have control over them, they'd prefer to be ruled by the "sons of the Saxon." And as the blood of history recounts, without sufficient support for an insured vote for Black men and poor Southern white men, the ravage against Blacks ensued, the effects of its lynching's, massacres, and diasporas over subsequent decades are still felt in the memories and psyches of Blacks today.

Having turned their backs on Blacks, Suffrage rhetoric became increasingly overtly racist. In part, this was due to their attempts to court and appease Southern women. -- Ironically, despite having sold out Blacks -- in the end, their forty pieces of silver bought them *nothing* -- as the vast majority of the South voted against women's suffrage in 1919 and almost succeeded in blocking the 19th Amendment entirely.

Middle-class white women's betrayal of Blacks and the working class proved tragically costly to all.

2) The Early Labor Movement at the turn of the 20th Century: *Had Working Class Whites not Sold out their Black, recent immigrants, and non-Northern Europeans Allies* -- History Could have turned out quite differently: Reconstruction Could have Succeeded, the Reign of Terror Against Blacks could have been averted, and the labor movement could have changed the face of American industry.

Slavery was no friend to most poor working southern Whites. "No wage" slave labor kept Whites from being able to earn a living wage. So with Emancipation, many poor Whites looked forward to a "Jubilee" for all poor struggling families. During Reconstruction, there were many partnerships between Blacks and poor Whites to improve wages and working conditions, from farm workers who helped give birth to the Populist Movement to shipping workers in New Orleans.

A high number of Blacks worked in mining, and in this particularly dangerous field in which men's lives were so dependent on one another so that race was less of an issue -- there were several black union leaders. The Knights of Labor was one of the most multiracial, multiethnic unions of the day. Along with other workers' rights efforts during this "Gilded Age/Robber Baron" era, there was tremendous organizing activity, brutality, violence, and *potential* -- as workers, women, immigrants, Blacks, and

other people of color struggled for their human rights and what the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution had held out as the promise of all.

However – the potential during this period was more often than not thwarted by Whites: Wealthy capitalists and industrialists and some of the white unions and white politicians who were in their pockets. Industry openly and publicly fomented racial conspiracy theories and xenophobia, and conspired with Democratic party leaders to sabotage multiracial and cross-cultural organizing efforts.

Occasionally, later generations of working class people would find common cause – for a while, until more seeds of divide and conquer would be again planted. A comprehensive study of interracial unionism during the Great Depression, for example, reveals that the United Auto Workers in Detroit, the mainly Pennsylvania-based Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and the similarity based United Mine Workers were able to organize a racially mixed labor force in settings where past racial antagonisms and minority strike-breaking had been sources of labor defeat.” (p83)

3) Civil Rights and White Flight:

Anne Braden again: “Many Whites were influenced by academic, government, and media propaganda that Blacks were going too far and asking too much – People don’t understand the repression that happened in the late 60’s. That the movement did not just go away.... They chopped off the black organizers.

It was irrevocably damaging to the country that the movement was blunted at that point. It really was merging the issues. It was taking on economic justice. The unfinished business of the civil rights movement was economic justice.”

She adds, “The ‘open sesame’ for my generation was race. Once we could understand what racism had done, then everything fell like a house of cards. It opened everything to question: economic injustice, foreign policy. If you don’t understand white supremacy, then you don’t understand the country.”

Despite that many discouraged his “mixing up” civil rights concerns with foreign policy, even though 70% of the country was in support of the Vietnam War, as early as 1964 Dr. King began speaking out publicly against it. He was moved by his conscience from an understanding of both interconnectedness of the exploitive economic system that dehumanizes people, all the more easily when they are POC; and the disproportionate costs to the poor and POC in the U.S. who paid with their lives abroad as well as with the loss of desperately needed resources at home.

Dr. King gave dozens of speeches, but in *Voices of the People’s History*, Howard Zinn points to one speech given on August 16, 1967 before the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that received far less attention than some of his others. In “Where Do WE Go from Here?” he raised the issue of the economic roots of racism and leveled some of his most profound criticisms of the U.S. economic system and the need for it to be transformed.

... It means ultimately coming to see that the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.... A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years and will “thingify” them and make them things... Will exploit them and poor people generally economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and it will have to use its military might to protect them... We must go from this convention and say, “America, you must be born again!”... Let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction.

Before he was assassinated, he was talking with his staff about organizing a massive poor people’s march.

4) The Feminist Movement of the 1970's & 80's: *Had Middle Class White Women Been Allies to Women of Color and Working Class Women* – The ERA may likely would have succeeded, and a coalition of women and their allies could have fostered other positive societal changes.

Many women of color chose not to become involved with the feminist movement, which they felt was a middle-class white women's movement, concerned primarily with issues around equal pay and daycare – but entirely ignoring the experiences of women of color and the oppressions of racism and classism. Even the term “feminism” echoed back to the white women's experience of previous centuries – the “ideology of femininity,” childlike fragility, and being relegated to the “pedestal,” – something that women of color and working class women had never known.

And thus, Pulitzer Prize winning author Alice Walker adapted the term “womanism” in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*, to speak to the perspective and experiences of women of color and the strong, mature adults society had required them to be as a matter of survival -- while having feminized and infantilized white women.

Like their working class sisters during the labor movement, these women chose not to turn their backs on the racist and classist struggles of their men and further tear apart their communities in pursuit of their own specific concerns as women.

Once again, potential for a unified movement and significant social strides was lost, as middle-class white women chose not to look beyond their own specific experiences and immediate concerns, and repeated a history that most of them were likely unaware of – while many women of color, knew too well, once again, not to trust white feminists.

VII. CLOSING COMMENTS:

In order for gains to be made in issues that profoundly effect the lives of the majority of the U.S. population: equal access to affordable housing, quality education, health care, full employment, legal justice, environmental health, and public financing of campaigns -- a critical mass of people will need to strategize and coordinate together to build an effective movement to face down the unprecedented wealth and power that is in the hands of a small minority.

This movement will need to be multiracial, multiethnic, and multi-class in order to build both the numbers needed and to be based on a firm foundation that will not so easily be dissipated, as movements of the past inevitably have. The number of activists and organizers involved with the Civil Rights movement are said to have only numbered in the thousands – yet they changed history. To complete the work of the Civil Rights movement and the Poor People's movement that Dr. King did not live to see, and to make some systemic changes that will not so easily be co-opted by a conservative minority – we will need to engage far greater numbers.

And we can do this. But this will require that middle-class white liberals and progressives who are often to be found working diligently on a number of these issues gain an anti-racist and anti-classist lens that will help them to be effective partners in coalition work, who can earn the trust of POC and working class people that they will be reliable for the long-haul, and are equally concerned to do what they can about issues of racism and classism.

And we can do this, because we have collected tremendous resources for learning about some of our past mistakes, about our own blind spots that all of us with any form of privilege we inevitably have, and to learn from successful models.

It will not be an easy path – but it is the *only* path. This is the golden organizing opportunity. The first step is to become educated and aware of the linked oppressions and how they have served to insure the maintenance of our current exploitive economic system. And then, to become more aware of

our own blind spots and how we have played, and been played, in this system. And then we can begin to unravel this web -- together, in partnership, learning from one another.

And in the course of building relationships and working together toward common cause – we are also healing together from the scars and burdens of our past.

And we can do this – because it is not a matter of choice. Even given the rise of global crises – we must build a strong society that can protect all of our people, and become the global citizens we must in order for all of us to survive these dangerous times. It is a matter of *necessity* that we learn from one another and unravel this web together, and “must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools.”

SOME WORKING DEFINITIONS USED:

- **Race** – A social construct that incorrectly assumes genetic classifications of humans who may share certain physical characteristics -- but who in reality have less genetic commonality than is found across “races” (Human Genome Project)
- **Racism** = Racial Prejudice + **Power** to **oppress** people based on their race
- **Individual Racial Prejudice** is not the primary issue addressed in “Anti-racism” discussions * -- but of prime concern instead is:
- **Systemic and/or institutionalized racism** – Self-perpetuating “normative” systems that give preferential treatment to certain racial/ethnic groups while discriminating against others
- **Privilege** – Unearned [and sometimes unconscious] Advantage: White privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege, non-disability privilege, wealth/class privilege, Christian privilege, etc. – that can lead to a sense of entitlement
- **POC** – “**People of Color**” (not “non-white” ☹, and is much more inclusive than Black or African-American. “Minority” is not an accurate term (or a positive one).) Some Native Americans state preference for “Euro descent” and “non-Euro descent,” but this can be seen as problematic as well, in naming one group as being “not” something.
- **White** (Caucasian, European Americans) who do not identify themselves as, or are not identified as POC.
- **White Supremacy** – The Socio-economic and cultural system that assumes European-American culture, race, and ethnicity as the norm and proffers it advantage – at the expense of other ethnic and racial groups.
- **Activism** (any activity/initiative) ≠ **Organizing** (strategic, mobilizing toward making some change beyond one’s private sphere)

* Some people call individuals and/or their behaviors “racist” instead of bigoted or prejudiced. This usage is not “wrong” -- but it does lead to unfortunate confusion, so that when some hear the term “anti-racist” – they think that it is referring to individual people and their attitudes and/or behaviors vs. systems, the ways they operate, and collective attitudes.

RESOURCE BOOKS AND ARTICLES:

Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1983)

Gary Delgado, “MultiRacial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change,” (Applied Research Center, 2003)

Paul Kivel, *You Call this a Democracy? Who Benefits, Who Pays, and Who Really Decides* (NY, NY: The Apex Press, 2006)

James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (NY, NY: Touchstone, 1995)

Sharon Smith, *Subterranean Fire: A History of Working-Class Radicalism in the United States*, (Chicago: Haymarket Press, 2006)

Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get it*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005)

William Julius Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999)

Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove, *Voices of the People’s History*, (NY, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2004)

“Inside-Out and Upside-Down: An Interview with Anne Braden,” *ColorLines*, Spring 2001