

**BRIDGING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVIDES**

# COMMUNITIES

**Life in Cooperative Culture**

Spring 2018 • Issue #178

## **CLASS, RACE, and PRIVILEGE**

**Barriers to Diversity**

**White Bias, Black Lives**

**Class-Harmony  
Community**

**Confronting Cultural  
Appropriation**

**Combating Racism,  
One Community  
at a Time**



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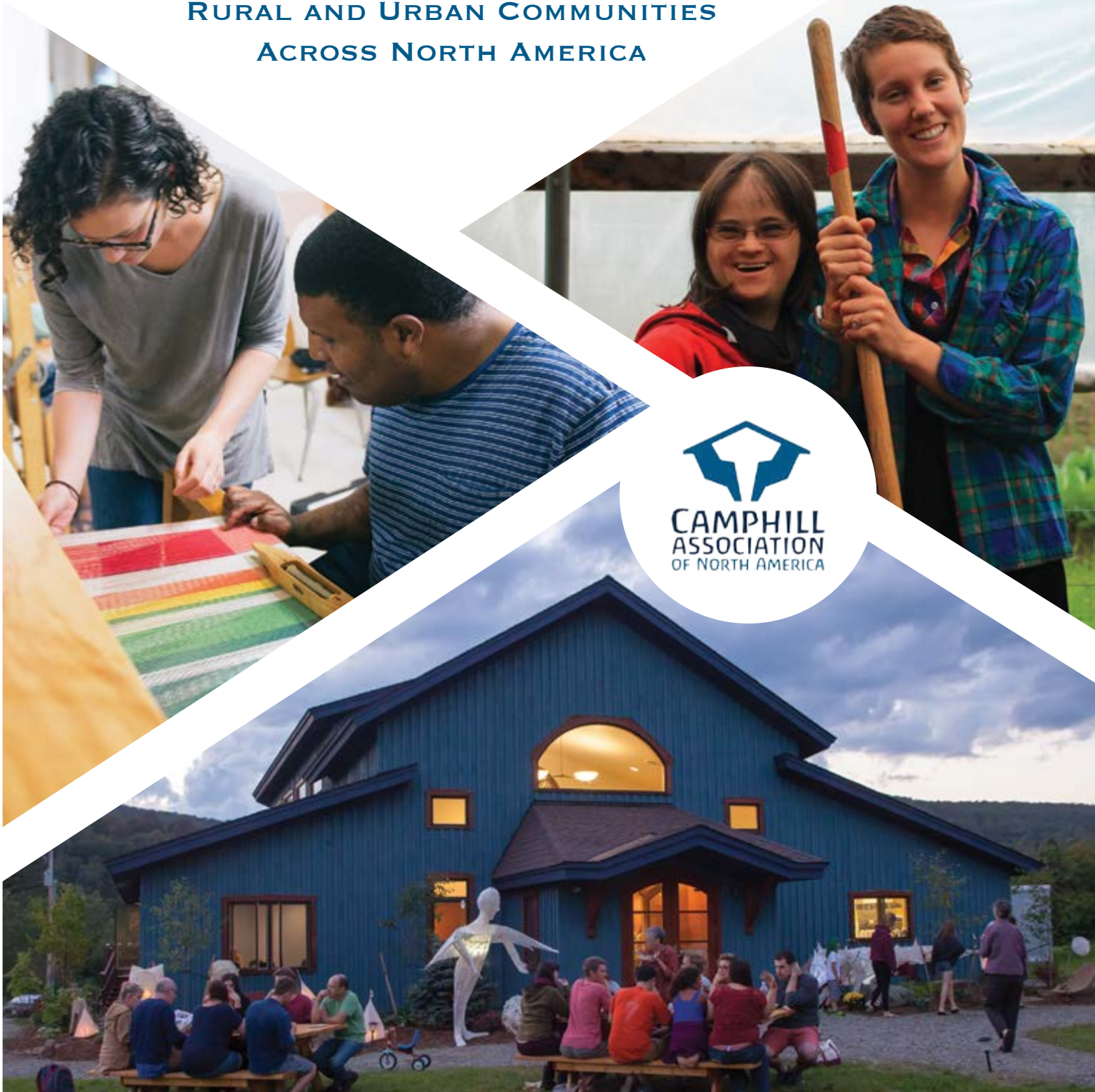
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# Our Commitment TO SOCIAL JUSTICE



Intentional communities are intrinsically idealistic. They're based on a radical analysis of social problems and are an attempt to address them. They represent a personal desire to live in a way that feels more satisfying, but also the desire for a better society for all people. They are a recognition that some of the essentials that make community what it is—mutual support, love and caring, sharing lives and livelihood in a meaningful and satisfying way—are lacking in the world. Not all intentional communities share the same political or social views. Some mirror the trend towards isolationism and protectionism we see in politics today. But most value, at least in theory, diversity, equality, and sustainability, and want to help create a world that works for everyone.

We live in a world fraught with injustice and inequality. In the US in particular, we live with a legacy of slavery and genocide that affects the opportunities we have regardless of when our ancestors came to this land. We all live with the effects of racialized, gendered, and classist society. These are core issues that need to be addressed if intentional communities are to fulfill their potential as models for a better way of living.

If we want to create models for how to live that address the problems in society, it's crucial that we hold central the perspectives and issues of those most affected by those problems. Certain people are more likely to have access to the resources to buy land, build buildings, and start businesses. Unfortunately, when they do, they're going to create communities with cultures that are less comfortable for people who are not like them. There are systemic economic and cultural barriers to living in and starting intentional communities, both from external forces and from the unintentional perpetuation of oppression and privilege by intentional communities themselves and the people who live in them.

If we think about racism and classism not as personal failings but as a system in which we are privileged or disadvantaged, then those of us who benefit from this system have a responsibility to work to change it. Intentional communities are a means to the end of making a better world, but they're also an end in themselves, of creating a way to live right now that's better than what the mainstream has to offer. It's a privilege to live in and start intentional communities, and we have a responsibility to help extend the opportunity to everyone who wants it.

The FIC is recommitting to our organizational value of social justice, particularly in the realm of racial and economic justice. At our Spring Board meetings, the Board went through an anti-racism training with the AORTA Collective ([aorta.coop](http://aorta.coop)), and began identifying how to bring this into what we do, both internally as an organization and externally in our work as servants of this movement. FIC has often showcased ICs that are pioneers in addressing gender dynamics, ecological responsibility, and cooperative economics. Racism and economic inequality have not been a core focus, and we would like to more directly address the reality of how these factors affect who participates in this movement and how this movement can be a real force for change in the world. There are lots of different ways this can look. For example:

- We're publishing this issue of **COMMUNITIES** magazine.

- We'll be working to create a set of questions about social justice practices for listings in the Communities Directory.
- We will have a solid selection of materials that cover these issues available through Community Bookstore and a page on [www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org) detailing resources for communities addressing social justice.
- We will make sure to address these issues in interviews and articles.
- We will provide extra promotion and social media attention to groups working to address these issues.

FIC has also recognized that our staff has almost always been made up of white people, and we believe this has limited our ability to fully understand our own movement. Thus, in recent hirings, we have made a point of being especially diligent to avoid racial biases and we are committed to this being our new normal.

Intentional communities have a unique opportunity to address oppression and privilege. And while most value diversity, they often struggle to achieve it. Why? There's no easy answer, and we need to be asking ourselves some tough questions and be open to courageous conversations. How do racism, classism, hetero-cis-sexism, and other forms of oppression play out within intentional communities? How can ICs become truly accessible and inclusive spaces? How can people with privilege, especially white people, men, and straight people, let go of their privilege or put it in the service of others? How can intentional communities help address oppression in the larger society, both directly and by providing accessible and relevant alternatives?

We each have our own internal work to do here, and we also need to come together to do this work. Let's make this movement a profound source of healing, reconciliation, and empowerment for the world to draw from. 🌱

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*Sky Blue ([sky@ic.org](mailto:sky@ic.org)) is Executive Director of the Fellowship for Intentional Community. A previous version of this piece appeared as a blog post on September 18, 2017 at [www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org).*

## Accountant's Note BY KIM SCHEIDT

# COMMUNITIES: An Experimental Shift to Gift Economy and Open Source Information



As an experiment, with this Spring 2018 issue of COMMUNITIES, we at the Fellowship for Intentional Community are tweaking the business model of our magazine to be more in alignment with our mission as a 501(c)3 nonprofit. **Our mission is to support and promote the development of intentional communities and the evolution of cooperative culture.** Charging money for something can be a prohibitive influence to the spread of information and we want to do whatever we can to get this material out to a wider audience. Our plan is two-fold: to upgrade our design software in order to create a first-rate digital version of COMMUNITIES, and then...to offer digital COMMUNITIES as a gift to the world. We hope to successfully operate under an altruistic economic model where we provide a quality product to anyone who wishes to have access to it.

We'll ask for financial support from those who can afford that; however, we mostly ask for everyone to please spread digital COMMUNITIES widely and freely to anyone on this planet who could benefit from it. Together we can further the ideas of cooperation, social justice, and sustainable living. We can counteract the epidemics of loneliness and isolation to reach a common goal of societal, individual, and environmental sufficiency.

Please join us at the FIC in the adventure of changing this world for the better. Let's create this present moment and our collective future reality to be one of thriving cooperative culture! 🐦

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*Kim Scheidt lives at Red Earth Farms in northeast Missouri and works for the Fellowship for Intentional Community as its Accountant.*

**CULTURE GAP**  
TOWARDS A NEW  
WORLD IN THE  
YALAKOM VALLEY  
JUDITH PLANT  
\$17.00

*Culture Gap* tells the story of the challenges and privations, the joys and adventures of rural communal living in a remote commune in British Columbia, Canada.

An absorbing account of a lifestyle emblematic of a time, *Culture Gap* also shows, from her own older perspective, a young mother's struggles to reconcile her social ideals of personal and environmental responsibility, and loving and caring for those closest to her.

*Judith Plant's memoir of fleeting achievements and uncommon good times glows with wisdom, complexity, and compassion. A noble read.* —Stephanie Mills, author of *Epicurean Simplicity*

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#### COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

COMMUNITIES is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living or shared projects.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about “creating community where you are.”

We do not intend to promote one kind of group over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related thematically to community living and/or cooperation, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

#### Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, 23 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 800-462-8240; [editor@ic.org](mailto:editor@ic.org). To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: [layout@ic.org](mailto:layout@ic.org). Both are also available online at [ic.org/communities-magazine](http://ic.org/communities-magazine).

#### Advertising Policy

We accept paid advertising in COMMUNITIES because our mission is to provide our readers with helpful and inspiring information—and because advertising revenues help pay the bills.

We handpick our advertisers, selecting only those whose products and services we believe will be helpful to our readers. That said, we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements—unless they are FIC ads—nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered an FIC endorsement.

If you experience a problem with an advertisement or listing, we invite you to call this to our attention and we'll look into it. Our first priority in such instances is to make a good-faith attempt to resolve any differences by working directly with the advertiser/listener and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

Please check [ic.org/communities-magazine](http://ic.org/communities-magazine) or email [ads@ic.org](mailto:ads@ic.org) for advertising information.

#### What is an “Intentional Community”?

An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based; others are both. For all their variety, though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.

# Undressing and Addressing the Elephant in the Room



Chris Roth

With this issue, COMMUNITIES faces head-on a theme that has seemed increasingly timely in recent years—particularly over the last six months during which we've been assembling these articles. Especially in the context of broader discussions happening in society, Class, Race, and Privilege often seem like the “elephant in the room” in the intentional communities world. This issue makes an attempt to undress and address the issues that elephant raises.

The questions of Class, Race, and Privilege in intentional community are not simple or clear-cut. I see two simultaneous impulses—one in which intentional communities expose people to greater diversity in their social and working circles; broaden people's empathy and ability to understand and embrace those different from them (coming from different class or racial backgrounds or amounts of inherited privilege); level out social inequities; and serve as models for the coming-together that can help us understand how related we all are, that we're all in this together, that socially constructed differences of power and privilege are arbitrary and deserve to be jettisoned and rectified. Intentional communities can become places where the trappings of prejudice, power-over, and separation on superficial grounds are transcended, and replaced by new ways of relating that show what is possible.

The other impulse, often hidden or overlooked in communities' own understandings about themselves, is in the opposite direction: intentional communities can become refuges for people to escape to in an effort to be with a closer “tribe,” which unfortunately often turns out to have the same racial and class backgrounds and amounts of inherited privilege. Even when this is not a conscious intention, and even when there is a clear, stated desire for greater diversity, less class and racial diversity can become the default mode, and power imbalances can persist in communities, for a host of reasons examined in this issue: economic barriers, cultural barriers, unacknowledged or invisible racism, fear.

In my own life in community, I've witnessed both impulses at work. Along with the idealized (and usually inaccurate) notion that communities bring together a rainbow of people in an



egalitarian utopian lifestyle, I've also heard the generalization that North American intentional communities are populated almost exclusively by white, middle class people. While we don't have comprehensive statistics available across the broad spectrum of the communities movement, the latter generalization may be true in many (but not all) cases, at least as far as the "white" goes—and often in the area of class as well, especially in more expensive communities, though as always there are exceptions.

My own journey into community is a bit more complicated than either of these scenarios (the inspiring or the dismal) in relation to social justice. I grew up in a setting that was ethnically and even racially somewhat diverse but fairly homogeneous economically and socially; my town's inhabitants ranged from middle class through upper-middle class to upper class, and my friends were almost all in the first two categories. The working class people I had exposure to were the blue-collar workers from adjacent towns with the technical skills and willingness to get their hands dirty that kept most residents of my town comfortably detached from too much (or in some cases any) physical work.

It took moving to an intentional community for me to start learning real-life skills in areas that, in my hometown, were below the pay scale or dignity or social class—while being well above the practical aptitude level—of most residents. It also took moving to an intentional community to start mingling with people from significantly different backgrounds, including working class as well as the middle class from which I came, and including (because of the communities I was attracted to) people with international backgrounds, including from less developed countries. By becoming downwardly mobile, I (and many like me) became more adept at the skills of self-reliance and resilience, while learning from others who had already been acquiring those skills while we had been marooned in suburbia and/or academia. In these settings, the work of community became the great equalizer among people from disparate class backgrounds.

Two groups were notably absent from these places: the very rich, and the very poor. But in other ways, I found that community living greatly broadened my class horizons, removed class barriers in ways that staying in my hometown and in the circles within which I grew up would not have. This mixing of classes has presented some challenges: cultural differences, varied attitudes toward such things as diet, tobacco, communication styles, etc.—but ultimately I have always been thankful to have entered into a world where people of different class backgrounds find common ground and can share their lives together, much more than I experienced in the social world from which I came.

The same cannot be said for race. The communities I've lived in have included fewer people of color than the town I grew up in or than the towns in which my parents and my brother now live. This is partly because both Oregon—where I've spent the great majority of my time in community—and rural northeast Missouri—where I've spent most of my few adult years away from Oregon—are predominantly white, and furthermore have a history of racism whose legacy lives on in the racial makeup of the states (see "Oregon History and Politics" in Kara Huntermoon's "Why Diversity Is Good for Intentional Community," page 45). It's also partly because of the various factors explored in articles throughout this issue.

In my early 20s, I had the experience of being a racial minority—in fact, the only white person I dependably saw every day—for a year-and-a-half, and since then I've gravitated toward communities with missions of education and creating cross-cultural bridges, sharing what we've been fortunate to gain access to with others who may not have had access to it otherwise. At the same time, the relative racial homogeneity

has been among the most disappointing aspects of most of my formal intentional community experiences. And while the IC world has greatly broadened my experience of class diversity, it's also true that for many in the communities world, their home intentional communities are, if anything, less diverse than the settings they came from, more of a class-restricted, unintentionally racially homogeneous enclave.

In short, intentional communities have a lot of potential for addressing questions of class, race, and privilege. And, as we see in this issue, they also have a LOT of work to do in all of these areas to create the conditions where reality can catch up to ideals. In many ways they are no further along in addressing these issues than the wider society is—and in some ways, they are often less far along in practical terms, even if they're further along in "intention."

We hope that this issue will help communitarians to discuss this elephant in the room without shame, denial, rationalization, "fragility," or any of the other reactions that impede real progress. This kind of progress (in our own understanding and awareness, and in our external actions) can and must be made in order for the world many of us envision—in which the wounds created by conscious or unconscious classism, racism, and privilege are healed, and are replaced by a culture in which all have equal access to fulfilling, cooperative, resilient ways of life—to become the world we are living in.

We encourage your Letters (sent to [editor@ic.org](mailto:editor@ic.org)) in response to the articles in this issue, for publication in issues #179 or later. This is a conversation we hope will be an active, ongoing one within the communities movement until there is no longer a reason for it—a day which is unlikely to come until a lot more reflection, discussion, and work are done, until broad efforts are made to act upon some of the insights and suggestions shared in this issue, and upon others yet to emerge.

• • •

In concert with publication of this issue, we are undertaking an initiative intended to make it—and hopefully future issues as well—accessible to anyone, anywhere with an internet connection. As detailed in Kim Scheidt's Accountant's Note on page 7, in order to facilitate wider distribution and readership of this issue, **we are offering digital copies of issue #178 for free download from [ic.org/communities](http://ic.org/communities)**. Because of software upgrades, these include formats fully compatible with every variation of electronic device. The FIC is soliciting donations to support this offering, but not as a condition of digital issue download. If this model brings in enough support, we hope to make this arrangement permanent, greatly increasing our digital readership while still bringing in enough income to pay our bills from those who are willing and able (thank you!) to contribute monetarily to this effort. Also:

**We are asking for your help in spreading word about this offering.** Who do you know who would appreciate reading this issue? Please send them to [ic.org/communities](http://ic.org/communities) for their free digital copy. Please share news about this issue and this offering on blogs where you think they would be appreciated, in social media, in any other venue through which you reach people who might benefit from reading COMMUNITIES. We are excited to share this issue with the world in hopes that it can make a difference, both in the world of intentional communities and in the larger culture.

Thank you again for joining us in this issue! 🌱

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*Chris Roth edits* COMMUNITIES.

# BEAUTY AND BROKENNESS: Digesting Grief into Gratitude for Justice

*By Ridhi D’Cruz*

Seven years ago, I left India, the land that birthed me, and embarked on an epic adventure. I crossed the large pond we call the Pacific Ocean to nestle myself into the grassroots sustainability movement in Portland, Oregon. I chose to travel halfway across the world to help shift the story fueling the world’s destructive aspirations. The theme of this magazine edition is very dear to me. Writing about it for you, dear reader, someone I have not and possibly will never meet, is both terrifying and exciting. The written word: it has destroyed as much as it has enlivened. Know that these are my personal opinions that can not represent any of the groups I identify with. I entrust you with my words on the condition that you use them for peace and justice. May they help you transmute your grief into gratitude that we may walk this life as the wounded warriors we are. Broken and beautiful.

## Development

I grew up in a middle class Catholic family in a suburban house in south India. English was both my first language, and a class marker. As a young teenager, I found it excruciatingly difficult to translate the values my dear parents nourished within me into my life as a young adult as I was being pushed into an increasingly globalized and industrialized market culture. Back then, in the 1990s and early 2000s, my world was changing rapidly as unbridled development deformed my beloved garden city, Bangalore, into the half-hideous silicon city it is today. I neither knew what forces drove this perversion nor where it emanated from, much less what to do in its wake. Instead, I watched it, the Information Technology (IT) and Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) industry-driven development in Bangalore, burn furiously like an uncontrolled forest fire. Of course, at the time, I knew it was not entirely evil. There were diverse outcomes ranging from the commodification of everything, life itself, to the increased agency for women with their newfound financial independence. In the process, I forever lost my sense of home in that place.

## American Culture

While most of my good friends went underground, continuing to sedate themselves to dull the pain, I ran away. In 2005, I left to study Journalism in a nearby city, Chennai. I brought with me a burning desire to uncover deeper truths. As I learned about neoliberalism and globalization, my rage turned towards the United States and my intention shifted to leveraging the unpopular and potent stories of resistance to the toxic American dream we were being force-fed. I believe that 9/11 was a turning point globally. For me, when I saw those twin towers ablaze, slowly realizing it was on the news and not Hollywood’s latest white-male-savior-oriented sensation, I felt a sense of guilty elation. I didn’t admit it to anyone but for me, 9/11 symbolized retribution. I hated the US and the lifestyles it justified at the cost of so much dear to me. Being inherently a peace-loving and compassionate human being, I was horrified by my reaction to 9/11, knowing that the victims of this terrible crime did not deserve to die. And yet, there it was: the ugly truth of my deep-seated rage-filled hate for people I had never met. If that were true for me, then how easy it must be to resort to violence as a victim of violence oneself.

And yet, I also knew that I had found solace in its cultural products like Nirvana and Led Zeppelin. These were my songs of resistance against the deep-rooted patriarchy and internalized racism in my own culture. Journalism school overwhelmed me with its endless sea of news events like 9/11, sowing in me a healthy distrust for the written word. But it also helped me disentangle people both from their governments, and from ideological dogma. In a remote and impoverished village in southern India, an illiterate shepherd taught me that I had no right to assume that the financially poor were intellectually and emotionally poor. As I gazed up at the stars that night, and felt the separation between this shepherd and me dissolve, I realized that humanity is so much more complicated and unpredictable than I wanted to believe. I discovered that the truth I was searching for was neither singular nor static. And to uncover more of it was to face my own prejudices and privileges.

## Participatory Media and Natural Building

Fueled by the shocking revelations of my own class and caste privilege, I spent a couple of years in Mumbai, the financial capital of India, working with some of our most vulnerable. I used participatory media to contest my privilege as the storyteller, and offered platforms for street youth and the children of sex workers to tell their own stories. In Mumbai, I met my own limitations, burning myself out, as many of us do, learning painfully to revision my well-intentioned martyr complex for a deeper-rooted sense of self-worth, capacity, and calling. When I came undone, my only memory of anything healthy was the feeling I had as a child while playing in the mud. My crisis had finally gotten me to stop distracting myself. Shortly after, I found out about earthen building and its Indian corollary, vernacular architecture. I quickly fell in love with this life-way, as it awakened a cellular memory and the visceral possibility of building my own home, my own safe space, with my own two hands.

## Sustainability in India

After dabbling in various sustainability-oriented projects in India, ranging from our vernacular adobe building to hosting ecotourists at a family-owned wildlife resort in the UNESCO heritage site, the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, I once again found the toxic influence of Western thought choking our home-grown ways of being, criminalizing our vulnerable forest-dwelling tribal people and itinerant animal herders. Enraged at the overpowering influence of Eurocentrism in driving profit-oriented “progress” and in advancing a sterile, de-peopled notion of “wilderness,” I finally decided to listen to my father, a beloved mentor of mine. I chose to pursue a master’s degree in the United States—but in the field of Sociocultural Anthropology. He was not happy about that focus, mostly because he did not at the time understand that it would become the legitimized intellectual foundation upon which I built my practice of walking in this world with the very values that he and my dear mama had gifted me.

My dual purpose in moving to the US was first, to search deep within myself to find compassion for those I associate with the root causes

of our current path of violence, and second, to find communion with those working to make obsolete the system that feeds this violence to people and place. In my heart, I know that if we do not do this work here, on this land, then the “Work” is so much more challenging the rest of the world over. Such is the power of the American “dream,” the American story.

### A Second Home in Portland

I moved to Portland in Fall 2010 and aligned my graduate work with elevating the perspectives of Native Americans within public land management and supporting the creation of opportunities for their place-based lifeways. Grad school was hard. I often found I was the only “person of color” (POC) in the room. I often caught myself feeling out of place. However, I also felt a deep sense of belonging at times. It was here that I realized I would never really truly fit in anywhere. I allowed myself to grieve and then celebrate the sense of liberation it eventually filled me with as I more fully embraced my own brokenness and the healing potential for building bridges it provided. In the bureaus of government, I was crafting mechanisms for “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.” In the academy, I was learning social theories of power, culture, nature, and identity. With my Native collaborators and grassroots sustainability organizers, I learned the language of social and environmental justice. On this continent, I bring my vulnerabilities, strengths, and learnings from the wretched and blessed place I never quite fit into either: my beloved original home, India.



*Adobe building in India.*



*Natural Paint workshop in India.*

### Justice

This finally brings me to where I am now, in time and space, my current positioning as a change agent working in liminal spaces, along the edges, in between things, trying to smooth out the frayed edges of our torn cultural fabric. Formally, I work with a Portland-based nonprofit, City Repair, as one of three POC co-Executive Directors. We are dedicatedly steering our organizational path from placemaking towards place justice. I am propelling myself forward in increasingly uncertain times as our segregated spaces begin to entangle in uncomfortable and volatile ways. For me, placemaking is peacemaking and the creative reclamation of public space must ensure potential thriving for all creatures, especially our most vulnerable.

You would think that as a woman of color from the “global south,” I have had a hard life. And in some ways I have. Also in many ways I know I am incredibly blessed. I am surrounded by people who care about me and each other, and who are deeply interested in learning from each other. I have faced incessant sexual harassment on the streets in India, so I know a small fraction of what it is to feel unsafe in public space. My middle class privilege afforded me a car so I could try to insulate myself from my harassment. I was even privileged enough to afford to cross the Pacific pond to participate in the different flavor of patriarchy on this continent. Knowing the beauty and brokenness I do, I deem it necessary to unpack my privileges to leverage them for justice.

### Privilege and Allyship

Allyship is not a state of being to achieve after supporting the marginalized. Allyship is a state of doing. You cultivate it; it takes practice. Similarly, none of the isms we strive to dismantle are conditions that exist outside of our ability to unmake them. Racism is our support of an institutionally sanctioned crime against first POC and then “white” folks too. It is a crime against all humanity that disproportionately affects people of color and especially black folks with deadly consequences. I am not interested in oppression Olympics. We all have our traumas to work on. But we must set our shame-riddled defense mechanisms aside to integrate the painful experiences of those more vulnerable than us.

For this to be possible, “white” folks, especially, I plead with you, cultivate your practice of holding space for POC. Witness us without your ego. Acknowledge our trauma. Listen and listen deeply. I know you can empathize because you have also experienced injustice. But now is not the time to center this conversation around yourself. Allow, for this moment, the voices and stories of those oppressed and criminalized most severely at the hands of “whiteness.” This is time for acknowledging the truths you, hopefully, will not have to directly experience. Truths you are being called to acknowledge. Truths that will hopefully yield ways for you to leverage your privileges for our collective liberation.



*Place Justice Dialogue at Q Center.*

Photos courtesy of Ridhi D'Cruz

For your own ancestral healing, I urge you, don't run from it. Gather with people who similarly identify with their white skin privilege to help you metabolize your grief into gratitude. And perhaps even more importantly, have compassion for yourself and for those around you who are only beginning their journey. Call them in, instead of calling them out. Actively work on forgiving yourself, and your ancestors, as you cultivate your allyship. Be gentle but firm. And when a POC "calls you in," I invite you to respond not with the need to absolve yourself of our collective history, but rather to accept the invitation to grow. It is a gift. Treat it with respect even if it appears disguised as grief and rage. Some of this work we can do in mixed groups, across intersectional lines. But some of it we must do within our politically prescribed identities because despite their invisibility they constrain our lives in very real ways.

### Stories of Struggle

POC folks, I am assuming most of you do not read this because we are such a minority in the new sustainability movement. But if I am wrong, and you are reading this, then know that I am here in this continent to amplify your work to make it easier to then amplify our voices in places like India. It has enriched me so deeply to talk to illiterate shepherds in India to uncover my own ignorance of their profound cosmological awareness. It has enriched me so incredibly deeply to walk alongside my Native collaborators and learn the stories of their families brutalized, locked up in board-

ing schools, and then sitting across the table from me smiling about the delicious salmon and berry soup we are sharing at a celebration. I would LOVE to amplify your good work. I would love to learn with you and from you. Thank you for sharing your grief and demonstrating your resiliency. It will help the voices of the geopolitically disenfranchised across the globe to rise up with you. I am deeply grateful.

### The River

For moving forward, I leave you with the metaphor of a river. We are shifting from "sustainable" to "regenerative," from "racism" to "racist behaviors and systems," from identities to "identification"—and also returning from a static, reductionist noun-based worldview back to a dynamic, living-systems-inspired verb-based culture. This ensures that we acknowledge our responsibility to all our relations. The oppression alive today is not just the context we inherited. It lives off of our choices. When people ask me about cultural appropriation, I say, think of the cultural practice as a river of knowledge, a tributary enriching your life. I don't find it problematic that the river enriches your life as long as it also enriches the lives of others, that you are sharing the water and fertility of life as fairly as you can and that you are reciprocating this generous gift to ensure that future generations will also be blessed with this life-giving water.

If any of these conditions are untrue in your context, then I urge you to consider ways to align yourself with the regenerative cycles of life, rather than the broken feedback loops of isolation and destruction. Remember that you are at choice and that you can choose to embrace the full spectrum of our humanity and humbly discern the best way you can engage with it. We will most definitely and gloriously fail at "solving," "fixing," and "saving" anything. Oppression will surely continue to exist, for it seems to be an inherent part of life. But rather than depressing, I find it relieving that I don't have to try to do anything other than walk my own path with integrity, in relation to all things sacred to me. What an incredibly special gift it is to know that I have you all in my heart leading me forward, holding me in alignment. It is an incredible privilege to be gifted the opportunity to share this life and embrace our brokenness and beauty. Blessings to your journey, dear friend, wherever you are. Walk well. 🌿

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Ridhi D'Cruz.

Photos courtesy of cityrepair.org

Photo courtesy of Ridhi D'Cruz

POCSHN co-organizers.



POCSHN conference 2015.



POCSHN co-organizers.

Photos courtesy of Deseree Fontenot

# Moving Beyond Diversity Towards Collective Liberation: Weaving the Communities Movement into Intersectional Justice Struggles

By Deseree Fontenot

Struggles for equitable land-use and affordable housing have intensified across the country at an unprecedented rate in recent years. Decades of extractive urban renewal policies<sup>1</sup> and the entry of predatory financial institutions<sup>2</sup> into real estate markets have resulted in waves of displacement, gentrification, and housing insecurity for low income communities and communities of color in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

How can the Communities Movement address the suburbanization of poverty, the gentrifying face of the urban inner city, and the stark economic challenges of rural and agrarian communities? With a historical lack of racial, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity in the dominant narrative of intentional communities, what interventions might be necessary to make this movement more impactful in a time of great social and ecological crises? How could an entire discourse about collective placemaking and modeling ecologically sustainable lifeways be strengthened by a grounded racial and economic justice analysis and practice? What would it take to build a more accountable and expansive Communities Movement that is grounded in deeply intersectional justice work? How might we proliferate radically inclusive models of community, land stewardship, and governance that transform our relationships to land, place, home, and each other?

These are some of the questions that the People of Color Sustainable Housing Network<sup>3</sup> (POCSHN) has been tackling in our organizing work over the last three years in the San Francisco Bay Area. POCSHN is a resource network for self-identified people of color (POC) interested in building intentional, healthy, collective, and affordable housing communities in the Bay Area and beyond. The network was established in response to extreme increases in housing costs, rapid gentrification, and the lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity in the predominant intentional community, cooperative, and cohousing movements around the country. Our central vision is to create an entire ecosystem of cooperatively-controlled POC-centered communities that are ecologically, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally regenerative spaces.

POCSHN was founded in February of 2015 by long-time Bay Area residents, Tavi Baker and Lailan Huen. It started as a Meetup Group—

hosting events, trainings, and field visits to cohousing, cooperative, and farm sites that were primarily led or owned by people of color. Since our first day-long POC Sustainable Housing Convening in August of 2015, we have brought together groups and individuals passionate about collective land acquisition, cooperative living, and co-ownership models. Our efforts also include educational workshops at local and national convenings (including a keynote address at the 2016 West Coast Communities Conference), community study groups, and strategic partnerships with vision-aligned organizations including the Sustainable Economies Law Center<sup>4</sup> (SEL) and our fiscal sponsor, the Northern California Land Trust<sup>5</sup> (NCLT).

POCSHN has grown to become an intergenerational project with six core organizers (mostly volunteer-based) and a 1,200-person broader member base. Our time doing this work has made it abundantly clear that people are hungry for cooperative solutions to the housing crisis and want to be a part of shaping them.

Our efforts are POC-centered (though not exclusive) because our aims are to support communities on the front lines of racialized violence in the work of creating and reclaiming spaces that honor our historical legacies of survival, resistance, and ancestral placemaking practices. Many people have come to our network with horror stories about navigating white-dominated collective houses, cooperatives, communities, and other institutions—stories of unexamined power dynamics, tokenism, and problematic expectations rooted in a lack of ongoing personal and collective engagement with issues of race, class, and other types of identity formation that shape our lives.

It is important to acknowledge that building meaningful alliances across difference is hard work and is a particularly intimate task to come home to in community. However it is the deepest work we must do in order to enable a politics of solidarity to blossom into action. The work of cultivating skills in nonviolent communication, community governance, and effective responses to conflict must go hand-in-hand with the work of examining and transforming our relationships to wealth, land, and power. POCSHN is committed to building a narrative around commu-

nity co-ownership that interweaves these frameworks—with the hope of co-creating and sustaining cooperative living and co-ownership projects that are rooted in grassroots efforts to bring about more sustainable ways of relating to people and the planet.

Over the last three-plus years of organizing, we have encountered and accepted a number of visionary strategies that we believe are worth replicating and supporting within the Communities Movement. Here are three key strategies we recommend engaging to deepen your community's work on issues of race, class, and privilege:

### 1. Study Up!

There are many resources out there that unravel histories of settler colonial violence, labor extraction, discriminatory urban planning, radical land-based resistance movements, cooperative and community land trust history, and more! At the end of this article is a list of resources to check out on issues of displacement, national movements, and land histories. Use these resources as jumping-off points for conversation within your community. Folks should also engage the breadth of work out there on anti-oppression praxis, including the Catalyst Project<sup>6</sup> and Showing Up For Racial Justice<sup>7</sup>. Collective study and discussion is one way we can build shared understandings of the complex past and present that we are all accountable to and more holistic visions of the futures we seek to create.

### 2. Engage in Redistributive Politics

The radical redistribution of wealth, land, and power is key to creating the world we want to live in. There are community projects doing this work at various scales and it's worth looking at one community trend here. POCSHN has been in contact with a few different long-time rural and semi-rural intentional community projects that have engaged in the work of redistributing some of their land to people-of-color-led collectives. While I don't have permission to mention them directly in this article, I believe that this could be one way of approaching questions of diversity for groups who may have started off as a fairly homogenous bunch who now wish to expand their membership, rather than the usual "add and stir" inclusion model where a few folks who carry marginalized identities are admitted. Let's instead work towards models that put forth a greater shift in governance and representation.

### 3. Support Radical Financing Models

With the cost of land and housing skyrocketing in many areas around the country, it is more important than ever that we invest in financing models that build community-wide assets and long-term permanently affordable spaces that are out of the grips of the speculative market and into the hands of the people. A couple really awesome efforts we would like to share: The Sogorea Te' Land Trust established the Shuumi Land Tax<sup>8</sup> for non-Indigenous people who live in traditional Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone territory to make a voluntary annual financial contribution to their critical community work of bringing land back into Indigenous stewardship. Secondly, Liberating 23rd Ave Community Building<sup>9</sup>, a long-time, low-rent community building in East Oakland, ran a successful crowdfunding campaign to help collectively purchase their multi-use building.

### What's Next for POCSHN?

POCSHN is launching two exciting initiatives in the coming year: The

East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative (EBPREC) and the Community Co-Ownership Initiative<sup>10</sup>.

In partnership with the Sustainable Economies Law Center, we formed the East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative, an umbrella project that is a California cooperative corporation that can raise capital through multiple small investments, keep land permanently affordable, and provide a limited equity appreciation model for residents. For more information about this exciting initiative, visit the EBPREC website, [www.ebprec.org](http://www.ebprec.org).

The Community Co-Ownership Initiative is a partnership between the Northern California Land Trust and POCSHN, along with other members of the Bay Area CLT Consortium<sup>11</sup> (BACCLT) to diversify and expand access to shared ownership and resident-controlled housing through leadership training, development of new financing tools, and technical support. The partnership leverages the technical expertise and stewardship knowledge of NCLT with the broad reach and engagement of POCSHN's diverse grassroots membership. As POCSHN's fiscal sponsor, we are partnering with NCLT to build joint organizational capacity, cultivate prospective and existing cooperative resident groups, and establish new sites for permanently affordable housing across the Bay Area.

If you are interested in helping to grow, connect with, and support the work of POC Sustainable Housing Network, please visit our website at [www.pochousingnetwork.com](http://www.pochousingnetwork.com).

### Resources to Explore on Land Justice: Urban, Rural, and Suburban Issues

**Land Justice:** *Reimagining Land, Food and the Commons in the United States:* [foodfirst.org/land-justice-re-imagining-land-food-and-the-commons](http://foodfirst.org/land-justice-re-imagining-land-food-and-the-commons)

**Revolutionary Urban Spaces:** Study Group Reading List: [docs.google.com/document/d/11XTqmEO28UeqWoQrckv8IdmPl8QyQtVzDvLiPQrbevs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11XTqmEO28UeqWoQrckv8IdmPl8QyQtVzDvLiPQrbevs/edit?usp=sharing)

**Right to the City Alliance:** [righttothecity.org](http://righttothecity.org)

**Urban Displacement Project:** [www.urbandisplacement.org](http://www.urbandisplacement.org)

**Sogorea Te' Land Trust:** [sogoreate-landtrust.com](http://sogoreate-landtrust.com)

**Suburbanization of Poverty:** "The Changing Geography of US Poverty": [www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-changing-geography-of-us-poverty](http://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-changing-geography-of-us-poverty)

**"Housing Challenges in Rural America Persistent, on the Rise":** [nlihc.org/article/housing-challenges-rural-communities-persistent-rise](http://nlihc.org/article/housing-challenges-rural-communities-persistent-rise)

**Down on the Farm: Wall Street: America's New Farmer:** [www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI\\_Report\\_Down\\_on\\_the\\_Farm.pdf](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Report_Down_on_the_Farm.pdf)

**Movement Generation: Justice & Ecology Project:** [movementgeneration.org](http://movementgeneration.org)

**Arc of Justice (film):** [www.arcofjusticefilm.com](http://www.arcofjusticefilm.com)—documentary about New Communities, Inc., the first community land trust in the US that was created by black farmers in the face of land loss and discrimination. 🐦

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1. [www.overgaardtonnesen.dk/TEKSTERNE/09-Weber-Extracting-Value-from-the-City.pdf](http://www.overgaardtonnesen.dk/TEKSTERNE/09-Weber-Extracting-Value-from-the-City.pdf)

2. [www.antievictionmap.com/wallstreet](http://www.antievictionmap.com/wallstreet)

3. [www.pochousingnetwork.com](http://www.pochousingnetwork.com)

4. [www.theselc.org](http://www.theselc.org)

5. [nclt.org](http://nclt.org)

6. [collectiveliberation.org](http://collectiveliberation.org)

7. [www.showingupforracialjustice.org](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org)

8. [sogoreate-landtrust.com/shuumi-land-tax](http://sogoreate-landtrust.com/shuumi-land-tax)

9. [www.youcaring.com/thetenantsandthecommunity-773671](http://www.youcaring.com/thetenantsandthecommunity-773671)

10. [www.pochousingnetwork.com/projects](http://www.pochousingnetwork.com/projects)

11. [www.bacclt.org](http://www.bacclt.org)

# On "Waiting" for People of Color

By Michael Brickler



*Daniel's Mountain view, land site.*



*Daniel's Mountain view, land site.*



*Unmarked slave grave site.*



*Arrowheads acquired by Pete Davis.*

Photos courtesy of Michael Brickler

Pete Davis

I am living on land where my grandfather was born a slave, land he and his brother purchased from his former "owner." This land, combined with my values and discouragement with the way our culture is headed, calls me to form an intentional community (IC).

In addition to its African American legacy, the land also seems to have a meaningful Native American history. A friend who is related to me on the slave-owning side has found Native American arrowheads on the land. We are located at a convergence of rivers that are part the homeland of the Monacan people.

The history of people of color on this land influenced me to make people of color, and diversity, central to the development of our IC—and to decide that the makeup of the community will be mostly people of color and have as one of its core values diversity of culture.

Starting an IC can be an overwhelming proposition. It certainly is for me. To find direction and develop strategies, I have done a lot of reading, visiting communities, taking workshops, and attending IC conferences. While this has helped in my understanding of how to form an intentional community, I found little help in centering this community on people of color. The conferences had few people of color attending and almost none were looking for a community in my area. I heard interest in attracting people of color and curiosity as to why few people of color seemed to be in most ICs but I saw very little success in attracting people of color to most intentional communities.

As part of my research, I've learned that ICs have been formed with

some success by people of color coming together where they already live and then developing a kind of intentional community there with people they already know. Success has come despite having to overcome tremendous outside pressure such as experienced by Dudley Street in Boston, and New Communities, Inc. of Albany, Georgia, and the violent repression of MOVE in Philadelphia. The high cost incurred in these cases may terrorize others from considering similar communities. These communities are separate from the wider ICs movement. They also seem centered on staying in an area while attracting people from that area.

I began to question assumptions about developing ICs that include a lot of people of color. I realized that, to be honest, what I have been looking for are people of color who want to live where I am and who think like I do. I wonder: Can I get both? People who want to live where I am in most cases already live here and are most likely to be found here. Finding people who think like me is a bit trickier: they would probably have a similar educational background and have my luxury of exploring alternative ways of living.

More assumptions I began to question: to a person rooted by family and other concerns in their current location, joining a new, separate community where a group of people can live together and share resources and goals that reflect their values may not seem practical. It just makes sense: people of color may not want to leave where they live and feel at least somewhat comfortable, to go to some strange rural area where they may face hostility, rural racism, and feel even more like outsiders in

this culture than we already do. On top of that comes the weirdness of having to live with strangers who may have a different cultural way of communicating, as well as eating, cooking, cleaning, working, and even relaxing. To say nothing of adding resource-sharing to the mix!

Looked at this way, it just makes sense that ICs are predominantly comprised of some people and not others. It's not just about people of color; working class white people are not found commonly in ICs either, possibly for some of the same reasons.

People in ICs tend to be educated and have a good bit of privilege. I was brought up in a privileged household. Everyone of my generation, my parents' generation, and most of my grandparents' generation had a college education and good-paying, professional jobs. For people of color—in particular African American, Hispanic, and Native American peoples—this is very unusual, when many are working class and without a college education. It would seem to me they would thus tend to be looking to get out of poverty and live in a decent neighborhood. Is it right or even wise for me to be expecting people of color—who may have never lived in a middle class neighborhood—to forget about experiencing that in order to live with me in the middle of nowhere with a lower standard of creature comforts than they may aspire to?

In discussing class, race, and privilege in ICs, we are discussing oppression. Class seems invented to justify oppressing people. Race seems an invented construct, cannot really be defined, and is used to separate and oppress people. Privilege tends to become self-justifying and an excuse for oppression.

In our efforts to develop ICs, we who seek to create alternatives that respond to what is lacking in our societal framework, and who have escaped oppression to a great extent, have an obligation to those who have not been so lucky. It might seem that we can meet this obligation by *including* people in our ICs who have suffered more oppression and have less privilege than we have into our communities. But *how* do we do this? How do we develop diversity of culture, ethnicity, and class in intentional communities?

Perhaps it is alright not to know how. In fact, I think *the answer may lie in admitting that we don't know how.*

On this analysis, I find I am currently playing a “waiting and coaxing” game: waiting until people of color appear who are open to joining a community and then trying to coax them into joining my community when, I must admit, it may not be right for them. This searching and waiting game goes against my nature. I need a more active approach.

And what is the most effective expenditure of my energy? Should I try to “sell” people on the idea of moving into a potentially uncomfortable situation?

How does my privilege play into this? Does my education and background grant me authority to tell others how to live?

Instead, I have begun to see my privilege as something to be thankful for, and to be thankful for it by service.

It's a sizable time commitment, when most of us feel we already have too little time—but when we acknowledge that we are blessed, there becomes an obligation to make time to give back.

One way I might best achieve my aims is by working with people and organizations who are already here to help find better solutions for how we all live in our local community. While I may hope for an opportunity to let them know one such solution could be an intentional community, that cannot be my starting point. The starting point is serving as an agent to help them find solutions to problems they, and organizations they are already working with, have identified as major obstacles to progress for their community.

When I make it part of our IC's mission to serve local communities of color, not only do I contribute to my surrounding community, the IC also receives the added benefit of connecting our IC to the surrounding community—giving us allies in that surrounding community. When I visited the Damanhur IC in northern Italy, I talked with long-standing members who said Damanhur started out isolating itself from its neighbors. They quickly discovered that this only led to mistrust and more division. When they instead chose a path of being of service to the surrounding community—for example, by starting a volunteer fire department, and

turning an abandoned factory into a local business and community center—they became allied with their neighbors and an integral part of their community.

While I am just beginning on this path, I don't believe our ICs can be successful without this kind of service work. I consider this a kind of “bridging,” connecting our IC with the larger community. This bridging is in fact written into our IC's core mission.

As I look over this article, I cannot help but judge my efforts thus far inadequate: mentioning doing service I have not yet done. It has only been a couple months since I have decided upon this new direction for our IC, but I can see how I have allowed the many demands on my time and energy to divert my intentions. This article has helped me re-center in my goals and recommit to acting on them. 🍷

*Michael Brickler is a web-media streaming consultant and performer who is forming an intentional community, Donald's View, based on Diversity, Bridging, and Consciousness in southwestern Virginia on the land where his great-great-grandfather was born a slave.*

## Recommended Links

**Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Boston, Massachusetts:** [www.amazon.com/Holding-Ground-Rebirth-Dudley-Street/dp/1574480464](http://www.amazon.com/Holding-Ground-Rebirth-Dudley-Street/dp/1574480464), [www.newday.com/film/holding-ground-rebirth-dudley-street](http://www.newday.com/film/holding-ground-rebirth-dudley-street), [www.yesmagazine.org/issues/cities-are-now/how-one-boston-neighborhood-stopped-gentrification-in-its-tracks](http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/cities-are-now/how-one-boston-neighborhood-stopped-gentrification-in-its-tracks)

**New Communities, Inc., Albany, Georgia:** [www.newcommunities-inc.com](http://www.newcommunities-inc.com), [www.arcofjusticefilm.com](http://www.arcofjusticefilm.com)

**MOVE, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:** [www.abebooks.com/9781937868321/Burn-MOVE-Philadelphia-Police-Department-193786832X/plp](http://www.abebooks.com/9781937868321/Burn-MOVE-Philadelphia-Police-Department-193786832X/plp), [www.barnesandnoble.com/w/let-it-burn-michael-boyetette/1117474135?type=eBook](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/let-it-burn-michael-boyetette/1117474135?type=eBook), [zeitgeistfilms.com/film/letthefireburn](http://zeitgeistfilms.com/film/letthefireburn)

**Damanhur, Italy:** [www.damanhur.org](http://www.damanhur.org), [www.damanhur.org/en/create-sustainable/damanhur-crea](http://www.damanhur.org/en/create-sustainable/damanhur-crea)

**Donald's View, Eagle Rock, Virginia:** [www.ic.org/directory/donalds-view](http://www.ic.org/directory/donalds-view)

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**In our efforts to develop ICs,  
we who have escaped oppression  
to a great extent have an  
obligation to those who have  
not been so lucky.**

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# Moving Beyond White Fragility: Lessons from Standing Rock

*By Murphy Robinson*

Last winter I spent six weeks living with the indigenous water protectors at Oceti Sakowin Camp, supporting their efforts to turn back the oil pipeline being built under the Missouri River next to the Standing Rock Reservation, part of the homeland of the Lakota people. As a white person from New England, this was the longest period of my life that I'd spent in a space where I was the racial minority. The thing I missed most deeply when I left the camp in late January was the vibrant and continual negotiation of racial and colonial privilege.

Oceti Sakowin Camp was not a safe space physically: police violence was endemic on the front lines, the camp was under constant threat of being raided or razed by militarized forces, and despite the no-alcohol policy in the camp, illicit alcohol use and unhealthy interactions were recurring problems within the Water Protector community. The camps were the most visible manifestation in recent times of the colonial war of genocide and land theft that has been going on in North America since the first European settlers arrived, and it did feel like a war zone. As one indigenous water protector observed, "This is the exact same war we've been fighting for 500 years...except now they are shooting us with rubber bullets, and we have iPhones to record it with."

Non-indigenous allies were welcomed in to join the resistance against the pipeline, while the movement remained under indigenous leadership, with a clear call for peaceful prayer as our sole tactic. I was one of the white people who came to support the work. My first few days in camp were a crash course in what NOT to do, mostly learning by making mistakes. After attending the newcomer orientation I understood how to avoid causing the most common offenses, but it immediately became very clear that I was unconsciously embodying a lot of colonial culture, and needed to shut up and listen so that I could relearn some very basic ways of being in community. One of the most impactful concepts taught in the orientation was this: When an indigenous person corrects you, the proper response is gratitude. Rather than being offended or defensive, recognize that it is a huge gift and act of trust for someone to take the time to tell you how to do something properly in our culture. When you react with resistance and protest, you dishonor and

reject that gift. Just say thank you and change your behavior, that is all that is required.

In late December I found a home in Two Spirit Camp, which was a community for queer, transgender, and two spirit water protectors and white allies. The camp was led by a Lakota two spirit woman with an intact lineage of spiritual tradition, and out of the 16 or so residents, just over half were indigenous. Most of the camps or *oyates* (smaller sub-camps within the larger water protector camp area) were for either specific tribal groups (such as the Oglala Lakota Camp or Michigan Camp where most of the Anishinaabe water protectors lived, which were usually wholly indigenous) or specific task forces (such as the Medic Oyate, which was predominantly white). Two Spirit Camp was one of the few camps where indigenous and non-indigenous people lived together and supported each other as a family group.

Everyone in Two Spirit Camp had a keen awareness of colonialism and white culture, and the ways those systems of privilege pervade all our lives. While Oceti Sakowin Camp was in a war zone, the Two Spirit Camp commu-



Photos courtesy of Murphy Robinson

nity felt like one of the safest places I've ever been when it comes to racial tensions. Unlike what I've seen in groups working on racism in the outside world, we were able to move beyond the White Fragility and White Guilt that completely bog down many attempts to communicate about privilege and oppression. Our community was built on a common mission (stopping the pipeline), and all of us had given up a great deal to come and live in the sub-zero temperatures of a North Dakota winter to defend the waters. We depended on each other for daily survival tasks like chopping firewood, cooking meals, and keeping a fire going in each tipi or tent. We had good reason to trust that everyone's intentions were good, and that gave us the safety to speak honestly about white privilege when it manifested in our camp.

Nearly daily, I would receive feedback about my unconscious acts of racism: using a phrase with derogatory roots, displaying impatience that betrayed my sense of entitlement to any space I was in, making a joke about Spirit Animals that made light of the sacred traditions of Lakota culture. Because everyone at camp understood that we had all come to earnestly fight against colonial oppression, we could correct each other with an attitude of "Let me help you correct something you don't realize is offensive" rather than an attitude of "You are such a bad person!" I did genuinely feel grateful every time I was corrected, because I knew it was a key way of helping each other unlearn patterns of oppression that are unconscious. We all felt an emotional freedom to speak our needs and reactions in a community bonded by love. We laughed constantly in that camp, letting the joy of community give us strength against the massive forces we were facing. When one of the jokes struck a sour note, someone would speak a correction, the jokester would apologize briefly, and then we'd keep on laughing.

The freedom to talk about these acts of un-

conscious racism without the fear of offending someone was something I deeply mourned when I returned to Vermont. Here, making a simple observation about colonial and capitalist patterns I see us enacting in our communities has lost me long-standing friendships very quickly. We don't have a culture of "correction as a gift" and instead see correction as criticism. When I make observations about the white supremacist culture that is endemic even in our politically correct liberal communities, people get very defensive. I get these reactions as a white person talking to other white people, so I can't imagine how much worse it would be to try to speak these things as a person of color in this environment. I've come to see our collective White Fragility as one of the key roadblocks that is holding us back from creating a more inclusive culture.

I wish I knew a magic formula for moving past White Fragility. So far what I have seen work at Standing Rock was a combination of five things:

1. Bring people together over a common cause that is greater than themselves.
2. Create a community where white people are in the minority.
3. Create a standard of People of Color being in leadership.
4. Give everyone a basic orientation to how privilege works and why we are trying to dismantle it.
5. Create a norm of prayer, ceremony, offerings, and gratitude.

Under these five conditions, White Fragility seemed to evaporate. I'm not sure if the same thing can be achieved in a predominantly white space like rural Vermont. Creating a norm of prayer and ceremony could certainly be done very poorly in a white space, since the tendency is to use culturally appropriative practices from other cultures.

The one space in Vermont where I've been able to consistently have the conversations I want to be having about colonialism and racism is a local decolonization solidarity group that has spent a year and a half educating themselves about colonization and received a lot of mentorship from a local indigenous elder. We are an entirely white group, but we can toss around ideas and analyses freely because we all trust that everyone is there to unlearn their unconscious habits that are harmful. We receive correction from each other gently and gratefully. Sometimes our conversations start to seem circular, as if we are only preaching to the choir, and we struggle with finding ways to bring these ideas to the wider community where we live.

Intentional communities tend to have strong shared value systems, and I think they would make wonderful environments in which to do this work of transmuting White Fragility into White Humility. Another thing we can do as white people is to get off our butts and put our time, money, and physical bodies into the struggles for an end to racial violence in this country. For me the pilgrimage of putting myself in service to an indigenous-led movement taught me things that have forever changed how I see the world. Both at home and on the front lines, we all need to be doing this work. 🌱

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*Murphy Robinson lives on unceded Abenaki territory, sometimes known as Vermont. She runs Mountainsong Expeditions, where she teaches archery, ethical hunting, and wilderness skills in a feminist, anti-racist environment. She is grateful that Mountainsong Expeditions recently acquired land through a beautiful community fundraising effort, and is also deeply uncomfortable with the colonial system of land ownership. She welcomes students and interns on this mountainside property for those who want to deepen their sense of nature connection and grapple with privilege together while building community. You can contact her through her website at [www.mountainsongexpeditions.com](http://www.mountainsongexpeditions.com).*



# BARRIERS TO DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITY

By Crystal Farmer

Although I don't live in a community yet, I have spent three years organizing Charlotte Cohousing in North Carolina. This year I gave three workshops on diversity in community. I attended the Cohousing Conference and the Twin Oaks Communities Conference for the first time this year. I also participated for the second time in New Culture Summer Camp in West Virginia.

I love that the intentional community movement is progressive and forward thinking. The movement is focused on equality and recognizes that everyone deserves access to a home. But I can see the huge group of people who have been unintentionally left out of the movement. Thanks to the Cohousing Research Network, we know that interest in cohousing crosses all races and socioeconomic classes, and it's probably true for other intentional communities too. The reality is that only a small cross-section of the population ends up living in community. Based on my observations, I offer several ways intentional communities unintentionally exclude people of color.

I grew up in an area that had a strong sense of community. We weren't intentional in the sense that we chose to live there. Instead, my neighborhood was the result of segregationist housing policies that forced black families to rent or buy only in certain parts of town. These policies were implemented across the country starting in the 1930s, until 1968 with the passage of the Fair Housing Act. By then, the racial makeup of urban, suburban, and rural neighborhoods was set, and the only change has been the recent trend of gentrification. As a result, the average black person's neighborhood is 45 percent black, while a white person's neighborhood is 75 percent white.

Twin Oaks is a short drive from Charlottesville, where we all have been reminded that race is not a solved problem in our country. When I drive through Virginia, I'm careful about what gas stations I stop at. It's no longer the days of the Green Book (a directory of black-friendly establishments published during segregation), but I am afraid that if I need help, the officers who respond won't be there to help me. If I were going to relocate, it would not be to rural Virginia. The allure of untainted nature and private space feels fundamentally unsafe to me, a black woman from the South.

The urban environment, especially in the Charlotte area, is no better in terms of diversity. Charlotte residents have a clear idea of what neighborhoods are safe, close to shopping, and have good schools. Those neighborhoods are overwhelmingly white. My forming cohousing community members had difficulty including the word "urban" on our website because of its association with the inner city—crime, rundown houses, and bad schools. Those areas exist in Charlotte, and the group is not interested in building in those areas.

Twin Oaks values green living and sustainability. After three years of visiting intentional communities, I'm familiar with composting toilets. However, using them for a weekend versus the rest of our lives is a big ask for my black family members. Black home ownership is only 41 percent nationwide, and many of those homeowners are only a generation removed from outhouses and coal stoves. The idealism of having a smaller footprint feels like the goalposts still moving in capitalist America. Understanding the impact on the environment and being asked to sacrifice for the largesse of others is a choice that many black families are not ready to make.

Which brings me to food. Healthy eating is becoming more and more mainstream, yet many black communities exist in food deserts, where the healthiest options are snack food at the convenience store or salad at Mc-

Donalds. As anyone who has been to a black family reunion can tell you, black people don't always eat healthy. When I visit communities that focus on vegan and vegetarian meals, I feel alienated and underfed. Living in community, I know that I would miss out on fellowship and friends if I choose to cook my own food or avoid mealtime because of my diet choices.

Another overlooked aspect of community living is division of labor. I admired Twin Oaks' labor credit system that put all work, from laundry to accounting, on even footing. However, in capitalist America, black people are more often found working as the housekeeper than the secretary. My great grandmother was a nanny for white families, and my grandmother was a janitor at a textile mill. My mother worked as a teacher, and my sister and I were the first to go to college for professional careers. While intentional communities aspire to be colorblind in work assignments, unexamined bias about competence and education may lead to discrimination in work assignments. If human resources professionals still fail to avoid bias when looking at qualified candidates, I question whether an optimistic volunteer will critically examine their prejudices when doling out work assignments.

The final factor for black participation in intentional communities is income and access to credit. This is more obvious in cohousing, where each member is expected to own their own home, but it could still affect other communities that ask for a financial investment for starting or participating in community. In 2010, the average credit score of a black home buyer was 677, compared to 734 for a white home buyer. That difference equals hundreds of dollars in monthly mortgage payments, and, combined with the lower median income of black families (\$20,000 lower), it explains why only 41 percent of black families own homes, compared to 71 percent of white families. It's more difficult for black families to invest upfront in community-building.

How can intentional communities recruit more diversity? Twin Oaks has set a good example by hosting anti-racism training. All communities should educate themselves on implicit bias and white privilege and have a robust discussion about how it plays out in their lives. The communities should then reach out to local people of color who are familiar with the community and its members. They should ask for feedback and listen, which might be the hardest part. If you've felt a certain resistance to the ideas in the articles and feel the desire to defend your community, that's a sign that you can spend more time listening. If intentional communities want to achieve social justice, they must make space for people of color and other minorities to speak. Some of the words spoken will be angry, but all of it will be what has been true for us. Ninety-nine percent of the time, that truth sounds alien to white communities. Instead of dwelling in guilt or defensiveness, find an element of shared truth and think about what you can do to move forward.

I believe the intentional communities movement is a way to change the world, but it can only change if the people who are drawn to it feel welcome and included. 🌱



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*Crystal Byrd Farmer is an engineer turned educator. She is the organizer of Charlotte Cohousing, supporting three forming communities. She is passionate about encouraging people to change their perspectives on diversity, relationships, and the world. She loves organizing meetups, teaching, and playing with her six-year-old daughter. As the owner of Big Sister Team Building, she leads team-building exercises and creates mobile escape room experiences.*

# Growing Inclusivity in Cohousing: Stories and Strategies

By Rosemary Linares

For me, it is impossible to separate my professional training and personal identities from my experience living in my Midwest cohousing community. As a queer, Latina, cisgender<sup>1</sup> woman, I easily pass as a straight, white female. I have been married to a cisgender Mexican male for the past seven years. We have two children who were both assigned male at birth and who will determine their respective gender identities and sexual orientations over time. My eldest is technically my step-son, but our bond is beyond biology. He is half-white and half-Mexican. Our youngest is half-Mexican, a quarter-Cuban, and a quarter-white. My white mother lives two doors down from our house in the same cohousing community.

My family lives in a relatively wealthy, highly educated town, but we would not have been able to purchase our home in this cohousing community had it not been for the post-recession drop in housing prices. We purchased our home from a bank after an eight month waiting period for a “short” sale. We learned about the short sale opportunity through my mother, who has lived here since 2002.

I share all of this very personal information to locate my intersecting identities of privilege and marginalization, as they inform my viewpoint. These identities also guide my personal and professional work for self determination and liberation. My background and social identities influence how I experience the world and how others view and make assumptions about me. As a result, I have dedicated my academic and career trajectories to focusing on social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. I launched a consulting company in 2010 to support nonprofits and universities in strengthening these areas.

Yet, when I moved with my family to this predominately white, progressive cohousing community, I was initially stunned by the implicit bias, microaggressions, overt acts of racism, stereotyping, and other racist and homophobic experiences we have had to overcome in order to continue living here. While these struggles have been, and continue to be taxing, I know that we would face similar issues in other neighborhoods that were not also trying to build intentional community. We stay here because there are also many bright and positive advantages to living in this community. For us, the biggest draws are twofold: my mother lives two doors down (our kids have two refrigerators to raid!) and our children delight in having a solid group of supportive friends of different ages, always ready to play zombie tag at any given moment. What a double blessing!

While we have enjoyed these advantages, our initiation to living in cohousing was quite jarring. Three months after moving into our new home, a serious conflict erupted regarding a display for Día de Los

Muertos in the Common House, and we were the catalysts. Our idea was to assemble a temporary, traditional altar for Day of the Dead in a well trafficked area of the Common House where neighbors could leave photos of loved ones who had passed. The display would last for two weeks and culminate in an evening celebration with neighbors, drinking atole, eating pan de muertos, and sharing stories. Typically in Mexico and Central America, beginning in October, families create ofrendas to celebrate loved ones who have passed, and leave them on display for weeks. My husband shared with me that where he is from, families first present sugar skulls, sweets, toys, and other food to honor deceased children (angelitos) to help their spirits return to earth on November 1st. This annual tradition culminates in the afternoon of November 2nd when families head to the cemeteries to clean and decorate the tombs where deceased members of their family are buried. Families spend all night through the morning of November 3rd in the cemetery with candles and food, sharing stories to remember their ancestors.

In our community, we came upon an unwritten rule that prohibited religious or seasonal displays in the Common House, such as Christmas decorations, lasting over a period of multiple days. This rule came about, in part, because a neighbor whose Jewish ancestors were brutalized during Christmas was very triggered by such displays. It was not a formal policy. Being new to the community, I did not know about this unwritten understanding. After collaborating

with other neighbors to sponsor this event, we were surprised when several community members were very displeased with our community-wide invitation to set up this Day of the Dead display. My neighbors' general disagreement emphasized that “it was inappropriate” for there to be Christian iconography on display in our common spaces over the period of two weeks. While my husband and I shared that this ceremony was rooted in pre-colonial indigenous spirituality that was syncretized with Catholicism due to European colonization and imperialism, this historical context did not change our neighbors' objections.

A painful conflict ensued. I set up the display in spite of the dissension from several community members and I take responsibility for my contribution to the escalation of the conflict. In the end, the display was beautiful (please see the photo) and the event was well attended by many adults and children. However, we have not had another Día de los Muertos, done in its original cultural context, in the Common House since.

Determined to prevent future pain like the hurt my family experienced, I launched an ad hoc committee called the Cultural Expression Committee. Returning to my community organizing roots felt produc-

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**I was initially stunned by the implicit bias, microaggressions, overt acts of racism, stereotyping, and other racist and homophobic experiences we have had to overcome in order to continue living here.**

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tive, and I convened this group over the span of one year. Organically the work of the group shifted. Rather than dissolve the committee, several members continued to work together to support a transformative process to change the community decision-making rule from “consensus decision making” to “consensus-oriented decision making.”

One year after the Day of the Dead conflict, Tim Hartnett, author of *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making: The CODM Model for Facilitating Groups to Widespread Agreement*, presented a dynamic training in our community. Stemming from this training, the community changed key policies in our Book of Agreements. Five years later, we have seen the paradigm shift with regard to our decision-making processes. In some ways, I think CODM allows us to make certain decisions at a faster pace, and for other decisions, the process feels more tedious. All in all, our ability to include and honor multiple perspectives during the process of making a decision is laudable. I am grateful for the evolution of our decision-making rules resulting from the adoption of CODM.

My initial orientation to cohousing made an indelible impact on me. I realize now that I naively made certain assumptions about my neighbors and expected them to all be friendly with me. I quickly learned that this was not the case, and that is ok. Exactly six years later, I would like to say that I turned this experience into an opportunity for learning and practicing setting boundaries with others. Now I share intimate information with only a few close neighbors who have become friends. As I reflect on other times of conflict in the community, I recognize that we all bring into community our respective social identities of privilege and marginalization, relationships, histories of childhood trauma, and present-day struggles. All of these factors influence how we interact and show up in conflict.

Because oppression permeates and manifests itself in cohousing, as in

all facets of society, I encourage those of us living in or studying cohousing to apply a racial equity lens to this experience of intentionally building community. A starting place is with the examination of disparities in the membership of people of color in cohousing communities. According to a 2011 study conducted by Angela Sanguinetti and highlighted in the article, “Cohousing’s Diversity Problem” by Amanda Abrams, 95 percent of cohousers are white, 82 percent identify as Democrats, 66 percent hold a graduate degree, and the majority are relatively affluent.<sup>2</sup> However, Angela Sanguinetti’s research has highlighted the importance of differentiating between new-build cohousing communities and retrofit cohousing communities, as the latter tend to be more diverse by race and socioeconomic status.<sup>3</sup>

This overrepresentation of white people in new-build cohousing communities is similar to the demographics of the leadership of the nonprofit, corporate, and public sectors. In her article “No I Won’t Stop Saying ‘White Supremacy’” critical race author and scholar Robin DiAngelo points out that the leaders of this country’s institutions are primarily white. For example, for the period of 2016 to 2017, “congress is 90% white; governors are 96% white; top military advisers are 100% white; the [current] president and vice president are 100% white; the current POTUS cabinet members are 91% white; teachers are 83% white; full time college professors are 84% white; people who decide which TV shows we see are 93% white; people who decide which books we read are 90% white; people who decide which news is covered are 85% white; and people who decide which music is produced are 95% white.”<sup>4</sup> Fortune 500 CEOs are 96 percent white, according to the Center for American Progress.<sup>5</sup> For the last 20 years, BoardSource has tracked the racial and ethnic demographic data of board members of nonprofit organizations. Over that period of time participation of



Photos courtesy of Rosemary Linares

people of color on boards has never reached more than 18 percent.<sup>6</sup>

NPR highlights that as of July 1, 2015, 50.2 percent of babies born that year were babies of color in the United States.<sup>7</sup> This statistic includes my preschooler. The US Census predicts that by 2044 the racial and ethnic demographics of our country will have shifted so that there will be more people of color than non-Hispanic white people. Given this future shift, at what point will these sectors, including intentional communities, also shift to reflect the demographics of our country? How can we accelerate this change so that cohousing communities actively engage and reflect the demographics of the general population? What are the barriers to making this shift happen? This is an area of focus I tackle on a daily basis in my professional role. But at home, I recognize that my cohousing community and the intentional communities movement are at the beginning of collectively designing strategies to effectively move the needle.

To start moving the needle, those of us in the cohousing movement need to overcome the barriers that prevent inclusion and promote racial and ethnic homogeneity. From my personal experience and observation, the following is a list of barriers to inclusion in cohousing. While not exhaustive, this list may help spark important conversations, leading to action:

1) As noted in the data above regarding the demographics of intentional communities, the majority of members reflect privileged identities. Those with privileged identities include people who are white, male, heterosexual, middle-to upper class, able-bodied, and/or Christian adults. I do not highlight these identities here to attack, blame, or shame anyone with any combination of these privileges. Encouraging guilt leads to inaction. Rather, I advocate that people with privileged identities leverage their privilege to learn and make change. This momentum forward starts with explicitly naming and recognizing one's identities that hold privilege. In my experience, the homogeneity reflected in cohousing communities lends itself to a severe lack of collective awareness and action regarding issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Most of my white neighbors have not actively evaluated their implicit bias, white privilege, white fragility, white savior complex, bias toward colorblindness, or complicity with white supremacy. It's hard stuff, and I've certainly made mistakes along my path to understand and accept my racial identity. But this remains a primary barrier to cultivating inclusive and diverse cohousing communities in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, age, and other markers of difference.

2) Social networks tend to be comprised of people with the same racial and ethnic backgrounds as one another. One of the most powerful recruitment strategies for new cohousing community members is through current members' individual spheres of influence. This is how my family moved to the same community where my mother lives. So when 75 percent of white people have only white friends, they are not likely to actively recruit new neighbors of color who fall outside of their social network.<sup>8</sup> Also, people of color want to avoid being tokenized and marginalized by their neighbors. For some, joining a homogeneous neighborhood of the powerful racial group feels like a threatening proposition, regardless of any positive intent from the current residents.

3) Diversity in background and styles of communication and behavior will lead to explosive conflict when unconscious bias is also present. People have different communication, behavior, and conflict styles,

which show up in daily interactions as well as moments of division. This is actually an asset, but it can serve as a barrier when we unconsciously, collectively ignore this fact. A study mentioned in a September 2016 *Harvard Business Review* article demonstrated that "homogenous teams feel better—but easy is bad for performance."<sup>9</sup> For example, if a community is comprised of primarily introverted white baby boomers, then an extraverted millennial family of color with a child moves in, the community is primed for conflict. Why? Because if some members hold an unspoken assumption, or unconscious bias, that this new family should conform to the cultural norms of the more seasoned residents, it is only a matter of time before conflict will erupt. This was basically my experience. Howard Ross says, "We do not think the way we think," which means that we do not consciously recognize if we are taking part in unconscious bias.<sup>10</sup> This is why it is important to be aware of intent and impact. My neighbors were positive in their intent to inform me of the unspoken rule regarding the presence of Christian imagery in the common house, but the impact of their communication and behavior resulted in painful conflict.

4) Conflict aversion will result in ostracizing and marginalizing individual members and their families. In general, those within white culture do not have to consciously realize that their cultural norms are upheld as the standard. It is possible that individuals involved in a conflict within community are already marginalized in the broader society based on their oppressed social identities. When a conflict arises, these power dynamics are present. Often the voices of those with privilege are elevated and those with marginalized identities are further marginalized. While this may not always be the case, we cannot separate systemic and structural oppression from any interpersonal interaction.

In the spirit of systems change, to overcome these barriers, I suggest the following recommendations for individuals living within intentional communities to shift the paradigm, in order to cultivate inclusion and diversity:

1) Create and commit to an action plan. An action plan can help a community strategically increase racially diverse households, tying together goals with activities, outcomes, a timeline, and resources. Action planning starts with establishing strong, shared mission, vision, and values statements that all members embrace. Refer to these statements and action plan at every community meeting.

2) Volunteer community leaders need to address conflict immediately. Managing conflict is not easy, but it is critically important. As soon as a conflict arises that impacts three or more members of a community, leaders within the community need to draw from existing norms, processes, and policies to engage the broader community in the conversation. If these norms do not exist, they must be created in order for the community to function effectively. Anyone aware of the conflict will have an opinion on the situation, and those impacted will desire to communicate their perspectives. There are structures to facilitate difficult conversations, such as restorative or listening circles and other participatory facilitation techniques. Make sure to intervene using these participatory methods immediately to not allow the conflict to quietly fester, because the community will reach a boiling point. Once the conflict explodes, community members' energy must shift to damage control. Heading off an explosion is generally a more pleasant course of action.

3) Hire an outside facilitator, trainer, or mediator. Someone who

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## By 2044 there will be more people of color in the US than non-Hispanic white people. At what point will intentional communities shift to reflect the demographics of our country?

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does not live in the community may best assist with leading community change processes. Because we all come with our implicit biases, relationships, and histories, no current cohousing member will be seen as impartial or neutral on contentious topics or areas of serious conflict. Plus, each member should be able to participate in the change process and it is very difficult to be both facilitator and participant because of the inherent power dynamics involved.

4) Acknowledge your community's contribution to perpetuating systems of inequity. Recognize the indigenous community's land on which your community is built. Acknowledge and reconcile if your community is actively contributing to the gentrification of the area where you are located. Pool a donation to support a local community-based organization that promotes economic justice and/or fair housing.

5) Recognize this is a lifelong journey and evolution for each of us as individuals and as a collective community.

6) Collectively organize and engage in opportunities for individual and interpersonal learning and growth:

a. Set guidelines and group norms: ALWAYS collectively agree on a set of guidelines or group norms to help structure any community conversation or dialogue focusing on issues of conflict, race, all forms of oppression and -isms, and other difficult topics. Examples could include:

- Practice active listening; seek first to understand
- Use "I" statements<sup>11</sup>
- Share the air time<sup>12</sup>
- Create space for silence
- Be aware of intent *and* impact<sup>13</sup>
- Practice "both/and" thinking<sup>14</sup>
- Challenge oppressive remarks and behaviors without blaming or shaming
- Expect/accept discomfort and unfinished business<sup>15</sup>

b. Trainings: Host annual trainings that examine systems of power, privilege, oppression, implicit bias, microaggressions, childhood sexual abuse and trauma, homophobia, transmisogyny, white fragility, white savior complex, and/or white supremacy.

c. Dialogue: Hire trained facilitators to co-facilitate a series of at least eight intergroup dialogues on race.<sup>16</sup>

d. Activities and events: These can be related to themes of race, racism, anti-racism, racial justice, and racial equity, targeting residents or opening up to members of the broader community, town, or city to attend.

e. Workshops on personality, conflict, and/or communication styles: Individuals can complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, TKI Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, or the Intercultural Development Inventory about intercultural communication to begin a meaningful conversation at the individual level and then explore a community's unique landscape of different styles.

f. Avoid using the word "safe space": Interracial, mixed gender spaces to talk about race are historically unsafe for people of color, women, trans, and non-binary individuals. In my role as a facilitator, I have heard participants with marginalized identities say this because these individuals experienced that the "safe place" was not meant for them, but for the participants with privileged identities. Frame the space as a "brave" space instead.

7) Begin collecting data on the racial and ethnic demographic composition of community members. Any respondents should self-identify, and no one should assume anything about another's identities. Track other demographic markers of difference as well, including gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, socioeconomic status, religion, etc. In order to illuminate the demographics of those who comprise the intentional communities movement in this country and track any changes over time, we need these data. Likewise, we need to provide opportunities for those who have done this work in the broader community to share it with others in the cohousing community.

8) If you are a white person, listen to people of color. Engage current and prospective members who are people of color in conversation. Listen to them when they speak at meetings. Do not interrupt. Notice if you start feeling defensive. Do not make the conversation about you. Just listen. Hear what they have to say and thank them for sharing their opinions. Do not expect them to teach you things; that is not their job.

9) Read *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. It is a quick read and valuable resource for life, as well as living intentionally in community.

Unfortunately my cohousing community has not updated its vision, mission, or values since 2003. One of our values still reads, "Deal with diversity of thought." That is not language that is likely to inspire and intrigue potential members of color to move here. In fact, our ongoing efforts to update our internal vision and values have started, stopped, and sputtered over multiple years. While I am hopeful that we will be able to revise and update this critical, unifying component to building our intentional community, I do not know when it will happen. But I do know that for as long as I continue living in this cohousing community, I will approach each experience as an opportunity for learning and growth. My mother's late friend said, "Cohousing is the most expensive self-improvement project you can find!" I wholeheartedly agree. The cost is not just monetary, but also emotional. For me, this cost is worth it because I continue to learn so much about myself and others in an environment filled with people who are also intentionally growing alongside me. 🌸

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*A mother, entrepreneur, and social justice activist, Rosemary Linares is devoted to promoting social change through capacity-building work in the non-profit sector. Connect with her via her website at [www.cmsjconsulting.com](http://www.cmsjconsulting.com).*

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1. Cisgender means identifying with the gender assigned to me at birth and not identifying as transgender, non-binary, or gender nonconforming.

2. Diversifying Cohousing: The Retrofit Model by Angela Sanguinetti, March 2015: [www.researchgate.net/publication/282050459\\_Diversifying\\_cohousing\\_The\\_retrofit\\_model](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/282050459_Diversifying_cohousing_The_retrofit_model)

3. Ibid.

4. [www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/no-i-wont-stop-saying-white-supremacy-20170630](http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/no-i-wont-stop-saying-white-supremacy-20170630)

5. [www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2012/07/12/11938/the-state-of-diversity-in-todays-workforce](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2012/07/12/11938/the-state-of-diversity-in-todays-workforce)

6. [leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/LWI2017.pdf](http://leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/LWI2017.pdf)

7. [www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/07/01/484325664/babies-of-color-are-now-the-majority-census-says](http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/07/01/484325664/babies-of-color-are-now-the-majority-census-says)

8. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/25/three-quarters-of-whites-dont-have-any-non-white-friends/?utm\\_term=.1993a60e9ca5](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/25/three-quarters-of-whites-dont-have-any-non-white-friends/?utm_term=.1993a60e9ca5)

9. [hbr.org/2016/09/diverse-teams-feel-less-comfortable-and-thats-why-they-perform-better](http://hbr.org/2016/09/diverse-teams-feel-less-comfortable-and-thats-why-they-perform-better)

10. [www.theplainsman.com/article/2017/09/critical-conversations-speaker-confronts-unconscious-biases](http://www.theplainsman.com/article/2017/09/critical-conversations-speaker-confronts-unconscious-biases)

11. By avoiding generalizations about groups of people and speaking from our own personal experiences, feelings, or beliefs, we demonstrate the act of holding ourselves accountable and avoid attributing these feelings, beliefs, or judgments to the listener.

12. Make certain that all participants are explicitly given an opportunity to speak. Invite participants who tend to remain quiet to "step up," and if they tend to dominate conversations to "step back."

13. Although I may have positive intent in saying or doing something, if the effect of my statements or actions is negative, I need to hold myself accountable for the impact I made, in addition to the intent I brought forward.

14. "Both/and" thinking is a discipline that can replace thinking in terms of "either/or." For example, "race and ethnicity" can be both a social construct with no real basis in science and it can have very real historical and present-day implications.

15. This work is challenging and ongoing. We may never come to any conclusions in our lifetimes, but we can commit to the learning journey and evolution, accepting nonclosure. We also need to lean into the discomfort in order to stretch and grow.

16. There are multiple models to hold dialogues on race; for resources please visit [www.racialquityresourceguide.org/guides/guides-and-workshops](http://www.racialquityresourceguide.org/guides/guides-and-workshops)

# Bridging Social and Cultural Divides in Cohousing

By Alan O'Hashi

What's been on my mind lately is how intentional communities can help bridge socioeconomic divides.

I live in a cohousing community, consisting of privately owned homes and shared common spaces. Everyone lives independently, but shares in some of the chores of maintaining the community. After living here eight years and volunteering for the National Cohousing Association, I'm convinced that intentional communities—including cohousing—are one way to help bridge cultural and socioeconomic divides, one community at a time.

## Confronting Privilege and Prejudice

The aura around social and economic “privilege” is subtle—I've experienced it from varying angles most of my life. Being a Japanese-American Baby Boomer, I grew up under the post-World War II anti-Asian sentiment. While I may speak English with an American accent and am a third-generation Yankees fan, I continue to find myself as the brunt of privilege, which is a separate story.

My partner in crime Diana and I moved here from a nearby two-story condo after the cohousing community had opened. A home became available when the owner died. It was ground floor, with no stairs, and wheelchair accessible, which turned out to be important when I was in rehab recovering from a debilitating illness.

Complicating the social culture here is the combination of market-rate- and affordable-housing-owners. The city housing authority provided free/cheap land to developers in exchange for 40 percent affordable homes. We were able to qualify for the local government affordable housing program. Affordable homeowners are restricted by a set of rules in exchange for the low purchase prices. For example, appreciation values are limited, as are sales prices.

Being part of an affordable housing program, coupled with stereotypes about people who reside in affordable housing, exposes us to oppressive language—“charity cases,” “think different,” “lower class,” “no pride,” “don't fit in,” etc. Those long-engrained attitudes are difficult to reverse even for the most progressive and socially aware.

The current political climate doesn't help things. Whether liberal or conservative, the national mood amplifies how individuals deal with their perceptions about differences among people. Unmasking prejudice is more common now, meaning that others are faced with learning how to be allies.

## Instilling Cultural Competency

Unless communities are intentional about unpacking their self-perceptions of privilege, “on-the-job” training can cause hard feelings. In my experience over the years, oppressors don't like to be called on their sh\*t by the oppressed. Cultural competency is a long, ongoing process and it takes some stumbling and falling, losing friends and making new ones.

I've been presenting at a lot of different meetings lately. Diversity issues seem to be of great interest. I get approached by attendees who agree they intellectually understand the importance of inclusivity, but don't know how to change themselves and their organizations. They are eager to learn.

The simple answer is to infuse cultural competency into the day-to-

day operations of the community. This involves fostering awareness and change at multiple levels: organizational, interpersonal, and personal.

Cohousing vision statements generally mention “valuing diversity.” When I talk with forming communities, I ask them to have honest discussions about what influenced their views about diversity and some ways the vision can be implemented based on changed attitudes. Governance based on shared responsibility, rotated leadership, and norms about accountability are big departures from majority rule and top-down decision making, and can help with this transformation.

Living in a community facilitates neighborly support if a ride is needed to the store, or help needed to move furniture, or caregiving needed by sick neighbors. Friendships form, BBQs happen spontaneously, and formal community events are planned around holidays. In the process, intentional communities enable conversation among divergent opinions. But individual effort must be put into understanding the perspectives of others and changing personal courses of action.

## Increasing Diversity

Cohousers may intellectually “value diversity,” but diversity doesn't always play out, considering that the typical cohouser is white, educated, high income and high perceived social class, and, about 70 percent of the time, a woman.<sup>1</sup> So forming community members should discuss what they would be willing to give up—attitudinally and/or financially—to include diverse members.

The need for personal introspection doesn't end once the houses are constructed and residents unpack their boxes. Over time, the community evolves and residents need to keep unpacking their personal histories and values as families move, people pass away, and new neighbors arrive.

Professional and lay cohousing developers can choose to make personal transformations. There are markets other than those of the “typical” cohouser, particularly in gentrifying and abandoned neighborhoods. More culturally competent developers can expand their markets by finding easier outreach paths into diverse communities. As a cultural broker myself, I know that this approach gets results and opens doors without the appearance of “tokenism.”

## Some Next Steps

- Step out of your comfort zones to start.
- Who do you sit next to in church? Sit next to a stranger.
- Do you stand up as an ally? Take a risk when you hear an offensive comment in the grocery store checkout line.
- Social justice marches and political elections may be personally transformative events that bring people together.

It's when individuals collaborate and alter their behaviors that bridges are built to close social and cultural divides—one community at a time. 🌱

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*Alan O'Hashi is a Board member of the Cohousing Association of the US. For more of his writings, please visit [alanohashi.wordpress.com](http://alanohashi.wordpress.com). A version of this article first appeared as a blog post in FIC's 30th Anniversary series.*



1. See [spaces.hightail.com/receive/jsJtWLrwT9](http://spaces.hightail.com/receive/jsJtWLrwT9), including data from [cohousingresearchnetwork.org](http://cohousingresearchnetwork.org).





# WHITE BIAS, BLACK LIVES: When Unconscious Bias Affects Your Community

*By Katy Mattingly*

**N**o one thinks they are racist. None of us believes we have a bias against an entire group of humans for no other reason than the color of their skin or the nationality of their ancestors. No one thinks—I'm a bad person, I'm unfair, I'm hateful.

Instead, we believe we are behaving rationally. We think we understand a thing or two about human nature, about who is safe and who is unsafe. We say to ourselves, "I may not be able to say it out loud in this meeting, because of these politically correct types, but they are fooling themselves. I'm a good judge of strangers, of who is good and who is bad." Everyone has a gut instinct. Everyone is driven to follow that instinct—right or wrong.

But of course, racism has affected everyone in America—me, you, and all our neighbors. It's *in* our gut instincts. We don't have to look far into the nation's history, politics, media, or current affairs before we see racism all around us. No one thinks "I am racist" but every child of color in America must face racism—it's everywhere. Even in our liberal intentional communities.

In my community, it's been showing up when children play on our property. Do you see a neighborhood kid, a visitor, a boy you know

playing basketball with his little brother? Or do you see a stranger, a trespasser, a young man threatening your family's safety and peace of mind? How do you decide?

## Unconscious Bias

*Unconscious bias* is the idea that stereotypes common in American culture get under our skin, past our mental constructs, and have a way of informing our behavior without our conscious mind's approval. Sometimes called implicit bias, implicit associations, or microaggressions, the concept has been proven scientifically in the psychological literature.<sup>1</sup> If you're willing to have some uncomfortably fascinating moments with yourself, take a few brief online assessments of your own bias at [implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html).

Maybe you've noticed unconscious bias in your own life when you accidentally associated a southern accent with stupidity, when you assumed the Latina you didn't recognize at work was there to empty your trash, when a black man got on your bus and you pulled your purse closer, then wondered why you were afraid.

Maybe you've noticed unconscious bias in your intentional commu-

nity. It may be there when someone on the membership committee asks: “Is this family really *a good fit* for us?” Or when there are more women than men in your neighborhood but somehow meetings are mostly filled with male voices. It may be functioning when some visitors are asked questions, and others are left alone.

### Is It Really Happening Here?

Sunward Cohousing, just outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan has been struggling with unconscious bias for a long time. Founded in 1998, we built our beautiful community of 40 homes from the ground up on an old gravel pit, just around the corner from a low-income, subsidized apartment complex. Later, two other cohousing communities formed next door. About 500 people live within a mile of each other in these four separate communities.

Many, though not all, of the cohousing residents are white, wealthy, and older. Many, though not all, of the apartment complex neighbors are African American, working class, and younger. Often, though not always, you can make a good guess about where a neighbor lives from a quick glance.

Decisions based on unconscious bias happen in split seconds. In group or out group? Friend or stranger? Safe or unsafe? And because adults in our extended neighborhood tend to stay near their own homes, it's the *children* who cross lines and show up as visitors or trespassers.

Take a look at that kid at the basketball hoop. Do you recognize him? Does he belong here? Is he a problem? Should you notify someone? Should you ignore him? Do you have time to go chat with him? Are you happy to see him? Do you feel worried for him? Are you afraid of him?

*Are you willing to add “why?” to the end of every one of those questions?*

Over the past two years my community has had some great interactions with neighborhood kids who visit our playground, our woods, our pond, and our common house. Our kids are friends and classmates and campmates with kids from the other three communities. Some of us from Sunward canvassed the low-income neighborhood before last year's presidential election and talked to teens there about registering to vote. Some charming and hard-working neighborhood kids showed up for our work day and worked long and hard beside us in the gardens.

And we've also had some terrible experiences with each other. One kid was accused of stealing something after being seen inside our common house. One damaged a garden and was verbally threatened with violence by a member. Some kids playing basketball refused to leave after they were asked nicely, and it devolved into curses and shouting on both sides.

The terrible experiences are the ones that get talked about in community meetings. We've tried many approaches. We started keeping the common house locked. We hung a “members and their guests only” sign at the basketball hoop. We encouraged visiting kids to stay and play but only if a Sunward adult was present. We asked kids to leave. We threatened to call 911 if they didn't.

And because we're home to about 100 people with different beliefs and experiences and free will, we've never responded consistently or agreed on the “right” way to behave. Some of us have invited kids inside for a snack. Some of us have physically dragged them off the property. Some of us have stopped reading emails about the issue or coming to meetings where it is discussed. The police have been called to deal with children. More than once.

It is painful *but essential* to note that children who are dark-skinned are treated differently than children who are white-skinned. I am unaware of a single instance of the police being called on white kids who trespass. Including the white girls who lit a fire in our woods, got drunk, threw up, and slept out there overnight. Or the white boys who rode

their mopeds up and down our delicate trails.

When we try to talk about the issue in community meetings, it often feels as if we're speaking different languages. When someone feels afraid, it's difficult to communicate to that person that her fear might be more about unconscious bias than it is about actual risk. We hear: “I'm just sensitive to the sound of loud voices.” We hear: “It's just that I was hurt once and I don't want to talk about it.” We hear: “I prefer not to have to see strangers and those kids look like they don't belong here.”

Mostly we hear: “This isn't about race, it's about something else.”

But it is about race. We are mostly Americans here in my neighborhood. We are mostly white Americans. And we are unconsciously biased against people of color in general and black boys in particular.

### The Process

Unconscious bias can be tricky to address. It's *unconscious*. Have you ever tried to change something about yourself you're barely aware of? Have you ever tried to get someone else to change a behavior she doesn't even know she's participating in? Have you ever been told something about yourself you were loath to believe?

We formed a small group to help the community walk through a Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making<sup>2</sup> process (CODM, for short) designed to answer the following question: *What should we do when random, uninvited kids show up on our property?*

CODM invites participants to generate a list of concerns which should be addressed in any eventual proposal; ours fell into five main categories:

<b>Safety of People</b>	We affirm the right of adults and children, members and residents of neighboring communities, to <i>feel</i> safe and to <i>be</i> safe.
<b>Safety of Property</b>	We may face legal and financial liability if a child is injured here; we wish to prevent harm to our buildings and property.
<b>Relationships</b>	We wish to build, nurture, and sustain relationships with our neighbors. This includes helping our kids befriend neighbor kids, and getting to know the parents of visiting kids.
<b>Fairness</b>	We are concerned with fairness, and desire a consistent response across incidents whether the kids visiting/trespassing are from the other cohousing communities or from the apartment neighborhood.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The chosen approach should be actionable, sustainable, flexible, and evaluated for effectiveness.

Next in the CODM process, we're invited to choose a general approach. Over several meetings, two different ways of responding to the issue emerged: *protective* and *welcoming*. We named these intentionally. The CODM team included proponents of both approaches, as well as a facilitator experienced with remaining neutral. Clearly, we couldn't label one approach *safety* any more than we could label the other *anti-racist*. Instead we identified positive language for both broad strategies.

Next, across multiple meetings, we hung large sheets of newsprint and brainstormed about each of the basic, shared concerns listed above. How could we address people's safety with a welcoming approach? How could we address it with a protective approach? Here are some samples from the brainstorming sessions:

CONCERN Safety of People	APPROACH Welcoming	APPROACH Protective
Physical violence between residents and visitors	De-escalate conflicts, use a respectful tone	Install/improve common house locks
Unpleasant verbal interactions	Trained team of responders who volunteer to interact with kids	Resident responders who are trained by the police
Harm to kids by unnecessary use of law enforcement	Written definition of when law enforcement is necessary, save it for emergencies, not damage to property, not trespassing	Ask the police for proactive help
Using law enforcement when needed	Post-incident debriefs led by mediation committee	Improve signage stating our trespassing policies
		Sign-in sheets for all guests

Ultimately, the community expressed a clear preference for the welcoming approach. At this point, CODM guided us to return to the minority preference—the protective approach—to select aspects which should be included in the draft proposal.

### The Proposal

You may have noticed that the concept of a team of trained responders appears under both approaches above. The idea of a team of willing volunteers who feel comfortable interacting with neighbor kids and could be on call for incidents arose again and again as Sunward discussed these challenges. This text is from the current draft proposal:

*All residents are encouraged to contact the response team (trained Sunward adults) if they are uncomfortable about uninvited children on the property. Members of the response team converse with kids and youth and, in most cases, ask them to leave. They treat everyone fairly and consistently. Team members are trained to use a relationship-centered approach, are sensitive to unconscious bias, and committed to communication that is fair, safe, and effectively sets boundaries. Calling 911 is an option of last resort used only in emergencies. Trespassing in and of itself is not considered an emergency.*

### Addressing Unconscious Bias

The proposal on the table attempts to address the challenges of unconscious racial, gender, and socioeconomic status bias in multiple ways.

**Separate Crime Prevention from Kid Visits.** It has been difficult to decouple the concept of crime prevention from interactions with neighborhood children. The team affirmed repeatedly that this proposal does not address security cameras, or neighborhood watch, or trespassing by adults, or recent petty property crimes committed or suspected in the neighborhood. This process is only to identify what we should do (and not do) when random, uninvited kids show up.

**Provide Multiple Roles.** By volunteering to be available, response team members could benefit those who feel unsafe or uncomfortable interacting directly with the kids. Sunward could develop a process by

which those who have lost their temper or threatened children are excluded from the team and relieved from feeling responsible for enforcement. Responders can be trained to look for unconscious bias and discuss it during incident debriefs.

**Limit Calls to Law Enforcement in Non-Emergencies.** Decision points in this area have been particularly fraught. Unconscious bias for or against the police runs deep. For many white people, it's shocking news to realize that many people of color and poor people feel the most unsafe when police are present. The current proposal aims to protect black kids from unnecessary contact with the police by providing a written definition of their role—while of course leaving every member free to make their own choices about calling 911.

**Address Age Bias.** “People of all races see black children as less innocent, more adultlike and more responsible for their actions than their white peers.”<sup>3</sup> White people also tend to guess black children as older than they are. By suggesting that the policy applies to older teens and young adults, Sunward is attempting to counteract this potentially dangerous misperception and limit calls to 911.

**Fairness.** The draft proposal emphasizes consistency, fairness, and application to kids from all nearby neighborhoods, including the other cohousing kids. If black children are not allowed to trespass on community property, then white children aren't allowed to either.

**Know the Impact of Language.** Most people are unlikely to warm to being labeled as *racist*. Referencing *unconscious bias* instead can welcome white people to these discussions. At the same time, know the phrase can sound to some like an ineffective synonym for *racism*. According to African American comedian and activist W. Kamau Bell, microaggression and unconscious bias are just “fancy ways for describing racism that isn't necessarily fatal. Racism that makes our so-called white friends ask ‘How do you know it was racism?’...the kind of racism that drives you crazy. Death by a thousand racist cuts.”<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

Probably no one is surprised that a midwestern cohousing community of mostly white baby boomers has not solved American racism in 2018. Despite the expressed desire of many to feel more *comfortable*—for example by excluding non-member kids—I think it's fair to say that *no one feels better* yet. In fact, those of us who are committed to unlearning our unconscious bias would suggest that feeling *uncomfortable* is one marker of progress!

We're not done. But the Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making process has shown us a way forward that hasn't required 100 percent agreement or even a shared definition of the problem. We hosted multiple uncomfortable conversations about race, class, gender, and age. We held listening circles which took our neighbors' fears and experiences seriously. We will continue to ask if our behavior is consistent with our values, and if our impact on neighborhood children matches our intentions. All of which has demonstrated a key benefit of living in community—working through hard issues, holding each other accountable, and taking shared action for the highest good. 🌊

*Katy Mattingly is a member of the Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making Kids team at Sunward Cohousing in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This article was read and edited for accuracy and clarity by the entire team, but not co-written, and reflects Katy's own opinions and experiences of the community process. Notably, zero child visitors were consulted in the writing of this article.*

1. For more information check out *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of good people*. (2013.) Banaji, M.R. and Greenwald, A.G. Or *Everyday Bias: Identifying and navigating unconscious judgments in our daily lives*. (2014). Ross, H.J.  
 2. See *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making: The CODM model for facilitating groups to widespread agreement*. (2010.) Hartnett, T.  
 3. [www.nytimes.com/2017/07/26/opinion/black-kids-discrimination.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/26/opinion/black-kids-discrimination.html)  
 4. *The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell*. (2017.) Bell, W.K.

# Reflections on Class from a Newbie at Rocky Hill Cohousing

*By Jennifer Ladd*



my history with Rocky Hill. One of the reasons I moved here is that I know people in the community who are actively involved in climate organizing, peace movement, and anti-racism work. I also know that the community worked purposefully on class issues at the beginning: I had been a co-facilitator of that exploration in April of 2005 with my cofounder of Class Action, [www.classism.org](http://www.classism.org), Felice Yeskel. We had worked with Rocky Hill members on class and money issues just as they were breaking ground.

The goals of that work were:

1. To create safety to begin a dialogue around money and class.
2. To better understand and respect each other's feelings and values about money.
3. To share some of their histories around class and money that may be relevant to their current feelings.
4. To begin to discuss openly their feelings about the money and class differences in the community; including: having vs. not having,

I moved into Rocky Hill Cohousing in Florence, western Massachusetts at the end of August 2017 and I am very glad to be here. I love that people will send out emails asking for all kinds of things, from bananas to send to school with their child's lunch to cloaks for Halloween. People in this 28-unit community ask for help moving things, getting a ride, and babysitting in an emergency. I enjoy the community meals, monthly meetings, workdays, and the ease with which I can walk across to my neighbor and share food, watch a movie, participate in a book group, or strategize how we will plow the roads together.

All of this I thoroughly enjoy. And, I seem to have chosen to live in a predominately white, mostly middle and upper middle class, formally educated neighborhood in a predominately white town. Not everybody shares these characteristics but many do.

Though race, class, and gender are braided together and very difficult to separate, for the purposes of this article I am going to limit my comments primarily to class because of



spending vs. not spending, giving vs. receiving.

This proved to be very useful as it helped members know themselves better and to better understand the history behind opinions strongly held by other members.

Some of the exercises we did together included answering these two questions:

1. In what ways do you think people in the community judge and/or make assumptions about you around money and class?

2. In what ways do you judge and/or make assumptions about others in the community about money and class?

We asked people to line up according to their self-defined class background when they were 12 years old. This exercise stayed with people: people on both ends of the class spectrum had the courage to step forward and risk feeling exposed. People shared the strengths they gained from their class backgrounds and the limitations—especially as they pertained to living in community.

At the end of our time together people identified next steps:

- Continue to discuss cost-sharing.
- Talk about inequality and power.
- Explore different values and ideas about money; why do we have them and what are the implications?

- Look at personal interests versus community interests.
- Think about the contingency budget—how do we negotiate our different values?
- Name and explore different kinds of power, not just focusing on financial power.
- Talk about shame that we carry in relation to money and class.
- Talk about unconditional acceptance.

So as I have entered into the community, I am curious about how those conversations have manifested today.

Rocky Hill is located in a predominately white town, Northampton, where the median home value is \$269,800; most of the houses at Rocky Hill are valued above that. Low-income families, even some middle class families cannot easily afford to move in. The real estate market in the Northampton area seems to be going up every year and it is more expensive to live here than in the surrounding towns. At Rocky Hill we live in a dilemma: we want to be open to anybody who is in alignment with the mission and values of cohousing, but we can't escape the relatively expensive real estate market that does affect the availability of homes here.

Some of the members I have talked to say, "Access was at the center in the beginning—and it was hard to do." However, there are a number of things that the community has already done and is working on to reduce the costs of being here and to therefore be more welcoming to people with fewer financial assets.

- **Offer homes with a range of size and cost.** There are three basic designs for houses ranging

from one to four bedrooms, which are charged by the square foot. If one has less money for housing one could purchase a smaller house; more money, a bigger house.

- **Charge for improved square footage.** Another way of adding to the community coffers is that people who decide to add on to their condo—building a deck, finishing the basement, adding a screen porch—are charged an initial amount per square foot (that they would have had to pay if the house had been designed with the proposed addition, at the beginning). This acknowledges that the family is privatizing what was previously community space. And people's condo fees are increased to reflect the additional square footage they now have. Different kinds of additions are charged different amounts.

- **Buy building materials in bulk.** Again, at the beginning the originating group made the decision to order materials in bulk or wholesale to reduce the cost. However, a few members now say, in retrospect, that this may have also caused people to design bigger houses with more than they needed for fear that if they decided they wanted something later on it would be more expensive because they would have to pay the retail cost.

- **Sell no higher than the appraised value.** There are no enforceable rules about selling one's house but people are encouraged to sell at the appraised value of the home rather than going to the highest bidder. This is challenging when housing is expensive and people want to take their proceeds and buy somewhere else which may be even more expensive than here in Northampton.



Photos courtesy of Jennifer Ladd

• **Have some rental spaces.** A few people have built small apartments in their houses that are rented out, again making it possible for individuals or small families to live in cohousing without buying a full condominium. These members participate actively in the community. Others are renting out rooms to people who are more transitory and not active members of community. We hope to find more ways to engage them.

• **Plan for big expenses.** The community is striving to be considerate of people on limited incomes by raising condo fees at a predictable rate for the purpose of building up the reserve fund. The Reserve Fund is specifically for doing large capital projects like replacing roofing, siding, painting, and redoing the asphalt road. The community brought in a pro-

transportation, healthcare, setting up a home—all contribute to this newly arrived family's capacity to live in Northampton while having a close warm tie with this community even though they live outside of the community.

• **Continue to ask the question:** How can we be more affordable to those who are currently here and to potential newcomers? We have some members who keep up with what other cohousing communities are doing and people in different committees keep these questions alive as well.

All of these ideas are very specific. Just as the devil is in the details, the “class issues are in the budget”—and it demonstrates some of the ways that values can be integrated into the system of cohousing operations rather than just being discussed as a good idea.

But questions remain. One person I talked to wondered out loud about what is going to happen when people get older, with less income and more needs? Will they need to move or will the community find ways to help people financially so that they can stay? He said, “I have my ideals and values of inclusion, and we are connected—yet, I have to admit that I like my comforts. I am not sure how much I am willing to give up to enable others to stay; I’m just being honest about my ambivalence.”

Though class and classism can be addressed in the budget, there is more to the picture than that. The community culture can absolutely reflect class and racial (gender, ethnic, religious, etc.) predominance and marginalization, comfort and discomfort, inclusion and exclusion.

Every workplace, community, group has a culture—a set of norms that may be very close to the dominant culture's norms or may be very different. Culture includes ways of decision making, showing respect, dealing with conflict, food choices, norms about noise, sound, child rearing, humor, manners—on and on. The more we can name and know our class culture the more we are apt to see misunderstandings as cultural and possibly take them less personally.

I think it is worthwhile for every group to acknowledge that it has a culture with underlying or hidden rules and then to articulate what those rules are so they are not so hidden

to those within the sea they swim or to others who enter the community. We as a community have yet to tackle this!

**Next steps from my newbie point of view:**

1. Be clear about the community culture—what are our norms and practices, spoken and hidden. Clarify who we aren't.
2. Continue to get to know about each other, including our class backgrounds and childhood attitudes towards money that are playing out today in our decision making.
3. Engage in white awareness work as a community.
4. Find ways for those who are renting temporarily to feel as included as possible.
5. Create policy that makes emergency/backup funds available to community members who really need it.
6. Have frank conversations about aging and sickness—how does the community want to be with those who can no longer afford to pay condo fees and live here?
7. Alert community members about city, state, and federal initiatives that enable low-income people to have decent housing so we continue to ground our solutions in the larger town, state, and national context.
8. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable as we explore class, money, and for that matter, race, gender—any of the deeply ingrained dominant patterns in our society. Liberation often requires going through the metaphorical fire of openness and conflict to get to the other side.

Every day I have some concrete reason for enjoying being here, much of it having to do with people sharing who they are and what they have with one another. I also know that good intentions to be welcoming across race and class are very, very difficult to really achieve. The weight and momentum of historic/systemic patterns is very heavy. These pockets of experimentation are essential. May we keep on learning, reflecting, and taking action. 🙏

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*Jennifer Ladd, Ed.D. is a philanthropic advisor, fundraising coach, and anti-racism/classism trainer. She cofounded Class Action ([www.classism.org](http://www.classism.org)) with Felice Yeskel. In her consulting work she is dedicated to creating resilient community by helping resources move where they are most needed in a way that serves all involved.*

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the “class issues are in the budget.”  
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fessional to help estimate how much money needs to be put aside so when there is a very costly repair community members don't have to pay an assessment—a large lump sum per household all at once—to cover the cost of the expensive project.

• **Reduce community costs.** We do our own plowing, cleaning, leaf raking, and landscaping in general, which keeps condo fees lower.

• **Create and now possibly expand an Affordability Fund.** In the beginning the community and a few wealthier families pooled approximately \$25,000 into an Affordability Fund, the purpose of which is to help people with down payments for a house. At least three families took advantage of this. The community is now considering other uses for this fund (which is now half its former size) such as temporarily assisting people struggling to pay condo fees or assisting someone to create long-term rental space. This has yet to be worked out.

• **Develop close, mutually rewarding relationships with low-income families.** It just so happens that this community is part of a Circle of Care supporting a refugee family from the Congo. And though this is not primarily a financial form of support—it's mostly the moral and day-to-day support of helping with jobs,

# I'm Not a Racist, But Racism Is in Me—and in My Community

By Joe Cole



*Halloween Pennant Dragonfly, Hart's Mill, July 2016. Dragonflies are symbols of light, color, flight, and change. Are intentional communities resisting change or open to transformation when it comes to racism and inclusion?*

Joe Cole

A few years ago I attended a film showing at a restaurant in Durham, North Carolina. Seventy people turned out to watch the film, which followed a young white couple biking across the country to visit intentional communities. Almost every person in the film was white, as were the overwhelming majority of people who came to watch it.

After the film, the moderators held a Q&A with one of the film's producers. One questioner asked, "Why were the communities so white?"

"Well, I'm not sure," replied the producer, "but many of the communities in the film were in rural areas."

A woman of color in the audience raised her hand. "Perhaps groups that are all-white tend to have unacknowledged racism," she said, "and that creates a barrier for people of color to join."

The moderator turned to the producer, who did not have a response. After an uncomfortable silence, the moderator moved on to the next question, and the conversation left the issue of racism behind.

In the years since, I've come to agree with the young woman at the film showing: predominantly white communities are going to stay mostly or all-white as long as they fail to acknowledge and address racism. In that very moment after she spoke, the group itself was embodying the problem the woman had named: predominantly white groups—even in the intentional communities movement where people display so much self-awareness and social consciousness—still often falter when it comes to talking about racism.

Conversations about racism and white privilege are so difficult because they tap into the pain of our nation's history and our own family histories, as well as the ongoing trauma of racism. After many years, I'm just beginning to see how essential this conversation is for myself as an individual and as a member of a community interested in justice and sustainability.

White people and communities need to be able to talk about racism, and take responsibility for it. This is not about guilt, shame, or blame. This is about deep responsibility and awareness, and a willingness to grow and change. These character traits are already present in a lot of people in the intentional communities movement. We just need to apply them to questions of race, racism, and racial justice.

Acknowledging that racism is in me has been an important part of taking responsibility for racism's impact on me and on the communities where I've lived. I'd like to share my personal journey around racism and white privilege, some working definitions and vocabulary, and my experience in two intentional communities before offering some suggestions on a way forward.

## Racism Is in Me:

### My Personal Journey from Class Awareness to Racial Awareness

My family comes from a small coal-mining community in rural West Virginia. Both of my grandfathers, and several of my uncles and cousins worked for much of their lives in the coalmines. One of my grandfathers died of black lung and lung cancer in his 60s when I was eight years old. Even though my parents left West Virginia before I was born, we visited there often when I was young, and saw relatives sacrificing their bodies and lives for the coal industry and living in near-poverty conditions even though they were working extremely hard. I grew up feeling that my family had been exploited, and I developed a sharp sensitivity to economic injustice.

When I was in college at Penn State University in the 1980s, I became involved in the Anti-Apartheid movement on campus. The racism and injustice in South Africa was clearly visible, and it moved me to act. However, when friends of color directed their attention to the racism on cam-

pus and in the local community, it was initially difficult for me to see and accept the extent of racism at home and the possibility that I could be a beneficiary of it. I still preferred to talk about economic injustice because that was what my family had suffered. It was much harder to understand and take responsibility for how racism had given me advantages and privileges in this society. Slowly, I began making connections to racism in the United States and to my own privileges as a white person.

In recent years, I've learned some distressing aspects of my family history: one of my great-

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## Racism functions as a system that unfairly burdens and harms people of color and rewards white people, regardless of conscious intentions or ideologies.

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grandfathers was a member of the Ku Klux Klan in West Virginia, and some of my ancestors owned slaves in South Carolina in the 1800s. These revelations disrupted my simple and comfortable story of my family being the victims of injustice. My family history is interwoven with our collective history of colonialism, the extermination of native people, the enslavement of African people, and the oppression of immigrants and working people. My family's pain of poverty and exploitation in the coalmines, while real, does not negate or diminish the centuries of slavery, segregation, and racism suffered by people of color. Nor does it give me the license to neglect the current reality of racism in our country, nor allow me to deny the many doors opened, opportunities offered, and advantages given to me as a white male in this culture.

Over the last few years, I have learned a lot more about racism reading books like *Witnessing Whiteness*, watching films like "Race: The Power of an Illusion" and "13th," and taking workshops and trainings. I've come to a better understanding of racism as a system of white privilege and power. I've come to understand that racism persists because of silence and inaction. And I'm now able to acknowledge that racism is in me and in the communities of which I am a part.

### Working Definitions

So, what is racism? And what do I mean when I say that racism is "in" me?

Racism is a system that divides people on the basis of racial categories and distributes benefits and burdens according to those groupings. Even though racial categories are quite powerful and still impact our daily lives, they have no biologi-

cal or scientific basis—race is a social reality and a biological fiction. In the US, the main racial categories are white and black. These categories were created during the European colonization of the Americas and the enslavement of people from Africa, and they allowed wealthy elites to divide and rule by separating poor whites from people of color, while also providing ideological cover for the brutality of slavery. After 250 years of slavery and another 100 years of segregation, during the last century people of color were systematically excluded from social benefits and opportunities like Social Security, Minimum Wage protection, Federal Housing Loans, and Educational benefits for several decades, allowing for the creation of a large white middle class while simultaneously creating a large black lower class. Today we still see the legacy and ongoing effects of racism in the criminal justice system and the unjust distribution of resources and opportunities across racial groups.

Racism benefits people who look like me, and harms people who don't. Because I'm categorized as white in the US, I'm much less likely to be pulled over by the police, and much more likely to be let go when I am stopped. I'm less likely to be charged, tried, convicted, and punished for the same crimes and violations as people of color. I'm more likely to get a loan or a job or a safe place to live. Whites have around 10 times the median net worth of blacks in the US, which compounds from generation to generation, and makes it more likely for me to receive financial assistance from my parents and be able to provide financial assistance to my children. It's easier for me to travel across country and find services and support, and feel safe and welcomed along the way. It's easier for me to grow up with a sense of dignity, self-respect,

and self-confidence that I can succeed and thrive in this society.

Racism is a system, and should not be equated with racial prejudice or bias; individual racial bias is morally wrong, but doesn't always indicate the presence of a system of racism. Likewise, a very damaging and harmful system of racism can persist even as personal racial prejudice is decreasing. While the open expression of racial hatred and prejudice by white supremacists is shocking and disturbing, the core of racism today—and its greatest danger and harm—is that it functions as a system that unfairly burdens and harms people of color and rewards white people, regardless of the conscious intentions or ideologies of individuals in the system.

Because of the horror, trauma, and violence in both the history and current system of racism in our society, many white people are wary of conversations about race and racism. We are afraid of being labeled "racist" and held responsible for 400 years of oppression. Like most white people, I don't enjoy being called a racist or being called out for racist remarks and behavior. But what I have found quite helpful is to acknowledge up front that racism is in me: not only do I have prejudices and stereotypes and reactions inside me that were instilled by a culture of racism, my life is shaped by opportunities and resources offered to me because I'm white and denied to others because they are

*The Hate Free Schools Coalition in action at the Orange County Board of Education meeting, August 2017, calling on the Board to ban the Confederate Flag symbol from Orange County, NC public schools. Author is holding "WE" sign.*



McCausland Havens



not. I'm not saying that I am completely and exclusively shaped by racism, just that racism has been a crucial factor in determining who I am and how I live as a white person in 21st Century USA.

Of course there is racism in me—just as there is mercury in the soil, in the water, and in my body from the burning of fossil fuels since the start of the Industrial Revolution, so also the toxins of racism are lodged inside our society and inside me. After hundreds of years of colonialism, slavery, segregation, and discrimination, it's not so easy to clean out our social system or my personal system from the poison of racism. I was raised in an economic and cultural environment constructed on the basis of racial categories and oppression, and those toxic categories affect my thinking and behavior—and impact the benefits and harms I encounter—on a regular basis. Of course there is racism in me, in us all, and in our institutions and communities. Because racism is in me and in all of us, it affects us every day. And because I am interested in justice, sustainability, and community, I am moved to address the reality of racism in myself and in my communities.

### Racism Is in Us: Race and Diversity in My Community Journey

Many intentional communities adopt diversity as a core value, but remain silent about racism. I was involved in the development of Pacifica Cohousing in Carrboro, North Carolina from 2003-2006, and I lived there until 2012. While one of the group's core values was diversity, we remained a mostly white neighborhood. Pacifica did do well in other dimensions of diversity, including age, sexual preference, ability/accessibility, and income (out of 46 units, seven are managed by a local community land trust). The initial costs for moving in were quite affordable compared to the housing costs in the area; however, within a few years, the value of homes increased significantly with the local market, effectively pricing out low-income people. While I lived there, the group had multiple conversations about how we might become more ethnically diverse, but we did not reach a solution. Like many communities, residents generally agreed that racial diversity was important and desirable, yet did not have an answer to the common question, "Why is our community so white, and how might we change it?"

Now I can see that the problems with race and racism within intentional communities are the same common issues among white people in the US: feeling safer talking about diversity; denial of the existence or extent of racism; historical inequity that has separated most whites and blacks culturally and economically; claims of "colorblindness" by well-intentioned whites; and insensitivity and a shallow understanding of injustices faced by people of color in the US.

My current community, Hart's Mill, is developing an Ecovillage in central North Carolina. While we are a predominantly white group, Hart's Mill has recently moved beyond a vision of diversity and towards actively confronting racism and working for racial equity in our community. At least seven members have participated in weekend trainings on Racism and Racial Equity, and our community has served as a co-host for a mini-training on addressing racism. In the fall of 2016, we adopted a new Principle and Intention on racism: "We are committed to working for racial equity and for social and environmental justice. We acknowledge racism in ourselves and in our society, and seek to overcome its harmful legacy in our relationships, our country, and on the land."

One of our most prominent members initially resisted the adoption of this principle because

he felt that racial justice was not central to the mission of the community. While he supported racial justice work personally, he didn't see the relevance of this work to the project of creating a sustainable community. His view of racial justice and racism as marginal or secondary work is quite common among whites in the intentional communities movement, as it is in the broader culture. I believe that this inability to see the connections between addressing racism and the mission of sustainability is not only a misunderstanding of the depth of sustainability, but also an example of white blindness, a self-protecting maneuver and one of the privileges that whites have in this society that allow us to avoid confronting the realities of racism. In addition, many whites experience trauma in this society because of economic injustice, sexism, environmental damage, and other forms of the abuse of power, and they may worry that these important issues will get swept aside if serious attention is given to racism and racial equity.

Another common challenge is that white folks often have a difficult time even listening accurately when the topic of racism is raised. During our community conversations about adopting the new Principle and Intention on Racial Equity, I shared my thoughts about how "Racism is in me" at a meeting. Afterwards, one of our members approached me and asked, "Why are you calling yourself a racist?"

"I'm not," I replied. "I'm saying that racism is in me, because it is in all white people in our society."

"So you're saying that all white people are racists?"

No, I wasn't saying that at all. I was actually trying to differentiate myself from ideological racists and white supremacists, while still taking responsibility for how racism shapes my life. But many white people have a fundamental challenge listening accurately in a conversation



*Pond at Hart's Mill, January 2017.*



*Hart's Mill Logo*

about racism, much less engaging in the deep work of overcoming it. That's one of the reasons why there are so many all-white or mostly-white intentional communities. How can we expect people of color, who cannot avoid the real harms and dangers of racism in their everyday lives, to feel safe building community with people who struggle to even have a conversation about racism or acknowledge that it is real?

Through these experiences, I've come to see that racial justice, and hence the hard work of addressing racism, is essentially connected to the creation of sustainable communities. Sustainability requires that we address the use and abuse of power, the fair distribution of resources, the scarring of our natural environment, and our deepest values and consciousness around our relationships to the environment and to each other. How can a community—especially a community in the Americas—claim to be working for a sustainable future if it is not addressing the past and present realities of racism? To put it in stark terms: any community owning land in the United States is living on soil soaked with the blood of Native Americans, and in the South, our land is also soaked with the blood of slaves. That oppression and exclusion is part of what has made it possible for white people like me to accumulate resources, liberties, and opportunities, and to use those assets to create intentional communities. As a basic step of accountability and justice, we have a moral responsibility to address how racism is shaping our lives and our communities. This is difficult and daunting work. And yet if we don't accept the challenge, we risk seeing our efforts at building sustainable communities devolve into the creation of privileged and isolated mini-utopias that serve only whites.

### A Way Forward in Communities

As a way forward, here are some suggestions for individuals and communities:

- Responsibility for Self-Education
- Expand Vision from Diversity to Racial Equity
- Implement a Vision of Racial Equity
- Build Relationships with Racial Justice Organizations
- Be Cautious with Pitfalls
- Find and Cultivate Resources and a Shared Vocabulary
- Grieve the Painful Legacy and Ongoing Reality of Racism

**Responsibility for Self-Education:** White people and communities must take responsibility for deepening our own understanding of racism and how it affects our lives. Commit to building knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity within your group (reading, trainings, ongoing conversations). Develop a common vocabulary that makes it normal for members to name and discuss Racism, White Privilege, and White Su-

premacry as facts of our social and interpersonal environment. At Hart's Mill, we are encouraging our members to participate in racism education, and last summer our members organized an in-house training that brought in trainers from SURJ, Standing Up for Racial Justice.

**Expand the Community Vision from Diversity towards Racial Equity:** A vision for diversity is not enough to address the legacy of racism in our country. We need a deeper vision of healing the wounds of racism, addressing past injustices, and creating a system of justice for all. At Hart's Mill in the fall of 2016, we developed a new Principle and Intention:

"We are committed to working for racial equity and for social and environmental justice. We acknowledge racism in ourselves and in our society, and seek to overcome its harmful legacy in our relationships, our country, and on the land. Aspiring to create a racially inclusive community, we recognize that we can only achieve this goal by addressing our own racism and by working for racial justice. Aspiring to create a sustainable community, we recognize that true sustainability requires achieving harmony and justice—making ourselves a 'beloved community'—both ecologically and socially." ([www.hartsmill.org/about/principles-and-intentions](http://www.hartsmill.org/about/principles-and-intentions))

**Implement a Vision of Racial Equity:** Create an internal culture that recognizes and addresses historical inequity, and creates avenues to welcome and include people of color. At Hart's Mill, we are currently discussing a Sliding Scale system for buying into the community that would offer lower buy-in costs to people of color (and potentially to other historically disadvantaged groups). When I mentioned this in a workshop at the September 2017 Twin Oaks Communities Conference, a white participant challenged the idea, and asked whether it would be demeaning to people of color to offer a discounted rate for joining the community. Some people of color in the workshop responded by saying that they had no problems at all with such a system, and would appreciate any enhanced opportunities that recognized the historical inequities in our society that have affected the ability of people of color to accumulate assets and wealth. Another workshop participant observed that such a system could be understood as an act of reparation for the harms of racism.

**Build Relationships with Racial Justice Organizations:** Even if the racial composition of a community does not change much after working on racism, predominantly white communities can still build relationships with people of color and racial justice organizations, and can make important contributions to the larger society around issues of racism and racial equity. A handful of us at Hart's Mill have been active in the past year in a local group called the Hate Free Schools Coalition of Orange County, where our land is located. An African American mother of children in the Orange County, North Carolina schools founded the Coalition after she saw the Confederate Flag being displayed prominently by some white students on their clothes, backpacks, and vehicles. When she asked the School Administration for action, they ignored her, and she organized in the community to call for the banning of the Confederate Flag in schools. Members of Hart's Mill answered the call and attended school board meetings to speak out for a ban, and also worked to educate the community. After almost a year of work, and much resistance, the school board finally shifted after the August 2017 display of racial hatred and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia (about three hours away from Orange County). The board agreed to ban the Confederate Flag and other white supremacist symbols for the 2017-2018 school year. Our community continues to look for



*Hart's Mill members displaying a visioning map.*

Hope Horton

ways to partner with people of color, racial equity education groups, and racial justice organizations.

**Be Cautious with Pitfalls:** There are many ways that we as white people in the US stumble when it comes to addressing race, racism, and racial justice. Here are a few common pitfalls to watch out for:

*Avoidance:* claiming colorblindness (“I don’t see race”), transcendence (“I’m beyond race”), emphasizing ethnicity instead of race (“I’m an Irish-American hillbilly, not white”). These coping strategies are signs of privilege, for white people can often get away with not looking at or talking about race and racism. What’s worse, these avoidance maneuvers are deeply disaffirming to people of color, and diminish or outright deny the history, legacy, and ongoing reality of racial injustice. Basically, these avoidance strategies communicate to people of color that their experience of racism isn’t real and/or doesn’t matter. While often well-intentioned, these behaviors foster mistrust and can cause a lot of damage.

*Grasping for Affirmation/Forgiveness from People of Color:* another common pitfall for white folks occurs when white people who are aware of racism and are taking actions to overcome it are fueled by an internal desire for affirmation or forgiveness from people of color. We want people of color to tell us that we are alright, that we’re not racist, and that we’re one of the “good white people,” in order to help us heal our own wounds and guilt around the history and reality of racism. But this is unfair to people of color and puts unnecessary pressure and weight on them. It is not their job to affirm or forgive or heal us. It is our job to find our own support in navigating and healing the inner and outer wounds of racism.

*Educate Me, Please:* oftentimes, white people will rely heavily on people of color to guide us and educate us on matters of race and racism. On the one hand, it is natural to turn to people with more insight, experience, and understanding of an issue to mentor us when we are learning something. On the other hand, this is too much pressure and responsibility to put on people of color—there’s a lot of white people out here who need educating! Furthermore, people of color are already burdened with the daily harms and injustices of institutional racism. While relationships with African Americans and other people of color have been essential for my own growth and learning, it’s important for white people to respect boundaries, establish balanced relationships with people of color, and take responsibility for our own education on race and racism.

**Find and Cultivate Resources and a Shared Vocabulary:** Find Racial Justice and Racism workshops in your local area and take them, or bring in out-of-town trainers if there aren’t any locally. Read books like *The New Jim Crow* and *Witnessing Whiteness*, and articles like “White Privilege, the Invisible Knapsack.” Watch films like “13th,” directed by Ava Duvernay; “Race: The Power of an Illusion”; and “12 Years a Slave.” Go to websites like [whiteawake.org](http://whiteawake.org). Create your own list of helpful resources as a group. As you do, you’ll be developing your own framework, vocabulary, and culture for addressing racism and white supremacy.

**Grieve the Painful Legacy and Ongoing Reality of Racism:** The history and current reality of racism is incredibly painful and agonizing to me. I grieve it everyday. And I regularly feel grief at seeing white people, including those in positions of power, denying or diminishing the reality and pain of racism. I grieve at seeing public institutions and officials that are so slow to respond, if they respond at all, to the concerns and needs of people of color. It’s painful to watch, and it grieves me

tremendously. It’s also quite painful to witness members of my community and others deny the urgency of addressing racism.

So part of my ongoing work is recognizing and grieving pain. Racism is damaging and painful for everyone—to differing degrees, of course, but the dehumanization of racism affects us all. That’s why for white people, it is in our self-interest to confront and overcome racism—we should be in this for ourselves and our own liberation from systems of oppression, along with supporting our friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens who are people of color. But doing this work involves uncovering traumatic histories and ongoing painful experiences that can leave us shocked, drained, and demoralized. That’s to be expected. As Joanna Macy points out, our capacity to feel this pain is a sign of our deep interconnections to other people and to all of life. In my own journey, it’s been important to make time to grieve, and not to hide from the sadness of the reality of racism and racial injustice.

## Conclusions

I believe that racism is in me, and in all of us, and that white individuals and communities have a profound and urgent responsibility to address racism in our selves and in our society. This essay has focused on racism, but the call to address racism doesn’t imply ignoring the other crucial work facing those of us in the communities movement: sustainability, gender equality, responding to global warming, economic justice, creating collaborative culture, environmental regeneration and healing, and other essential issues. Our concern about one of these issues does not prevent or exclude our concern about the others—in fact, many of these issues are deeply interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation from one another.

It’s crucial for me to approach the work of racial justice and healing with patience, self-care, and compassion: we’re all learning, and this is long-term, cross-generational work that addresses deep trauma, pain, and injustice in our world. And it is essential for those of us dedicated to sustainability, justice, and community to commit ourselves to this work. 🌱

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*Community Meeting at Hart’s Mill, Fall 2017.*

# Can We Have Communities without Gentrification?

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE ECOVILLAGERS ALLIANCE

By Eve Bratman, Brandy Brooks, Taylor Mercedes, Josh Jancourtz, and Joel Rothschild

Mayors across America are falling over themselves vying for Amazon's new headquarters, even in tiny towns like Rockland, Texas and Scarborough, Maine. They're inviting a disruption we know too well: techies move in, then skyrocketing costs push locals out. This *drop a giant money bomb* approach to community "revitalization" deals shock to local ecologies, economies, and communities, yet it is the dominant approach in our new Gilded Age. We urgently look to intentional communities, cohousing, and ecovillages to provide an alternative path. So, do they?

To assess any alternative's viability, first we need to identify exactly what it is we want to avoid. In other words, what's wrong with dropping a corporate money bomb, if a city then has more jobs and money? Most of us involved with intentional communities would say it's the *inequity* and *unsustainability* of the approach's outcomes. If we agree that patterns of inequity and unsustainability are what we seek to avoid, then we don't want intentional communities to reproduce those patterns.

### Colonialism in the Communities Movement

Breaking free from oppressive patterns by divorcing ourselves outright from the system, the dreaded "Grid," is a tradition of intentional communities. Sometimes we need distance from an ill dynamic before transformation can begin. In this spirit, and of course also to find "cheap land," intentional communities often move to the edge of mainstream society, as though to a whole new world.

The catch is: this world we share, there is in fact only one of it. Building *utopia*, Greek for "no place," cannot be done without impacting *topia*, the places where everyone else lives. That ill dynamic will follow us into Brooklyn, where we call it gentrification, and it will follow us into the countryside just as well.

When we with the privilege of money and mobility build our communities among the habitat of those less privileged, government and markets rush to attract more consumers with privilege like ours. When we go for undeveloped property instead, the gravity of our privilege draws resources away from existing neighborhoods, bringing disproportional benefit to those of us with the means to travel, to move away from family, to *choose* where and with whom we live. In either scenario, the less privileged are excluded from the plans and usually also from their fruition. In either scenario, we gather up privilege until we have enough to drop it somewhere, like our own little money bomb.

At this year's Twin Oaks Communities Conference, a group of us from the Ecovillagers Alliance proposed questions for community builders to ask ourselves:

*Does the community of my dreams presume others have received education comparable to mine?*

*Does the community of my dreams see mutual trust and consensus flowing from a common class or ethnic background?*

*Does the community of my dreams expect others to have income or access*

*to capital similar to my own?*

*Does the community of my dreams require difficult commutes for those who can't easily change jobs or leave behind family?*

*Does the community of my dreams begin with finding land for sale so we can take control of it?*

This is where colonialism, all too often, manifests on the road paved with our good intentions. After all, the intentional communities movement is drawn from the history and lore of 19th-century utopians, who were themselves inspired by the first European colonists, seeking a "New World" to shape according to their values and interests. We tend to forget how these pioneering experimental colonies were part of the so-called Manifest Destiny project that destroyed countless indigenous worlds and people. By neglecting that history, might we doom ourselves to repeat it?

### The First Step to Recovery Is Admitting Our Problem Is Systemic

We could make this personal. By riding bikes and planting trees, each of us does our part for the earth, so the thinking goes. But we can't fool ourselves that it makes a dent in climate change. Environmental problems are systemic, so systemic change is necessary. When we purchase our own homes, likewise, we can trick them out with cob walls, solar panels, kitchens to feed crowds, amazing gardens, all the eco-groovy things! Yet it's deeply protective of the status quo to expect a consumer market activity like buying property will be what changes the very consumer market system that put the property up for sale. This applies to an intentional community buying property as well as to an individual.

Consumer capitalism is a *system of domination*, so intimately linked to colonialism that the world has hardly known one without the other. At Twin Oaks, we tried to get precise about this. Labor, black and brown and femme bodies, cultures with non-Christian roots, non-human species, and ecosystems have always been devalued, degraded, and exploited by colonialism and consumer capitalism. Because this happens systematically, it is perpetuated *even when* we as participants carry no personal animus against the victims. Even when we're among the victims ourselves!

In other words, no person's or community's statement of values makes much difference. As the First Nations community activist Rebecca Adamson has remarked, "I don't care what a society says its values are. How is the economy organized?" And as black community activist Ed Whitfield said in his Communities Conference keynote, "Our economy is built on the wrong premise: accumulation, also known as *hoarding*."

Consumption-based schemes to change the world are like trying to win at soccer while blindfolded on a sloped field. The players can't work together and the ball tends always toward the goal of those with built-in advantage. Anyone who's studied the history of capitalism has likely realized the playing field was never level, the players were always blindfolded, and this is how it was designed to be, despite our fervent hopes and some stubbornly-held myths about bootstraps.

Systems of domination run deep. They pervade one's sense of self, what we dream to be possible, and the tools available for building those dreams. It's not enough to *believe* in a post-colonial world. We must pry ourselves out of the logics of colonialism and consumer capitalism, in how we think and moreover in what methods we reach for when seeking our actualization, whether as individuals or communities. And we can't wait for when it's convenient. What if no system except colonialist consumer capitalism is offering our dream-community land to live on? Then we must create one.

## A System of Healing

In Ecovillagers Alliance we're convinced no community based on private ownership of land and buildings can ever be free from the cycles of dominance, because those patterns come baked into the system of real estate itself. It can be cohousing or an ecovillage, urban or rural. If it drops the bomb of accumulated privilege, it will leave a crater somewhere.

We are convinced that state or nonprofit ownership are not much better, because these are also tools of dominance controlled by the rich and powerful. Independent collective ownership seems the natural third way, so how can we cultivate independent collectives that will favor the interests of labor, black and brown and femme bodies, cultures with non-Christian roots, non-human species, and ecosystems?

Independent collectivism is an especially tall order for those who've been systematically divided and conquered. In the world's most powerful country today, the United States, the richest one percent of families control nearly twice the wealth of the bottom 90 percent combined. Merely pooling resources won't be enough to beat the system when the field is sloped this badly.

Luckily, there are stars to guide us in the night. Cooperative efforts emphasizing labor and inclusion, like Cleveland's Evergreen Cooperatives, Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi, and the Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative, are empowering local residents, most of them historically marginalized, with direct ownership of holistic, sustainable, and democratic enterprises, and they have started to bring housing into the model. The Los Angeles Eco-Village continues to demonstrate how grassroots organizing can provide a neighborhood with shelter, food, transportation, meaningful work, and fellowship through democratic self-governance, retrofitting buildings, and peer-to-peer financing. Also in California, the People of Color Sustainable Housing Network, supported by the Sustainable Economies Law Center, is developing a radically democratic approach to property investment by and for community. (See Janelle Orsi's "Home Ownership Is Dead!" on page 40 of COMMUNITIES #175, and Deseree Fontenot's "Moving Beyond Diversity Towards Collective Liberation" on pages 13-14 of this issue.)

At Twin Oaks we described these approaches broadly in terms of *healing*, to emphasize how restorative and regenerative processes can correct harms and build resilience. The efforts just named all emphasize work with existing buildings, community organizations, and relationship networks, effectively putting restoration ahead of replacement. As we've seen, the outcome of utopian thinking is often the opposite: replacement over restoration.

The projects that inspire us also rely heavily on education, not only for existing members but for others in their networks and in the neighborhood. The express goal is to encourage regenerative cycles of learning and leading, leading and teaching, teaching and learning again, from one community member to the next.

Intentional community proposals often emphasize some big vision; a healing system tends to do this less. Effective healing, akin to good permaculture design, begins with awareness of who and what is present and what their conditions and interdependencies are. Healing happens through the application of *care* more than vision.

Furthermore, healing acknowledges that illness isn't personal, though

**Community Land Cooperative**

**What We Want**  
 A way to own and guide our neighborhood as a whole.  
 To share the costs, benefits, and stewardship of our land and buildings.  
 The ability to plan for our community's long-term needs.

**Voting Shares**

**How We Get It**  
 Instead of owning patches of land, we own a Community Land Cooperative (CLC). We each buy one voting share. We each get one vote on CLC decisions. The CLC represents our shared interest and enables us to act as a community.

**Shared Equity**

**What We Want**  
 Money to buy property and make our ecovillage.  
 Ownership in the place where we live and do business.  
 Flexibility for different members to invest different amounts.

**Equity shares**

**How We Get It**  
 We buy equity shares in our CLC, as much or as little as each of us chooses. Equity share purchases give our CLC money to spend on real estate. Equity shares are non-voting. We each still have one voting share and one vote.

**More Shared Equity**

**What We Want**  
 More money to develop more real estate, so there's room for every tenant-owner.  
 Freedom from banks' fees and limitations on green building.

**REIC**

**Tenant-owners' equity Class A shares**

**Supporters' equity Class B shares**

**How We Get It**  
 Our CLC is part of a Real Estate Investment Co-op (REIC). Some REIC members invest in our ecovillage with no plans to move there themselves. The REIC gets one CLC vote, to represent our supporters' interests as investors.

**Rent and Revenue**

**What We Want**  
Cash flow, so we can afford to take care of our land, buildings, and systems. Residents can up-size, down-size, or leave, without having to sell anything. Tenant-owners can buy or sell equity without having to move.

**How We Get It**  
Residential and business tenants pay rent. Our CLC puts rental revenue first toward taxes and cooperative property management. Tenants lease the property they need, and can switch when their needs change.

**Dividends**

**What We Want**  
A return on our investments. Instead of an incentive to sell, an incentive to stick together.

**How We Get It**  
CLC revenue left after property management makes a surplus for dividends. Share owners receive dividends regularly, proportional to their shares. Instead of principal and interest to a bank, we pay perpetual dividends to ourselves.

**Resilience Fund**

**What We Want**  
The ability to create affordable housing units for community members in need. A buffer against rising property taxes. Grants and low-interest loans to help community enterprises start up and thrive.

**How We Get It**  
Supporting members own Class B or C shares, a Socially Responsible Investment (SRI). A small portion of B share dividends, and more from C shares, goes to a Resilience Fund. After a few years, we can use our Resilience Fund to strengthen the community.

part of the work to correct it may be. A virus-free individual surrounded by sick people coughing is no better positioned for wellness than a perfect acre of off-the-grid self-sufficient cottages is positioned to participate in societal transformation.

Healing calls for a *whole system*. This presents a real problem for healing-oriented approaches in a world controlled by systems of dominance. One neighborhood cannot create the whole system necessary for its own liberation. It's too much! Among the Ecovillagers Alliance, we say, "it takes a community to raise a village." This points to organizational power that, frankly, doesn't yet exist and that we need.

**Community Land Cooperatives**

The Ecovillagers Alliance group at Twin Oaks made a proposal: to cultivate *community land cooperatives* ("CLCs"). CLCs provide a way to steward a neighborhood's land and buildings outside of real estate's harmful buy-and-sell cycles. In financial terms, CLCs rely on equity rather than debt. Organizationally, they're based on the power of a grassroots network, known as a *real estate investment cooperative*.

In a nutshell, the CLC is a landlord, owned and governed by its tenants, who are called *tenant-owners*. Each tenant-owner holds a lease, providing the right to a CLC home or place of business. And each tenant-owner holds a *voting share* of ownership, providing the right to participate in decisions about the CLC's property, including the rent and other terms of leases. The CLC is designed to provide cooperative ownership and governance to as many neighboring units or buildings as can be incorporated over time, without ousting owners or residents who don't wish to participate, up to roughly the scope of one square city block.

While the CLC provides ownership and governance on the hyperlocal level, it operates as part of a regional real estate investment cooperative ("REIC"), which provides the larger system of democratic capital investment, educational and technical support, and organizational power that the CLC needs to become established and to thrive. When we speak of Ecovillagers Cooperative, we refer to the proposal to establish North America's first real estate investment co-op dedicated to community land co-ops.

With the REIC underpinning its CLCs, it's possible to finance the ownership and improvement of CLC land and buildings without debt, because *non-tenant* members of the REIC can join tenant-owners in purchasing *equity shares*. The sum of equity share investment by tenant- and non-tenant-owners together provides the capital for each CLC to own land and buildings adequate for the tenant-owners' needs. Because an equity share represents a portion of the CLC as a whole, not an at-

**Adjusted Rent**

**What We Want**  
Lower cost of living for tenant-owners who've invested a lot. Financial security for retired community members. The equivalent of owning a house free and clear.

**How We Get It**  
A tenant-owner may opt for a lease with lower rent instead of dividends. One whose dividend would equal half his rent can opt to just pay half that rent. One whose dividend would equal her whole rent can opt to pay no rent.

omistic building unit, shares can be bought and sold among members of the REIC without affecting anyone's cost of living (i.e., the rent) or requiring anyone to move.

CLCs and their REIC alike are independent, democratic collectives, the combination of which produces a whole, healing system. The CLCs sustain our villages at the scale of local self-governance, and the REIC sustains the broader community it takes to build them. The CLC minds local needs, while the REIC maintains educational, technical, administrative, and capital resources in common.

Without the land and buildings ever being sold, a CLC enables residents and community businesses to build local wealth and power with the support of REIC members who fill in the missing cash. CLC wealth flows from the cooperative *dividend* produced when tenant-owners' rent payments exceed the cost of taxes and maintenance. The dividend is distributed proportional to each member's equity, with a higher-return share class reserved for tenant-owners. Rent and share valuation are determined through inclusive self-governance so that no one impacted by decision-making can be excluded from it.

Because tenant-owners can acquire additional equity shares gradually over time, each community's members have potentially greater financial flexibility and security than conventional homeowners, to say nothing of conventional renters. The ownership of cooperative equity isn't tied to any particular lease, giving tenant-owners greater flexibility with respect to where they live or do business.

### The Path Ahead

This cultivation of "ecovillage neighborhoods," as we sometimes call our CLCs, begins with study circles, to engage us first in building relationships and educating each other in the nuts and bolts of cooperative governance. Any group of neighbors can propose to form a CLC by learning together, with mentoring and guidance from their peers, building on the REIC's curriculum and guidelines and a growing awareness of local needs.

This path toward healing prioritizes place-based work, in the sense of the landscapes, the buildings, the community enterprises, and, above all, the networks of relationship already in a neighborhood. Building a CLC does involve property acquisition, but through the most cooperative and inclusive process we can muster. If an existing property owner wishes to join the CLC, their title can be traded for equity shares. If an existing renter wishes to join, the REIC can finance their home's purchase and they can start buying equity in their neighborhood over time, without having to move.

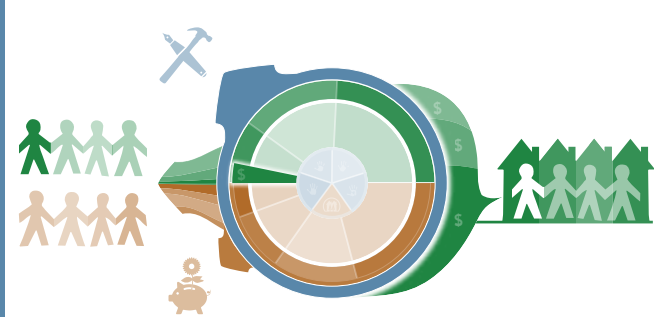
Healing can be a long process, and Ecovillagers is a big experiment, one that will continue to raise juicy questions and challenges. Within the Ecovillagers Alliance, we have been studying the financial, legal, and social implications of these models for many years, and work still remains. Though the needs are urgent, any quick fix would almost certainly reproduce the patterns of dominance as much as heal them.

We take heart from the spirit of people rising up in this historical moment. We were moved by the seriousness and optimism of discussion around these ideas at Twin Oaks this Labor Day. And now we invite all to join in the conversation and work together toward a communities movement that is equitable, sustainable, and just. 🐦

*Eve Bratman, Brandy Brooks, Taylor Mercedes, Josh Jancourtz, and Joel Rothschild write on behalf of Ecovillagers Alliance ([www.ecovillagers.org](http://www.ecovillagers.org)), the organizing and education initiative in support of Ecovillagers Cooperative. Josh lives in Union County, New Jersey where he has worked with EcoVillage New Jersey. Taylor, Eve, and Joel live in Pennsylvania and are working to build a CLC-based ecovillage neighborhood in the City of Lancaster. Brandy lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, was an Ecovillagers Alliance co-founder, and is running for Montgomery County (MD) Council At-Large.*

Rent to Own

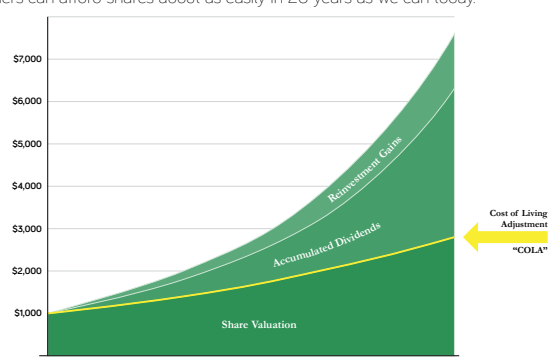
**What We Want**  
 Tenant-owners can build equity gradually.  
 The community rewards members for staying long-term.  
 The equivalent of paying down a mortgage over time.



**How We Get It**  
 Tenant-owners can pay extra rent to purchase extra shares a little each month. New CLC shares are created only for these "rent to owns" or to build new units. CLC shares exclusively represent investment in our place or in our people.


Wealth Building

**What We Want**  
 Community wealth building over time.  
 Tenant-owners can afford homes about as easily in 20 years as we can today.  
 All owners can afford shares about as easily in 20 years as we can today.




**How We Get It**  
 All CLC owners can roll our dividends into a responsible mutual fund for extra gains. CLC policy limits rent inflation to a real-world Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA). The basic price of a CLC share increases in lock step with the COLA.


Principles




**Cooperative Ownership**  
 Renters are owners. Owners are renters.  
 We're in this together.




**No Flipping**  
 We can buy and sell shares,  
 But our habitat is not a commodity.



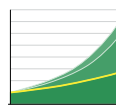
**Egalitarian Decision-Making**  
 One owner,  
 One vote.




**Local First**  
 A portion of dividends will always be reserved for community resilience.



**Slow Growth**  
 It should be as easy for future generations to stay, or to leave, as it is for us today.



**Social Finance**  
 Equity expands our community network.  
 So we prefer equity to debt.



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COMMUNITIES 39

# CONVERSATIONS ON CLASS AT DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

By Sasha Adkins

When I was living at Dancing Rabbit (Rutledge, Missouri), I participated in a “Train the Trainer” weekend with ClassAction (classism.org), and came back eager to try out some tools that were new to me. The Rabbits gave me space to experiment. It turns out that more Rabbits were “diggers” than “pavers,” and our conversations were rich and thought-provoking.<sup>1</sup>

We incorporated the “Power Walk” exercise into our annual retreat. Participants began by standing in a straight line facing in the same direction, as if we were all looking towards a common goal, and then we repositioned ourselves in response to 20 statements such as: “If there were more than 10 books in your house growing up, take one step forward” and “If you ever went to bed hungry because there wasn’t enough food, take a step backwards.” After the statements were read, folks were invited to add their own. We discussed what surprised us looking around at where each other was standing, and some of us noticed how closely the configuration of who was out in front mirrored who had the most influential voices in our governance. Some of us asked who was present in our community and who was not.

We also held a forum which we called, “*Are Ecovillages Inherently Elitist?*” In one brainstorm, we imagined that we were going to create the most elitist ecovillage possible and listed all the written and unwritten rules it would have. (Sometimes dystopia is initially easier to describe than utopia.) After that, we reflected on our own. Here are some of the thoughts and questions that came out of this exercise.

- How can the “visitor” phase be made more accessible for new residents? Taking two or three weeks away from job and family responsibilities to try out life in an intentional community may not be possible for someone who has no paid vacation, for example, or no back-up for elder care. At the same time, an extended visit is an essential part of discerning whether the community and the potential resident are a good match. Beyond that, our visitors were asked to either pay for overnight accommodations in the Mercantile or to bring a tent and a sleeping bag. For those who don’t own one and whose friends don’t spend their leisure time exploring the wilderness, this might add another layer of potentially insurmountable financial burden.

- Do our expectations for comportment follow white middle-class norms? This may show up in procedures for conducting meetings and structures for resolving disputes, to name just a few examples. Are residents from other class backgrounds and other cultures pressured to learn and conform to these norms, or is there room for new residents to help shape a different way of doing things?

- Some folks in community spend a great deal of time unpacking their emotions, and often in a compartmentalized way (“inner sustainability” sessions or co-counseling or check-in). At other times and in other spaces, open—particularly loud—expressions of anger, grief, or even joy may not be encouraged. (Of course, this depends on who you hang out with!) Emotional restraint may be experienced by some as cold and unwelcoming.

- For those who have experienced food insecurity, evictions, and having their belongings sold or pawned to pay bills, minimalism as a voluntary “lifestyle” may not feel safe or appealing. In particular, Dancing Rabbit’s rule that members may not own a car represents a different level of risk (and freedom?) for some than it does for others.

- Dancing Rabbit is rural, and the surrounding towns are largely white, and heavily Old Order Mennonite. One African American visitor shared that she felt trapped and isolated and that the thought of needing to interact with local police or hospital staff (who were all white) was more than unnerving. Some members take extended trips abroad or to other parts of the country when claustrophobia sets in, but this may not be an option for folks who are from poor or working class backgrounds.

- Folks who rely on WIC or SNAP (the program that used to be called food stamps) need to purchase groceries from local supermarkets where their benefit cards are accepted, to supplement whatever food they grow or raise. Though in some areas, farmers’ markets accept EBT cards, many do not. Members supported by trust funds and others with access to wealth are able to source (and take more risks in growing) a more organic, sustainable diet. Do ethical judgments



about the folks who “support” conventional agriculture and confined animal feedlot operations crop up? Do folks on government assistance feel that they are perceived as not contributing as fully to the community’s mission and values?

• Because the cost of living at Dancing Rabbit is lower than that in many other areas of the US, DR may attract some members who are primarily seeking affordable living/survival, while other members who have a wider range of choices are drawn to the ecovillage because they are excited to be part of an experiment in sustainability. All members contribute to the work of building Dancing Rabbit. How can we be sure we aren’t, even unconsciously, privileging one motivation over another?

I don’t pretend to have answers. I offer my recollections of our conversations simply as an invitation to others to help me think through it more deeply, and as conversation starters for other communities. I appreciate that so many folks at DR were willing to have these conversations, and to listen to each other’s experiences with compassion and an open mind. I have been inspired by the depth of honesty and trust that I saw modeled there and hope to carry that spirit into the wider culture. 🌱

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*Sasha Adkins was raised a nomad, traveling on a sailboat in the Atlantic with family. Sasha has yet to settle down and stopped keeping track after the first 50 addresses, but spending six months at Dancing Rabbit in 2012-2013 was definitely a highlight. Sasha has also lived in community at the Beacon Hill Friends House (Boston) and the Discipleship Year House (Washington, DC). Sasha, a fellow with GreenFaith, teaches environmental health, with a focus on plastic marine debris as a symptom of the toxicity of disposable culture.*

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1. “Diggers” want to surface the root causes of conflicts, while “pavers” value harmony and would rather smooth over differences to preserve cordial relationships.



*Potluck Circle at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage.*

Cecelia Watkins

# CLASS, RACE, AND PRIVILEGE in Intentional Community

By Kara Huntermoon



*Community members watch solar eclipse in the North Field.*

In my first year as a co-owner of Heart-Culture Farm Community's land, I was shocked to learn that new residents, particularly raised-poor and people of color, felt I had pressured or forced them to vote yes on particular people moving in. I thought I was expressing an opinion, in the context of everyone having an equal right to their opinion. Certainly those who felt "forced" hadn't said anything during the consensus process about not liking the new people. Nobody ever accused me of "forcing" them to vote a certain way during the seven years when I was only a renter!

The problem was one of privilege—not necessarily the "privilege" of being more officially responsible for helping our intentional community function well, which is what ownership actually means at Heart-Culture. The privileged status of my class and race backgrounds, combined with the experiences of our residents of living in the wider oppressive culture, made it hard for them to accept that they had a right to participate with an equal voice. In our resident consensus process, a block is a block, regardless of owner or renter status. How could I make that clear?

I learned to withhold my opinion and listen first, even calling on people who tend to remain silent, ensuring their voices are heard before mine. My position as a white middle-class educated person holds meaning in my relationships, especially when one knows that I am a community co-owner and 10-year resident. I'm also the rental manager, a job I got because nobody else was willing to sign eviction notices (even when all agreed one was needed).

Initially in my liberation work, I tended to focus on my hurts, on the ways I have been oppressed. As a woman who became a single mother at 23, sexism and male domination hit me especially hard. I now had a very important job to do, and one for which I would be frequently judged by complete strangers if I failed in even the tiniest detail—like the day a woman screamed at me on the street because my toddler was not wearing shoes. However, my important high-stakes job came with zero income. In fact, it increased my expenses. Though raised middle-class and educated at an excellent high school, I had not finished college. I joined the ranks of the extremely poor when I chose to parent full-time. My daughter and I spent two homeless years living on the grace of friends, and then found an intentional community that charged \$85 per month to live in an eight-foot-diameter cardboard and scrap-wood dome and share facilities in a support house. I advertised at the local Organic markets until I found a job nannying for \$80 per week (eight hours), and suddenly I had stable housing and extra income! Wow! Intentional community can totally rock for single mamas!

As I explored the ins and outs of sexism and male domination, and the effects of sexual assault, domestic violence, and the institutionalized exploitation of female labor on my own life, it slowly

dawned on me that my own personal constellation included many aspects of privilege. A 40-hour volunteer training at our local domestic violence shelter included an exercise called "The Shape of Privilege." To do this exercise, draw a circle, then intersect it with four lines to make eight spokes. Label each spoke with an oppression—for example, sexism, racism, able-ism, age-ism, classism, gender oppression, immigrant oppression, religious oppression. There are others; choose the eight that make most sense in your life. Then imagine that the center of the circle, where all the lines intersect, is the point of zero privilege, or most oppressed. The place where the lines intersect with the outside of the circle is the point of maximum privilege, or least oppressed. Now mark a point along each line to represent where you feel you personally fall along the continuum of oppression. Connect the points, and color in the resulting shape. This is the shape of your privilege.

When I did this exercise, I was shocked. While my point along the continuum of "sexism" snuggled up in the center (most oppressed), most of my other points ranged near the outer edge of the circle. I have a lot of privilege! Most inspiring, the facilitator of this exercise claimed that the position of privilege is the power position in terms of making lasting change. It's easy for white people to ignore or dismiss people of color complaining about racism, but when white people stand up against

racism, their voices are more likely to be heard. This argument hooked me. I resolved to use my privilege to make change towards ending oppression of all people.

I came to understand that the systems of oppression for all other constituencies function in much the same way as sexism and male domination: in order to exploit the labor and value of a large number of people (let's say people of color) to benefit a few power-holding elites, a continuum of behaviors is needed. A minority of individuals in the privileged group do extreme violence (like routine police shootings of black people), and a majority of individuals in the privileged group perform microaggressions and fail to reform the institutions of oppression. The majority of white people can then deny being racist, without actually doing anything to end racism or recognizing the way racism personally benefits them.

As this light went on, I started a life-long learning. I will never be done with this personal work, but I have a few insights to share. The question: How can I use my personal life and my position as a leader in intentional community to break down the barriers between people caused by oppression? How can my intentional community be a microcosm of a society free from systems of oppression based on the visible markers used by our wider society, such as class, race, sex, or age? Here are some initial answers:

**Lead from behind, listen first, listen longer, and keep my opinions “last and light.”** This helps counteract the tendency for my voice to carry more weight because I am white, articulate, middle-class-educated, and in a leadership role in the community.

**Relationship is more important than being right or being smart.** Respect other people's thinking, even if I totally disagree. Keep my opinions to myself if that might help the person who is talking feel more accepted. Really try to understand where they are coming from. As an example, I have eaten only Organic food for years, but instead of judging others in our community, I try to understand why they might make different choices around food. I have learned a lot about food access inequality, both from listening and from researching on my own (try Googling “Food Desert”). I have also had a positive impact on others. One of our residents (a person of color) told me he is trying to buy Organic food more, because he thinks it will be healthier for himself and his daughter. When he moved in several years ago he believed Organic food was impossible for his family; he felt separate from “judgmental hippies” and their “weird food rules.” I believe my consistent focus on caring about him and listening to him has given him room to make changes in this area.

**Invite feedback and thank people for it.** Make it safe for people to tell me how they are affected by me, even if they are in an oppressed group (for example, people of color) in relation to my privileged group (white). Don't defend myself—just listen.

**Proudly join the working class: the only class with a future** (to paraphrase Harvey Jackins). Do the dirty work. If I don't do it, some other person will have to do it. Do what needs to be done and don't complain. Pick up the trash, put away the tools left out in the rain, and don't bother to ask who left it that way. (It could easily have been me.)

**Make sure every voice is heard.** Notice if someone has not spoken about a topic of discussion, and call on them to do so. Someone who attends meeting after meeting in silence does have a valuable perspective and important things to say, and needs to know that their voice is welcome. In the history of our community, those who won't offer to speak in meetings have been immigrants, women of color, and people who were raised poor (particularly those who spent several years living on the streets during their teens). If they are not willing to speak up in the group, even when called upon, it is helpful to delay any decision on the topic until someone can ask the person privately to explore their thoughts and feelings. This extra effort to make safe space pays off in the long run in greater retention of diverse residents.

**Create financial structures that level the playing field.** Every community needs capital to start, and continuing inputs of money to continue functioning. At Heart-Culture Farm Community, our mortgage payment alone is

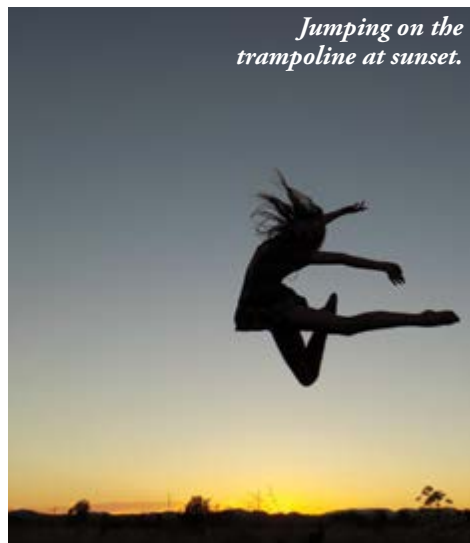
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## How can I use my position as a leader in intentional community to break down barriers caused by oppression?

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\$2,600 per month, and utilities, taxes, and maintenance add another several thousand dollars. That's before we add any “progress projects,” like installing water catchment systems, planting orchards, or building new housing. Creating a level financial playing field is tricky when the money needs to come from somewhere, quick.

This is a place where those who already have privilege (in this case, money) can leverage that



*Jumping on the trampoline at sunset.*



*Three community children, from three different families.*

Photos by Myriad Huntermoon

privilege to make necessary change. Communities do better with “financial angels” who are willing and able to take on responsibility for funding projects until the community can support itself. These people are “angels” because they play a specific role, and use their specific gifts to seed the community, but they remain humble in their relationships with people; they don’t use power-over control tactics to micromanage the residents. Personality and ethics are really important in a financial angel. Other people in the community can help by making a commitment to see the angel as a valued and important human being, one who is approachable and wants connection and closeness as much as any other person.

Residents with lower incomes have a valuable role to play in community. We charge rents between \$250 and \$800 per month, including utilities and community fees, depending on the size of the space. This amount is low in our area of the country, but it covers our community’s needs, and allows our residents to do more than chase the dollar. One of our owners, for example, works three days per week in a near-minimum-wage job, and spends the other four days working on community projects and building relationships with residents. He isn’t going to bankroll any large projects with his monthly buy-in payments, but the attention he gives to community well-being during his days off is invaluable to the community’s good functioning.

**Encourage sharing.** Good relationships lead to innovative ways to help each other. When we can borrow a tool, there is no need to buy it. On a larger scale, we can help each other through stressful life transitions. Several times our community has taken up collections to pay for a resident’s rent for a month, when an injured resident temporarily couldn’t work, or when a new parent wanted to bond with a baby but didn’t have paid parenting leave. Because many of our residents live month-to-month, sharing brings a resiliency to our lives that wouldn’t otherwise exist.

**Make ownership accessible.** Anyone who can afford to live at Heart-Culture can afford to buy in to the ownership structure. This system was created for my family, and has since been extended to two other owners and codified into our policies. In writing, it says that anyone who lives here for at least three years and attends owners’ meetings for at least one year can buy in to the ownership of the land, provided they can obtain consensus from current owners to accept them as a new owner. The new owner can, if needed, receive a loan from the current owners’ group, which allows them to buy in to the ownership by paying the same monthly amount they paid for rent. Anyone who can afford to live here can afford to buy in.

In practice, the current owners look for certain qualities in a prospective new owner, and the three-year time lag exists to give us time to identify those qualities. We want people who will resolve conflicts that come up while living together, and who are guided by values we hold in common. They need to be able to form trusting relationships with the current owners, and participate well in consensus during both resident and owner meetings. We want them to think beyond themselves and their families, to consider how to help the functioning of the entire community go well. Ownership means more responsibility, to both the financial and social well-being of the group. Owners rely on each other to help solve problems and hold a strong container for the community culture. This container is especially important at Heart-Culture, because we do accept residents who are very diverse, including those who have no experience with social sustainability structures (like consensus and mediation) or physical sustainability structures (like composting

toilets and greywater systems).

**Learn about race, class, oppression, and privilege.** Study the history of different groups of people. Why are race relations the way they are today? What were they like 100, 200, or 400 years ago? Learn the life histories of community residents; how do they relate to the histories of groups? For example, how does my life history relate to the history of white people in the United States? How does my Latina community-mate’s life history relate to the history of Spanish colonization of the indigenous peoples of Latin America? Don’t be “color blind” or “class blind.” Blindness isn’t a way to end oppression; it’s another way to avoid admitting to our own privilege. Unless we look squarely at the problems that face us, we will not be able to dismantle institutions of oppression and create a society where people are truly equal.

In the last six months I have seen signs that my efforts are paying off. One of our raised-poor long-term residents recently started speaking up in nearly every meeting, after years of cursory answers to invitations to contribute. An immigrant resident gave an unusually long speech in reaction to an emotional topic in a recent meeting. People are telling me they disagree with me—and I think that’s a good sign. I can tell we like each other, and I’m glad they feel safe arguing with me. I’m looking forward to seeing how our relationships evolve into the future! 🌈

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*Kara Huntermoon is one of seven co-owners of Heart-Culture Farm Community, near Eugene, Oregon. She spends most of her time in unpaid labor in service of community: child-raising, garden-growing, and emotion/relationship management among the community residents. She also teaches Liberation Listening, a form of co-counseling that focuses on ending oppression.*



*Serifina, three years old, was born at home on the farm.*



*Riverside mandala.*

# WHY DIVERSITY IS GOOD for Intentional Community

By Kara Huntermoon



*Eight Heart-Culture Farm Community children, ranging in age from two to 13.*

Why is diversity good for intentional communities? Challenging systems of oppression takes place on all levels, from the micro to the macro. Understanding the macro dynamics, the patterns of the wider society, lends significance to interactions on the personal level. The work of linking the macro to the micro can help us make personal choices that affect our bigger society. In my life, as a white woman in an intentional community in Oregon, I can tie these levels together through three vignettes from different levels of reality: macro (Oregon history and politics), micro (personal feelings and relationships), and community-scale (interpersonal decision-making).

## Macro Level: Oregon History and Politics

Segregation practices over 500-plus years have succeeded in making close interracial relationships harder. For example, 12 percent of Oregon's population is non-white, so one out of every nine people I meet on the street ought to be a person of color. But I do not meet that many people of color, and I notice when I see one because it seems so rare. We have to reach out specifically across segregation lines to make relationships. Our separation from people of color is one sign of white privilege.

Why do I have to seek out people of color in order to find them? Oregon's history is strongly racist, including active recruiting of KKK residents with advertisements describing Oregon as a "white haven." The entire state was a sundown town, with an 1859 Constitution that banned blacks from living or working in Oregon, owning property, or voting.<sup>1</sup> Black people who failed to leave the state could be physically

beaten until they complied. While these laws have been repealed, and today Oregon is known as a liberal state, we are still living in strongly segregated communities. White liberal people have little opportunity to learn, through relationships with people of color, about their own privilege and racism. This leads to a kind of white denial, where we are genuinely liberal and anti-racist, but unaware of our own privilege, so we perpetuate the institutions of racism without even knowing it.

Intentional communities in Oregon are generally white dominated and attract mostly white middle class people. If we want to change this (and I do!) we have to reach across color lines to create diverse communities. For communities to succeed in retaining residents long-term, we have to develop an awareness of the larger societal dynamics that affect our personal relationships. History, sociology, anthropology, liberation theory, and co-counseling are my favorite resources. If we don't seek out education about race, class, and privilege, we will remain well-intentioned but ineffectual—perhaps claiming to be "color blind," but actually incognizant of colorism, classism, and their remedies. Our communities will suffer as a result, usually by unknowingly repeating the social dynamics of the oppressive society.

## Micro Level: Personal Feelings and Relationships

It is very healing to have close relationships with people who are different. For example, two of my close friends are heterosexual men, and both relationships help highlight the fact that not all men will rape and attack me if I don't give them sex. I occasionally have to educate one of

them about microaggressions they've aimed at me or at another woman, but since they respond positively I experience this as an empowerment exercise. I *can* stand up against oppression in my personal relationships and move those relationships forward, even if I am shaking with fear.

On the other side of the oppression spectrum, I have several friends who are Latinx, black, or Asian-heritage. As a white woman I tend to be hesitant to express myself around people of color, but my close friends encourage me to be big and make mistakes. When they tell me I have erred in my treatment of them, I thank them. I am genuinely glad they feel safe enough to tell me some version of "Shut up, white girl, you have no clue." Both my self-education on racism, and the corrections I receive from my friends, serve to sink me into a deeper sense of security. I *can* have close relationships with all kinds of people, without fear of acting oppressively towards them. Since the last thing I want is to hurt others, it's reassuring to have evidence that my relationships can recover from my mistakes.

### Community Level: Interpersonal Decision-Making

The oppressive society hurts groups of people in patterned ways, and those hurts shut down some aspects of emotional and mental functioning. For example, boys and men repeatedly hear admonitions like "Boys don't cry"; "Buck up! Be a man!"; and "You're a sissy!" As a result, most men find it difficult to access tears as a healing process. Girls and women generally are allowed to retain more access to their emotions.

A diverse group of people includes individuals who have been subjected to different patterns of oppression. The areas of functioning impaired by these hurts are different for members of different identity groups. That means the areas of functioning retained or developed are also different. Each person has a piece of the truth, and together we can make a whole story; we can make more functional accurate responses to challenges that arise in our communities.

For example, our community once agreed to help a pregnant homeless couple be housed long enough to birth and recover from it. The family was not eligible for residency at Heart-Culture because of several details, including drug use, communication style, and the number of residents who felt triggered or unable to relax around them. About half of our residents gave impassioned pleas to accept them temporarily, as we didn't like to see a hugely pregnant woman on the streets. "The difference between this pregnant homeless woman, and all the other pregnant homeless women, is this one is asking us for help," explained one resident.

The deciding argument came from several raised-poor residents, in-

cluding some people of color. They explained that they had spent some time interviewing the homeless couple, and assessed that though they weren't a good fit, they also weren't dangerous. "They're not going to steal from us, hurt us, or make life hard on us," explained one young man. Those of us with "safer" more sheltered, more privileged backgrounds trusted their judgment, because they *knew*. They had lived through conditions where these kinds of assessments had to be made over and over, and empirical evidence collected from the outcomes. We trusted our community mates. We may not have trusted the homeless couple, but we trusted each other.

Several white middle class residents insisted that we not allow the homeless couple to birth on the property. Even though the community had several born-at-home babies, they felt it was too much to risk when we didn't know the parents. As it turned out, the mother needed the hospital to save her life during a true birth emergency, a rare complication that would have killed her before she could reach help if she had tried to birth unassisted on our land. Because we insisted they not birth here, they chose the hospital, and both mama and baby turned out fine.

Our community mates were right: the couple was safe for us, and we shouldn't allow them to birth here. Two positions, from diverse voices, combined to create a good outcome. We housed the couple for two months, they birthed safely, the dad found a job, and they moved on. Although several residents felt relieved when they left, all agreed it was a good experience.

### Conclusion

Most intentional communities are motivated by a goal to be different from the mainstream: more ecological, more egalitarian, or more supportive of personal and spiritual growth. Social justice consciousness and intentional diversity are one possible response to the problems of racism and classism in the wider society. Taking on the challenge of creating diverse communities can lead to personal and interpersonal growth for residents. Successful relationships with all kinds of people strengthen our communities, adding to our long-term resiliency. 🐦

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*Kara Huntermoon is one of seven owners of the community land at Heart-Culture Farm Community, where the ownership structure encourages low-income residents to buy in. She has lived at Heart-Culture for 10 years with her husband and two daughters. Kara teaches Liberation Listening, a form of co-counseling that focuses on understanding and ending systems of oppression.*

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1. "Oregon's Racial History, Diversity Explored." Mail Tribune, [www.mailtribune.com/article/20131020/News/310200330](http://www.mailtribune.com/article/20131020/News/310200330).



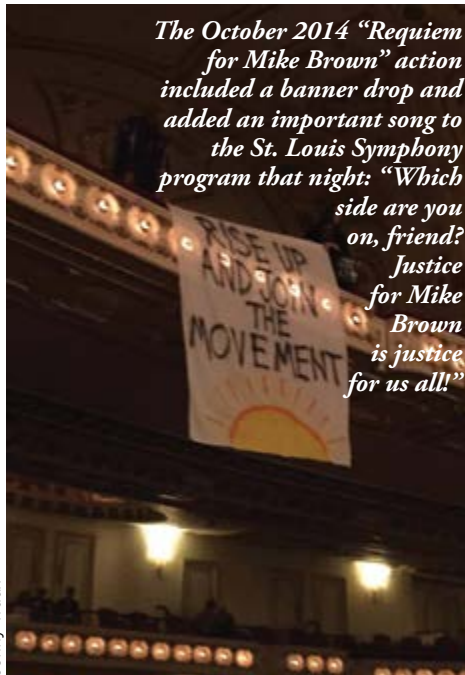
Photos by Myriad Huntermoon

*Sunset over the North Pasture.*



*August 2014 action led by the Organization of Black Struggle, attempting to ask Gov. Nixon to de-escalate police tactics in Ferguson and not bring in the National Guard.*

Jenny Truax



*The October 2014 "Requiem for Mike Brown" action included a banner drop and added an important song to the St. Louis Symphony program that night: "Which side are you on, friend? Justice for Mike Brown is justice for us all!"*

Jenny Truax



*Demonstration following Stockley acquittal.*

Richard Reilly

# Combating Racism, One Community at a Time

By Jenny Truax

“Where are all the people of color?” This question has come up frequently at gatherings during my 20 years with the Catholic Worker (CW) movement, a network of faith-based intentional communities that focus on direct service (often hospitality to the homeless) and justice work. Our current movement seems to attract largely white, middle class folks (myself included), and while our lack of racial diversity has been noted, we haven’t made a lot of progress in becoming more inclusive. In the past few years, CW communities in St. Louis and throughout the Midwest have been doing some exciting (and scary!) work examining ourselves, changing communal structures, and reaching out to become more anti-racist communities.

For white folks, dismantling white supremacy first requires an honest reckoning with ourselves as both individuals and communities. This work can be vulnerable, messy, and painful and needs to be an ongoing process. Secondly, it requires white-dominated communities to build relationships and concretely support organizations led by people of color, using the resources at our disposal—property, finances, a broad network of support, newsletters, and other means of communication—to uplift the work these groups are doing. These are two essential “feet” of anti-racism solidarity, and cannot be done well in isolation from each other. If we try to engage in action without first examining the damage our own whiteness and racism has done to us as individuals and communities, our efforts will be surface-level at best, and can do real damage at worst. Alternately, if white people remain in the realm of navel-gazing without taking action, we can end up becoming paralyzed in our own self-righteous anxiety. I’ll recount some concrete examples of both of these strategies.

## Looking Inward

After the murder of Mike Brown and uprising in Ferguson, our communal energy in St. Louis expanded to join and support the Black Lives Matter movement while we continued to do hospitality. A shift occurred for us during this time; we gained a new urgency to directly confront the racism present in our own community and in our larger movement. Looking inward, we began revisiting our founding principles through a specifically anti-classist, anti-racist lens. This process helped us understand more deeply why our movement is largely one of white, middle class, able-bodied people. It has been important (and painful) to acknowledge that something about our mission and the way we practice it makes us appealing to a very narrow (and socially privileged) group of folks, despite our own sense of being a radical movement. In re-reading our foundational documents and mission, we asked the questions, “Who would this speak to? Who does it explicitly welcome and

unintentionally exclude? How have these ideas been interpreted by our friends who are not white or middle class?”

We were very nervous to talk about simplicity and voluntary poverty, because they are central tenets of our movement. As we talked about both the ideal, and the current practice of it in our own community, we asked: Does our practice of simplicity presume that members begin with some level of material wealth? In what ways does “downward mobility” appeal only to those who have experienced a life of financial stability? How do poor and working class people interpret this value? Does our practice of this value acknowledge the differences between voluntary downward mobility for middle class folks, and achieving economic stability for poor and working class folks?

We also looked at our writings on non-violence, a central principle of the Catholic Worker since its inception. In the midst of the Ferguson uprising here, and the Black Lives Matter movement nationally, our community has heard the feedback that people of color are fatigued and angered at white people trying to dictate how they should respond to racist oppression. We’ve also noticed the ways that the term “nonviolence” has been used to silence the voices of people of color to actually promote the status quo. We also see that the behavior that white folks label as “violent” is very often a reflection of a culturally-white practice of politeness and compliance with police and

*The 2014 #FergusonOctober national march in St. Louis.*



Jenny Truax

*The 2017 Women's March in St. Louis.*



Jenny Truax

state power. Speaking for myself, adding these nuances has been vital to my growth as someone who seeks to exist in the Catholic Worker movement and also be an accomplice/ally to our local Black Lives Matter movement.

It's often difficult for white people to recognize how racism may be playing out in our communities. All communities have a specific culture: expectations, assumptions, shared values, beliefs, and symbols that are generally accepted without too much thought. We create culture out of our own socialization, experiences, and identities that we bring to community. Culture is powerful precisely because it affects everything from an underlying level, like the air we breathe. Our community has used the following list of ways that white supremacy shows up in the group culture to help us unveil how racism is operating in our community. This tool is from the Catalyst Project and Criss Crass, with summaries created by the St. Louis Anti-Racism Collective. As a mostly white community, we have come to understand that external tools like this are essential to help us become more self-aware in examining our practices and underlying assumptions.

### Universalizing White Experience

This phenomenon happens when "white" is considered standard and normal, and we assume that most people have had similar experiences. In intentional communities, white folks can view their way of doing things—organizing styles, meeting culture, style of communicating, and living practices—as normal and average, just "the way things are." In this

*2017 Highway shutdown following the acquittal of police officer Jason Stockley for the killing of Anthony Lamar Smith.*



Richard Reilly

*The 2014 #FergusonOctober national march in St. Louis.*



Jenny Truax



dynamic, white folks may react poorly to suggestions, challenges, or different ways of doing things from people of color. Some questions to ask about your community:

- Is it an expectation that people joining our community will learn about the culture and history of the folks we serve and the history of the land on which we are working?
- In what ways does our community prioritize efficiency over relationship-building?
- Does our community recognize that a white-led community has specific cultural ways of communicating and of running meetings, campaigns, and programs, which can inadvertently marginalize people of color?
- In talking about protest and direct action, does our community recognize that there are different risks for black, brown, and undocumented activists?

### De-racialization

De-racialization involves removing an issue from the larger context of racism and failing to challenge the impact of racism on that issue. De-racialization restricts the self-determination of the people who are most impacted by that issue to define their own struggle. This term was developed by Critical Resistance, a prison abolition organization. Some questions to ask about your community:

- When our community addresses issues like homelessness, war, or climate change, do we name and challenge the intersection of racism with these issues?
- How have we treated injustices like climate change and war as if they affect all people equally?
- In what ways are white people in our community encouraged to speak in newsletters, to volunteers, and publicly as experts on subjects that disproportionately affect people of color (while groups and people of color are often ignored or not believed)?

### Contradictory Resistance

In the dynamic of contradictory resistance, white folks work to end oppression but simultaneously fight to maintain the privileges they have. This can look like fighting to maintain positions of power in an organization. It can look like white activists sacrificing the goals of activists of color in order to win short-term gains for their own agenda. One example of this is when white leaders ignore the asks of organizers of color and prioritize their group's perceived reputation by "playing it safe" or avoiding the appearance of being "too radical." Some questions to ask about your community:

- If our community addresses an issue that disproportionately affects people of color, are they

in leadership on our projects and campaigns—or even at the table?

- Does worry about the perceptions of our (mostly white) members and donors prevent us from taking strong stands against racism?
- Are the white folks in our community willing to share power, and have less control?

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## The idea of "recruiting" people of color into "the" movement ignores historical and contemporary reality.

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### Centered on the White

This is a dynamic of white activists ignoring or misunderstanding the resistance coming from communities of color. Five-hundred-plus years of liberation struggles on this continent have been led by people of color, from colonization through today. The idea of "recruiting" people of color into "the" movement (defined as white radical struggle) ignores this historical and contemporary reality. Some questions to ask about your community:

- Do we get stuck on the questions, "How can we get more POC to join our group?" or "Why don't more people of color realize how important this issue is?" without doing any deeper digging?
- Has our community prioritized building relationships in our neighborhood, and with

*Karen House, a Catholic Worker house in North St. Louis.*



Jenny Truax



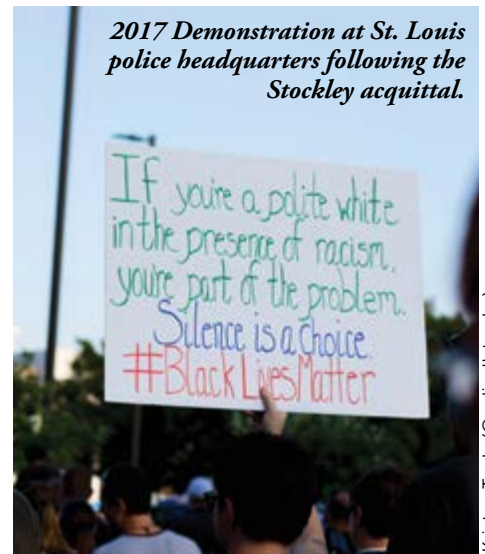
*August 2014 action. Quotation is by bell hooks.*

Jenny Truax



*Act of civil disobedience at the downtown courthouse on the one-year anniversary of Michael Brown's killing.*

Jenny Truax



*2017 Demonstration at St. Louis police headquarters following the Stockley acquittal.*

Kristen Trudo (@radicallytender)

the local groups led by people of color?

- Has our predominantly white organization ever used black and brown icons (like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, etc.) to further our mission without challenging present-day racism?
- Is our community supporting local or regional efforts led by people of color?

### Taking Action

As we move from introspection to action, knowing that the two are both ongoing, constant, and self-feeding processes, I'll give some examples of recent actions taken by Midwest Catholic Worker communities. These communities, most of which are majority-white, are doing work to address their own racism, change their structures, and support local groups led by people of color.

- Appreciating that dismantling white supremacy cannot be done within a white bubble, many Midwest communities have begun to deliberately partner with groups and organizers of color. Instead of trying to get people of color to join *them*, these communities are supporting organizations where people of color *already* feel safe and welcome—even if they do not philosophically align 100 percent of the time.

- Understanding that racism makes it much easier for white communities to raise money, the Minneapolis CW has committed to tithing a portion of its fundraising efforts to organizations led by people of color.

- Many Midwest communities are doing both internal and external education on decolonization, racism, and white supremacy. Communities have led book discussion groups on *Witnessing Whiteness* and *Waking Up White*. Other have brought local anti-racist speakers to lead discussions.

- Noticing that material support is a concrete way to support groups led by people of color, many communities are sharing their space, volunteers, and resources. The St. Louis CW



*In response to the uprising, many white Ferguson businesses and citizens erected "I love Ferguson" yard signs. One creative action repurposed the message. Art by Kristina Kvidovic and the St. Louis Artists.*

Jenny Truax



*This dystopian scene played out nightly during the winter of 2014; police armed with tanks, tear gas, and military equipment advancing towards demonstrators, just under the Ferguson sign "Seasons Greetings."*

Jenny Truax

organized, and directly offered hospitality to out-of-town activists during the national #FergusonOctober demonstration. The Minneapolis CW has cooked food for events that they themselves were not leading. In Chicago, the Su Casa community repurposed a portion of their building to provide low-rent office space to the #LetUsBreathe collective. The Milwaukee CW redirected a large bequest that they had received to help cover some of those costs to make the necessary repairs. #LetUsBreathe plans to convert even more of their space to welcome organizations typically excluded from access to affordable and private meeting space in Chicago.

- Remembering that each intentional community has specific strengths, the Minneapolis CW recognized that the Catholic Worker movement has a large number of people steeped in the tradition of civil disobedience. In 2016, they organized a large group of Catholic Workers to do a series of direct actions, taking direction from their local Black Lives Matter group. (Historically, these direct actions have been conceived, led, and executed by white Catholic Workers, who are often not directly affected by the injustice they protest. Needing to lead actions, rather than trusting in the leadership of people of color, is a symptom of white supremacy.)

- Recognizing that structural changes are necessary to combat white supremacy, the St. Louis CW has adjusted many policies and practices. We wrote down and published our process for accepting new guests and new community members in order to be more transparent. (A particular way that racism shows up in communities is when we base membership on “who you know” and therefore also subject it to the implicit bias of current members.) We are more intentional in how we welcome volunteer groups, trying to balance the (sometimes opposite) needs of volunteer groups seeking “face-to-face” interactions with the privacy of our guests who consider Karen House their home. Our weekly meeting features questions that presence our efforts to combat white supremacy: “How have you brought people of color closer into your own life and the life of the house? What are you doing, especially with self care, to combat the sense of urgency and scarcity?” In our newsletter and website, we seek to amplify the voices of those impacted by violence and oppression, rather than speaking on them as (white) experts.

White folks (myself included) in majority white intentional communities must reckon with the ways that racism has isolated us and limited our communities. Our radicalness, good work,

and good intentions do not make us immune from racism. Geographical proximity to communities of color does not automatically grant us the badge of “anti-racist community.” Our sense of being countercultural should not morph into an arrogant delusion that we are

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## Our radicalness, good work, and good intentions do not make us immune from racism. Geographical proximity to communities of color does not automatically grant us the badge of “anti-racist community.”

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not influenced by white supremacy. This engagement requires vigilance, vulnerability, and bravery. And our liberation as white people absolutely depends on it. 🌸

*Author acknowledgments: I'm grateful to Brenna Cussen Anglada, the current and past members of the St. Louis CW community, the St. Louis Anti-Racism Collective, and Annjie Schiefelbein, all of whom contributed ideas, editing, and content for this article.*

*Jenny Truax has been a member of the St. Louis Catholic Worker since 1998. She does anti-racism education and action with several St. Louis groups and has a deep love of all things related to Star Wars, pit bulls, and tennis. She also maintains the website of the St. Louis Catholic Worker, which has a vast repository of anti-racism resources: [www.karenhousecw.org](http://www.karenhousecw.org).*

### Sources and Further Readings

*Links to all of these resources can be found at the St. Louis Catholic Worker website at [newsite.karenhousecw.org/ic](http://newsite.karenhousecw.org/ic)*

*Catalyzing Liberation Toolkit by Catalyz Project and Chris Crass*

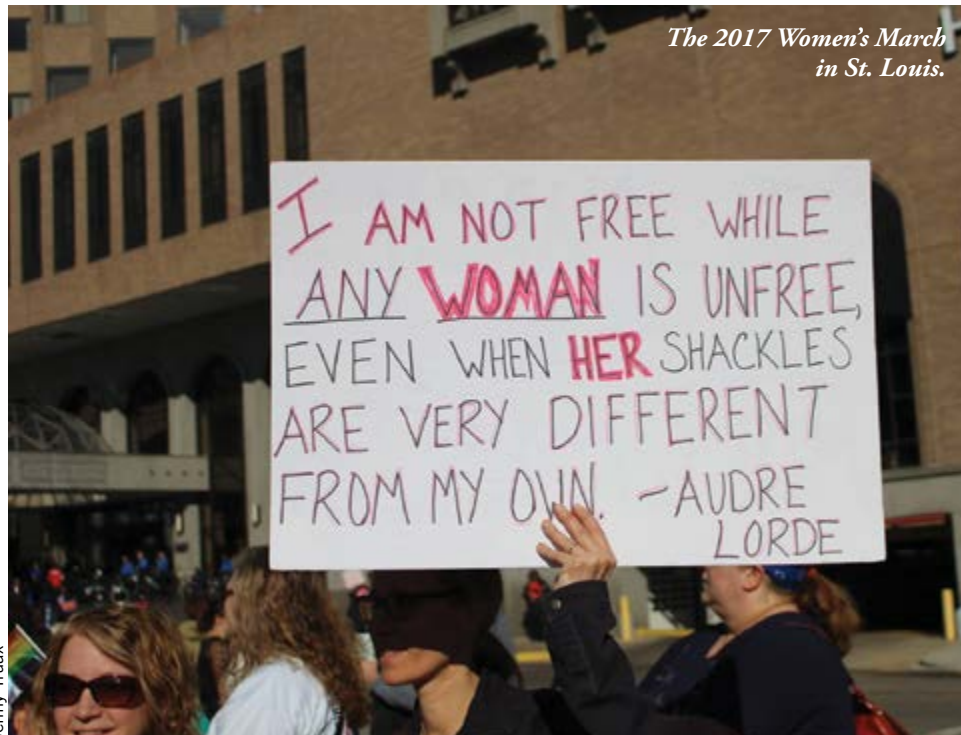
“White Supremacy Culture” by Tema Okun

“On Showing Up, Staying in our Lane, and Doing the Work that is Ours: 8 Guideposts for White People Supporting Black Lives Matter” by the St. Louis Anti Racist Collective

“Racism in our Communal Structures: A Community Assessment Tool” by the Western States Center

*Dismantling Racism: A Resource Book for Social Change Groups* by the Western States Center

“Decolonizing Together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization” by Harsha Walia



*The 2017 Women's March in St. Louis.*

Jenny Truax

# It's Not Just the Curtain: Crossing the Class Divide at the Bloomington Catholic Worker

By Laura Lasuertmer



Our short hallway is divided in the middle by a curtain that hangs from ceiling to floor. In front of the curtain is a door to our guest room and the full bathroom. Behind the curtain are the doors to our bedroom and our kids' room.

Peggy lives in the guest room. She is a thin woman in her mid-50s, with long, curly hair that she dyes red to cover the gray. Her energy level is enviable, and as she sweeps the living room she recounts how a man at the overnight shelter took her aside to ask, "What kind of speed are you on?" "I don't do that," she says to me, "I've just always had this energy. I like to work. I like to volunteer. Otherwise I just sit around feeling anxious." So she swept the kitchen too and even under the rug by the front door where we leave our shoes.

Peggy had been staying at the shelter but due to a disagreement with a staff member, she decided to leave. She moved in with us a week ago, which means she is halfway through her "two-week trial." Next Thursday, we'll meet with her to ask how her time here has been. If all is going well, we'll invite her to stay for two months, renewable up to a year.

Each family at the Bloomington Catholic Worker lives with people experiencing homelessness. These "guests" stay in our guest rooms, cook in our kitchens, shower in our bathrooms, and join us for meals throughout the week. Even as we live closely with these people, trying to form a bridge across class divides, we do not aim to live in intentional community with them. We make distinctions and create boundaries between the members of our community and the guests of our community. These distinctions, like the curtain dividing our hallway, can be problematic sometimes. They can inhibit our ability to form deep relationships with guests, and they mirror the class divide that already exists between us. Still, they are what allow us to share our homes with people year after year, to care for folks we might otherwise never meet. For example...

One Friday, a few months after Peggy moved in, I answered a knock on the front door.

"Can I speak with the owner?" asked a man in a gray t-shirt and baggy jeans. Big, round glasses sat on his squat nose and a brown ring of hair smiled behind his otherwise bald head. It was Michael. He'd been my client while I was working at the day shelter a year ago.

"The community owns the houses," I replied. "But you can speak with me. What's up, Michael?"

"I haven't slept in three days. I've got 56 more days on parole and every time I put my head down to sleep, the cops wake me up and tell me to move. I get in trouble just once and I'm back in prison." I was surprised how coherent his speech was. At the shelter, I'd most often seen him struggling to stand up straight, his words coming out thick and dry.

"Our guest beds are full," I told him. It was a warm mid-October day. The leaves had already started to fall. The sky was a blue so deep it seemed infinite. "But I can sling up the hammock in the back yard if you want to take a nap."

"Please," he said. We walked around the house to the backyard. A picnic table sat in front of two tall black locust trees. My young kids, Alice and Leo, came out to join us and busied themselves with the soccer ball.

"Have you heard of Team Takeover?" Michael asked as I wrapped a black strap around a tree. "They're a gang, a street gang. See my thumb?" He pointed to a thin, deep cut on his thumb joint. "RP did that. Said he'd take my pinky off if I don't give him \$300 on the 3rd when I get my disability check."

"That's insane," I said as I hooked the hammock into the straps.

"Can I sleep here tonight?" Michael asked.

"I'm not sure. We don't usually let people camp out. But let me run inside and talk to David about it."



*The curtain that divides the hallway between guest room and members' bedrooms.*

Would you let Michael stay the night in your backyard? Our community intentionally invites these situations and questions. We want people to show up at our houses while we are eating dinner, having a meeting, playing outside with our kids—maybe not every day, but definitely

sometimes. We want our lives to be interrupted by the needs of others.

Michael's situation was compelling: he needed a safe place to sleep. It helped that I knew him and that he was clearly sober. I ran the idea past David, who agreed, and went back outside. I found Michael already asleep. He passed the afternoon that way. It was early evening when I saw him swing his legs over the side and sit up.

"You can stay tonight," I said, taking a seat at the picnic table. "Should I set up the tent?"

"Naw. That hammock was great," he said. "Thanks. I haven't slept like that in weeks."

"I'm glad," I said. "Is it alright if I run through the rules we have for guests?"

"That's cool."

"Our big rule is that this is safe and sober housing."

"That's fine," Michael said. "I've been sober since I got out of prison a month ago, and I am done—done!"

"Great," I said. "Because we won't let you stay if you're using. And are you legally allowed to be around children?"

"Yeah," he said. "You want my D.O.C. number? You can look up my record. I don't have no sex crimes, nothing like that."

"Sure. I'll check it online. So the other main rule is that guests have to be out of the house, or I guess the backyard in your case, from nine to five."

"That's no problem. I just need a place to sleep."

"We'll take it a night at a time. And we'll have interviews on Wednesday afternoon. Peggy just found an apartment and is moving out on Monday."

"Can I get an interview?" Michael said.

"For sure," I said.

Later that night, I looked up Michael's criminal record. There were a few theft charges along with some misdemeanors for public intoxication and trespassing, similar to the records of many people who stay with us. I got him a sleeping bag and a pillow. He went to bed at eight and was still sleeping when I went out at seven-thirty the next morning, drops of rain starting to fall.

"Michael! It's raining! Grab your backpack and come inside for breakfast."

"I slept the whole night," he said sitting up. "I didn't wake up once. Can I come back tonight?"

"Sure," I said. "Come back any time after five."

That night the temperature dropped to the 40s. I wondered if we should let Michael sleep on

the couch. David was hesitant. He didn't know Michael and thought we should wait until we formally interviewed him with other community members. Our guest room was already full, David reminded me. Michael said he would be fine outside, so we gave him extra blankets and said goodnight.

Michael stayed with us a few more nights. On the day of the interview, he called to say he didn't need the bed. He felt safer being away from Bloomington, so he was going to camp out with a buddy in the next town over.

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## What is ideal when it comes to offering hospitality? Should we never turn away a person in need?

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"If you're sure," I said, "but call us if you need anything."

"I will," he said.

And he does. We check in with each other every few weeks, so I know that he'll be off parole in 20 days. In a month, thanks to a permanent supportive housing program, he'll be moving into an apartment.

**W**hat is ideal when it comes to offering hospitality? Should we never turn away a person in need? We've learned that thinking we can help everyone is not realistic and not



*BCW weekly potluck with community members and guests. Mark, a guest, enjoys a meal with Alice and Tressa.*



*Sarah Lynn Gershon, a BCW member, always smiles when she does dishes after potluck.*

Photos courtesy of Laura Lasuertmer

healthy. To be able to provide comfortable, peaceful places to live, we say no to some people in need. We say “no” to people with untreated mental illness, “no” to people actively using drugs or alcohol. We say “no” to people who are sex offenders. We say “no” because we recognize that we must also be hospitable to our children and ourselves, creating safe environments that further our well-being. We’re walking the middle road, and finding that even with these

of respite and healing—so we do not require our guests to believe anything we believe or to participate in our communal activities, except for eating dinner with us on Thursday nights. They do not attend our business meetings. They do not contribute to our common bank account. They are not required to cook community meals or attend daily morning prayer. We also ask our guests to be out of the houses from nine to five daily, so that families have a break from sharing their space. We do invite our guests to eat and pray with us, if they are so inclined, but it is up to them. Some guests leave early every day and arrive back late in the evening. Other guests eat dinner with us every night, use the kitchen, read books to our kids, and take to sweeping the floors. Community members, on the other hand, contribute half of their income to the common account, participate in consensus-based decision making, practice confession and reconciliation, go on retreat together, attend morning prayer together, and share childcare duties.

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**Our guests connect us with the urgent and harsh reality of poverty. They keep us aware of struggle and injustice in our community, showing us where to take action. We rely on our guests to help us grow and to keep us grounded in gratitude.**

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These distinctions between guests and members mean that we have to work hard to make our guests feel welcome and to get to know them well. They move into a well-established community with a middle class culture, and that can exaggerate the feeling of being an outsider. In between caring for our children, working, and participating in community life, it can be hard for us to take time to be with our guests. When our family lives dominate, what we offer to guests is simply a safe place to live. When we are more intentional about spending time with our guests, our hospitality builds genuine, reciprocal friendships that endure even after a guest has moved out.

restrictions, our guest beds are full. I’ve learned that we do what we can. A hammock outside on a cold night is not much to offer someone, but it’s better than sleeping in an alley or under a bush.

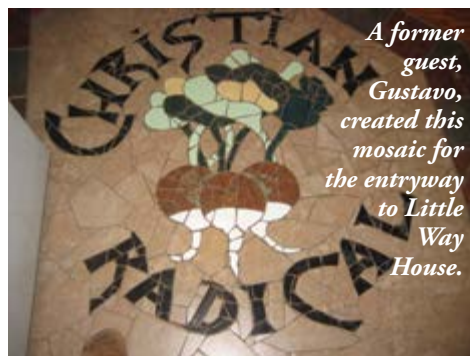
This way of living doesn’t eliminate class divisions, but it brings us closer to one another. Peggy and Michael, and all our guests, are an integral part of the Bloomington Catholic Worker. They connect us with the urgent and harsh reality of poverty. They keep us aware of struggle and injustice in our community, showing us where to take action. They remind us why we don’t aspire to build big houses and live in the suburbs. They ask us to share space and resources, reminding us that while we despise destitution we do desire to live, like them, with less. We rely on our guests to help us grow and to keep us grounded in gratitude. 🌱

Guests come to us because they need a place to stay, not because they are eager to participate in the shared life of our community. While our community is religious, we are not an evangelical mission. We want to offer our guests a place

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*Laura Lasuertmer is a member of the Bloomington Catholic Worker (BCW) community in Bloomington, Indiana. She enjoys writing collaboratively with people living in jail and on the streets.*

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*A former guest, Gustavo, created this mosaic for the entryway to Little Way House.*



*The kids in the community put on a show while the parents gather at another house for a roundtable discussion.*



*Three community houses: (from left to right) Little Way House, Oscar Romero House, and Eugene V. Debbs House. The fourth community house, Malvina Reynolds House, is across the street.*

can we shorten this

# GRIEF AND RE-MEMBERING: The Spirituality of Confronting Privilege, Entitlement, and Cultural Appropriation

By Christopher Bowers

I live in a beautiful, affluent little town infused with the legacy of '60s-era hippie activism and a uniquely Northern Californian hodge-podge of spiritual traditions. While I can't say what an entire town of people believe about themselves, the impression I have is that most of these kind, good-hearted people believe that they are living a life of integrity and spiritual rightness, and thus manifesting a world in accord with their beliefs and practices.

It is possible to cynically point out the contradictions—the cars with “no blood for oil” stickers on them, the whiteness of a place that so deeply and flagrantly believes in multiculturalism, the ex-San Franciscans that deplore the gentrification of their former city as they open up high-end restaurants and vacation rentals here. It is possible to go down this path of “calling-out.” But to do so would not be helpful and to do so would be to tempt my own hypocrisy into the spotlight. I would self-righteously be denying my own contradictions as I sit in the newest high-end coffee shop writing this essay against privilege before I go shop at the local organic market that prices poor people out of access to healthy food. In other words, we are together in this suffering. We are all at once victims of larger systems, seemingly (though not) out of our control. There is a good case to be made for compassion when we all are participating, through the very act of living, in a world of so much inequality and forgetfulness.

So our job, perhaps, is to remember, and to act in accord with our remembering. To remember the many origins of the situation in which we find ourselves. To take some account of the history that we all live out on a daily basis. And it is perhaps our job as well to temper our urge to be redeemed by the relative nature of oppression. Yes, we are all suffering under larger systems, but it's also true that suffering comes in degrees. Yes, we are all oppressors and we are all oppressed, however, this relativism is not pure and for many it is more heavily weighted on the side of the oppressed. Therefore, the degrees of suffering with which I must contend (as a white, cisgendered, hetero, able-bodied man) are far fewer than the degrees to which those who have made my life possible may have suffered.

## Origins

There are so many origins to remember because our forgetting is not so much a series of acts, laced together like a pearl necklace, each act a type of theft—but rather, our forgetting is a lifestyle, deeply embedded inside of our culture. It is a dirty ocean in which we all swim. So let us begin with something small and seemingly benign.

The coffee in front of me: the beans come from the Indonesian island of Flores. Coffee production in this region was a direct result of a highly exploitative Dutch colonization. While there are no longer slave-like coffee plantations as we might think of them, there is still a great divide between traditional Indonesian cultures and the global market. Assuming that the Indonesian farmers want to participate in a global market (though history tells us this may not be a business decision as much as a decision for survival), efforts are being made to create a more ethical coffee trade. Nonetheless, as I sip this ridiculously delicious cup of coffee, I am left with an acrid aftertaste of grief, knowing that some of the coffee farmers (without whom the cup of coffee and the price I paid for it would not have been possible) have received very little in return for their work. This inequity is a direct result of a colonial history that I had nothing to do with but from which I, even now, benefit.

And that's just the farmers. Not to mention the boxers (and the trees that made the boxes), the transporters (and the incredible resources extracted to make the vehicle, highways, the fuel...), the grocers, the resource-heavy roasting and processing equipment, the roasters themselves, and the baristas; all of which had some part in bringing me this little cup of coffee. And of course the coffee shop I sit in is made mostly of wood, concrete, and metal, all of which were extracted most likely without any permission from, consideration of, or offerings

to Nature herself.

I do not make this roll-call of origins to suggest that we shouldn't go to coffee shops. Nor do I suggest that we should all begin growing our own coffee and killing our own meat. We can't go back and just be “indigenous” (that very word deserves its own essay to unpack and understand), at least not without a huge amount of cultural baggage that would likely undermine the process anyway. I applaud anyone who does make efforts to be less reliant on harmful economic systems. But my intention in bringing all this up is to draw attention to the fact that our lives, even down to a cup of coffee, are constructed around a hierarchy of taking and the privilege of forgetting about all from whom we have taken (Mother Earth included).

There is even more than just the inequity of the global market that makes my little excursion to the coffee shop so comfortable. Not only can I afford this cup of coffee but I find myself in a coffee shop where everyone looks like me, thinks generally the way I do, and where music of the dominant culture (of which I am a part) is playing. On my way to the coffee shop I had no encounters with police and if I had it's not likely that they would have resulted in jail or death, regardless of my guilt or innocence.

This is one example of how I benefit from oppression on a daily basis, and the benefits accrued from this systemic oppression are what can be short-handedly referred to as *privilege*.

## Privilege

Many people understand that they are privileged but fall short when asked to describe their privilege. Others can describe it but get stuck in the guilt of what that means. And I should be clear that the guilt, while it can be crippling, is also a completely valid response to realizing how unfair our systems are for people with less privilege. Guilt can also be useful, but only if it is used as a launching point and not an endpoint. As one person told me at the White Privilege Conference (yes, there is a conference on white privilege!), “I don't give a damn if you

feel guilty about your privilege, but I care a lot about if you're gonna do something about it." So what is to be done about our privilege?

To truly answer this question would require another essay, if not an entire book, and even then an adequate answer is unlikely. Perhaps the idea that something like privilege can be easily fixed with a how-to guide is part of what got us here. So let us resist the imperial longing to mine a simple answer out of the hard rock of our guilt. Let us start small, as we did with the coffee cup. Let us begin by remembering the origins of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Since people can fall in many places on the oppressor/oppressed continuum (and can, almost quantum physically, be at more than one place at any given moment depending on the context), I am reticent to describe how one should go about their own remembering. So instead, I will simply tell you about my re-remembering.

I recently took two 10-day workshops with

race, and gender privilege. Yes I went to college and yes I worked hard, but to get there I didn't have to take out as many loans and I had a large base of community work and volunteerism to show the college application committees. Those jobs and that volunteerism were made possible by social connections that were isolated within the white middle-upper class communities and by the fact that I could drive, thanks to a car bought for me by my parents. Furthermore, in elementary and high school, my teachers assumed I was naturally capable of learning. And despite frequently disruptive and bad behavior, I was given opportunity after opportunity to continue my education. My fellow non-white students did not get such allowances.

So I went to college and I got a good job. This allowed me to be able to afford the time off, travel expenses, workshop fees, and lodging to go and study with Martín. Those workshops empowered my own sense of spirituality and deepened my worldview immensely. I began to see spirituality and life very differently. While I wholeheartedly believe that spirituality is not a commodity to be bought, I cannot escape the fact that many of my own opportunities for spiritual growth were made possible by my privilege.

### Entitlement

While studying with Martín I also began to notice how easily my sense of entitlement was invoked. For example, one morning Martín had played us a series of songs. One in particular was very moving and I had to know what that song was and who sang it. At the break I made a bee-line to the young man who was acting as Martín's DJ and asked, "What was that third song you played, it was amazing, what was that?" He looked at me, bright eyed and kind. He paused, took a breath, and then said, "Good Morning!" I felt a wave of shame come over me. He could sense

my need to have the answer given to me in a quick, tidy package, as if I was ordering fast food. He could sense my need to know and consume the song, to objectify the song and to objectify him. I hadn't even the courtesy to say hello or good morning. I just wanted to know the name of that damn song and I wanted it now. In that moment, he was just a vehicle to get me what I wanted. He was not a human being, and if I am completely honest, neither was I.

So what does this have to do with privilege? Well, this interaction was no different than 20 other interactions I have in a given day. I need, I want, I need. I can feel that same anxious entitlement gnawing at me in the car, at work, in the supermarket. It says, "I have a life to live, I deserve to have this

thing or that, in fact, I need to have this because I have a life to live. Dammit! Don't you understand?! Let's go already!" And so it goes. It is an entitlement sprouted and nurtured by privilege itself. It is an entitlement that subtly and sometimes not so subtly says "this world is made for me. It is my needs, desires, comfort (emotional and physical), that are most important." And in an individualistic culture my spirituality becomes truncated and warped. It becomes more about manifesting my individual life into some sort of spiritual achievement than about bringing something holy, sacred, and healing to the community, or even sitting long enough to figure out my own lack and how that leads to this kind of behavior.

Coming from a more compassionate place, I realize that this is how I've been trained. This is how we have all been trained. We are all born in dirty water. But how has this water become so adulterated? I mentioned the more recent history of our country but how was it that the Europeans as a people were capable of such atrocities? Martín helped me deepen this inquiry as well.

### Origins: The History and the Cost of Privilege

Without going into a long, anthropological history, it is important to spend some time considering that so-called "white people" were also once indigenous, as simplified as this examination may be. Just as they colonized the Americas, my ancestors were themselves colonized by Greece, by Rome, by Christians, etc. That process continues to this day as we lose our souls to the new religions of science and capitalism, neither of which have much respect for indigenous ways of knowing and loving the earth. It was some of the colonized European ancestors who decided that only light-skinned people were worthy enough to be considered citizens or to own land. It

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**Just as they colonized the Americas, my ancestors were themselves colonized by Greece, by Rome, by Christians, etc. That process continues to this day as we lose our souls to the new religions of science and capitalism, which lack respect for indigenous ways of knowing and loving the earth.**

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author and cultural steward Martín Prechtel. It was here that the importance of remembering origins deepened for me. Whereas before, I'd been vigilant in remembering that I have privilege and that it has consequences, I had yet to adequately consider the origins and consequences of this privilege. I had considered the relatively recent history of slavery and genocide on which the country in which I grew up had been founded. I had considered the many historical factors that had resulted in huge benefits for me: how my family had immigrated under favorable conditions (for example, unlike many Africans, my ancestors emigrated by choice), the benefits of the Homestead Act (free land for white settlers, land off of which Native Americans were pushed or killed), free labor from slavery, and housing laws that disqualified black people from buying houses and thus accrued equity and centralized wealth with white people.

I had considered how in my own life, my hard work was greatly augmented by class,



was the more privileged of them who, in order to break up solidarity between white indentured servants and black slaves, decided that race was something to be considered as a value judgment. Before that, the social hierarchy was determined by geography, familial backgrounds, tribal ranks, and other cultural factors. But over time those Europeans who were tribal became Christians, or serfs, or lords, or kings, and then eventually entrepreneurs, emigrants, and indentured servants. And in order to get out of their servitude and get a piece of the privilege in this new land, the servants became “white.” Not dissimilarly, women seers and priestesses who were seen as witches were burned and buried. So to claim the privilege of living, or to be free of persecution, they renounced their spiritual powers and survived as good Christians, housewives, or concubines. And with that Mother Earth herself lost her most capable allies.

What we are talking about is the same thing that the local Pomo and other indigenous tribes across the country and worldwide have been talking about for hundreds of years: generation after generation of loss. And with each generation came a denigration of what it meant to be a human being. The stories that came out of the earth, which our current culture shortchanges as “mythology,” were replaced by stories of industry, progress, war, and death.

As I considered all of this, my disconnection from this history and from my own indigenous background came painfully into view. For years I have flirted with the grief of this but was often mollified by the demands of surviving modern life, or by my own desire to escape the grief through alcohol, computers, television, yoga, anger, and depression (or what Martín calls “the lack of grief”). So I began to see that, despite what my old therapist Francis Weller calls our “culture of ascension,” the only way out is in fact down. The answer to how to deal with one’s privilege must include the willingness to grieve the losses of what has been traded—materially, culturally and spiritually—in order to gain that privilege. Otherwise, I believe we are destined to not just perpetuate the inhumane inequity through non-action, but we will likely cause further harm by capitalizing on our privilege and/or trying to take even more from other peoples and cultures in order to fill the hole caused by our ungrieved losses.

The loss of our own ancestral wisdom and the loss of our indigenous connection to the earth is huge but it is not the totality of the loss. For myself, I also count the rigid economic systems that objectify and dehumanize us into mere workers whilst separating families and communities in

the name of capital and accumulation. I count the false sense of safety I have knowing my local police department is seeing more danger in the black man who is my neighbor than in the white man who might be planning to shoot up another campus or grocery store or theater and who may also be my neighbor. I count the fear and apprehension on each side of some of my relationships with people of color. I count the alienating suburban sprawl that allowed my parents and myself, in our white flight, to live quite separate lives from those suffering the systems that were benefiting us. I count the many elitist art scenes, poisoned by capitalism and Eurocentrism, and that get passed off as community. I count the loss of true community, based not in similarity of dress or thought, but in love and struggle of how hard it is to be human; a community which would gather for survival and ritual but always feeding the life from which they constantly take so that they can be alive in this world. Lastly, I count the loss of my own humanity that becomes gravely compromised by the ways I consciously or unconsciously perpetuate oppression.

It is important to note that acknowledging the loss privilege engenders does not in any way negate the benefits afforded to us by our privilege. It is simply a deepening of understanding how



our privilege hurts not just others but ourselves as well. This understanding is not an endgame. To the contrary, this understanding is a call to further action. The work of challenging the effects of privilege and the dismantling of the systems that create it must be done. However, how we go about that work will be enriched by our grief because it will be informed by a sense of loss and our own truest desires for a better world, a tighter community, a more complete understanding of our history and more possibilities of how to be a human being and how to organize our communities in the future. Our grief takes us beyond superficial multiculturalism and into working for a collective liberation.

### Grief, Disconnection, and Cultural Appropriation

Francis and Martin, my sweet and fierce teachers, also advocate the act of courting. Courting is an act of courteously and respectfully inviting someone or something into connection. Courting is in opposition to seduction, which is putting on a false pretense in order to take or otherwise dominate someone or something. Courting is offering fertile soil for a seed to arise on its own terms, while seduction is modifying that seed to meet your own needs. To court means not just making space and time in your life for grief but actually inviting it through

of time I've spent trying to uncover the so-called Indian part of my ancestry, and it's conversely in the lack of time I have spent in trying to uncover the more prominent European sides of my ancestry. It is in my disgust of whiteness and thus at times myself.

The result is a denial of not just what I have lost but a denial of who I am, of who history has made me. This longing is my grief displaced. It's me trying to fill that cultural void with the shards of what were once more intact cultures around me, my unconscious volition towards enacting cultural practices and customs that I don't really understand or even if I do, practices and customs that I have not been given permission to enact. This is also known as *cultural appropriation*. It's not just the enacting of cultural practices that one has not been given permission to enact, it is when this is done to the benefit of the appropriator and to the detriment of the culture from which it is taken.

One hallmark of cultural appropriation is when those who created a particular cultural practice are not involved in its propagation. For example, Native American Art galleries in which very little, if any, of the art is done by Native peoples or even if it is, they are paid little for their contributions. Another local example is yoga. Yoga has become a staple of spiritual and non-spiritual communities across the country. While some studios maintain a fidelity to the spiritual traditions and even specific lineages of the teachings, most do not and millions of dollars have been made from this reworking, to put it nicely, of another culture's practices. Just looking at the average yoga advertisement will tell you that this 5000-year-old austere spiritual practice from India is now a fitness fad for middle class, mostly white, able-bodied, (and according to the ads which adhere to current standards of beauty: thin) North American women. Has this harmed the Indus-Sarasvati people from which this tradition was taken? Arguably yes. One person who has considered this deeply is Yogi Nisha Ahuja, who gets deep into the problematic nature of yoga in the west. Her work can be found here: [yogaappropriation.wordpress.com](http://yogaappropriation.wordpress.com).

Many argue against this reality by stating that every culture is influenced by another culture and the history of humans is but a million mergings of peoples and their customs. True as that may be, this argument is a just a few short steps away from saying that violence and colonization is human nature, which an honest and detailed examination of history would not support. It also suggests that we should accept the power differentials that exist in society because that's just how it's always been. What is also true is that in every act of brutal oppression or quiet colonization, there were resisters. People who were pathologized as "traditionalists," "savages," "rebels," or "terrorists" who fought against the violence of

the privileged in order to preserve their way of life. Another wonderful piece about cultural appropriation and what ethical and fair cultural collaboration can look like can be found here: [www.sfu.ca/ipinch/sites/default/files/resources/teaching\\_resources/think\\_before\\_you\\_appropriate\\_jan\\_2016.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/ipinch/sites/default/files/resources/teaching_resources/think_before_you_appropriate_jan_2016.pdf).

Not only does cultural appropriation serve to anger people from whose cultures we take (making them feel again violated, colonized, and exploited) but it also robs us of an opportunity to grieve and heal and in doing so realize that our privilege has both helped and harmed us.

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## Not only does cultural appropriation serve to anger people from whose cultures we take but it also robs us of an opportunity to grieve and heal.

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acts of prayer, offering, journaling, meditation, or other communal and cultural practices. Among our many losses and forgettings, we no longer know how to adequately grieve, except maybe individually, alone in the late hours of night, which often serves only to perpetuate our isolation. In fact, as I write this I can say that I still have not fully experienced the grief of all of this. But I can see what I do with that grief, or rather, what it does with me when it is not embodied and processed.

Aside from the aforementioned addictive behaviors, there is another side effect of grief avoidance. It's a longing, sometimes innocent, and sometimes intrusive. It is the inexplicable ache I felt when seeing the bucolic scenes of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* movies. It's my attraction to the now fashionable aesthetic of so-called "tribal" tattoos, piercings, hairstyles, and clothing. It's in the huge amount

of time I've spent trying to uncover the so-called Indian part of my ancestry, and it's conversely in the lack of time I have spent in trying to uncover the more prominent European sides of my ancestry. It is in my disgust of whiteness and thus at times myself.

I would contend that no spirituality in today's United States can escape or transcend issues of power and privilege and to try to do so will only diminish one's spirit. As well, no true examination of privilege and power should negate the spiritual costs incurred by that privilege and power. If one function of spirituality is to navigate what it means to be human, then no functional spirituality can lack a practice of grief. And if one function of spirituality is to enable a community to care for itself, then no functional spirituality can avoid the grief created by oppression and violence, however subtle that violence may be. In other words, if we truly believe in love, compassion, and healing, then it is simply not enough to meditate. To be in accord with our own sense of humanity and spirit, we must actively resist practices of colonization by, among other things, dealing with privilege, entitlement, and appropriation.

### The Fruits of Our Grief: Re-Membering

We often hear the maxim: "To change the world, we must first change ourselves." It is often attributed to eastern cultures like Taoism or Buddhism. What is not considered is how those cultures and our own culture may interpret that idea differently. In our highly individualistic culture this often is a rationale against community involvement and social engagement, as if one day, after much meditation and yoga and eating right, we will arrive at this perfect place in which we can then begin to change the world. What is never considered is how engaging with the pain

and injustice around us (read: trying to change the world) may actually change us as individuals, for the better—or better yet, allow us to reconsider whether or not narcissism is a useful position from which to live. In other words, changing ourselves and changing the world are not, and should never be, mutually exclusive. In going beyond Eurocentric “either/or” thinking, we are invited to think more holistically using “both/and” thinking. We can change ourselves and change the world and both efforts will accentuate one another.

Re-membering practices are multifaceted. They include re-membering ourselves as a member of a human family with huge power differentials that have at times had grave consequences. It is re-membering ourselves as members of a spiritual community that is trying to deal with the disaster of history that has put us at such odds with others in our own human family. But remembering takes time and effort. It takes courting. We must seek out alternative stories to the ones we’ve been told; find those buried and bludgeoned histories that were banished from light. We must start to understand our own familial and cultural histories and invite both celebration and mourning for all the beauty and loss we may find. We must court grief and make a place for it in our lives. Grief is powerful and can liberate us from guilt and shame. Grief teaches us that other people’s lives and liberation are tied up in our own. We must soothe our guilt with our tears and our resolve. And we must do better. Liberated from guilt and shame, we are free to move into action.

While I would not want to mandate the process by which all of this grief and re-membering should occur, I will offer up seven things that have been useful on my own path. These things may also be very useful in courting grief and as well as giving us a way to process it.

**1. Journaling:** Make an effort to notice moments when you feel privileged, guilty, scared, or frustrated in relation to your social positioning (your gender, your race, etc.). Write about it. Ask yourself: What does this say about me? What does it say about my community? Why does this make me so uncomfortable?

**2. Privilege Inventory:** Simply make a list of all the privileges you have and/or a list of all the ways your privilege affects your life. You can also make an inventory of all the difficult or uncomfortable racial or gender or class interactions you have had and ask yourself how your privilege was operating in those moments and what you could have done differently. This is not supposed to be an exercise in shame, but rather an exercise in accountability.

**3. Ethnoautobiography:** The internet has a lot about this that can be useful in writing your own ethnoautobiography. Basically this entails

doing your own familial and cultural background research that may include genetics, family stories, country of origin research, and trying to get a solid grasp of your cultural heritage. This may also include imaginal intuition such as dreams or art. The point is to begin to understand ourselves as cultural beings (not just some white norm or non-white, non-norm). We all have long and complicated histories about how we became who we are and how we ended up where we are geographically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. An ethnoautobiography is an opportunity to explore this! It is possible that you may also learn about long-lost cultural traditions from your ancestors which may then find a home in your life thus replacing practices you have borrowed from other cultures (even with the best of intentions).

**4. Vigilant Mindfulness:** Wherever you are throughout the day ask yourself: Do I have privilege in this situation? Will my words or actions in this moment be interpreted differently because of my social positioning (race, gender, class, etc.)? Will I interpret what others are saying or doing differently because of my own cultural background? Am I feeling entitled to what I hope for or want and how might that sense of entitlement affect others?

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## Grief is powerful, and teaches us that other people’s lives and liberation are tied up in our own.

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**5. Find Allies:** This is not a path that should be tread in isolation. Sonoma County has a group called Racial Justice Allies that holds monthly dialogues, movies, and events about whiteness, privilege, and anti-racism skill building. The Heru Network is a local group holding monthly events and dialogues about black culture and history. Even if you don’t want to be involved in a social justice group it’s important to have support. By that I don’t mean just your best friend or your partner but people who are currently on a path of examining and dealing with racial or gender dynamics in their community or who have done this kind of work before. More specifically I mean *people who can hold you accountable but also remind you of your own goodness*. I have been lucky to have several of these people in my life.

**6. Do the homework:** It’s good to find allies but it’s also important that we not expect people from marginalized groups to be our teachers about oppression. There are ample articles, books, movies, poems, and podcasts from which we can learn and deepen our understanding.

**7. Find a way to confront privilege and oppression in the community, in your daily roles of living:** This could be working with a social justice group, or starting your own project. However, activists alone should never be responsible for social change. Remember that it doesn’t have to be difficult or overwhelming. The horrible thing about oppression and privilege is that it operates in every aspect of our lives. However, this means there is ample opportunity to address these issues right where you are: in your family, in your job, in your class, in your spiritual community. Many organizations and spiritual groups have diversity committees, bring in trainers around undoing racism, or have other creative ways of addressing these issues in the moment.

We are tasked with fixing the human quilt by tenderly sewing the historical rips made by violence, patriarchy, and white supremacy. So if we have developed a vigilant practice of noticing our social positioning, particularly the place in which we find ourselves privileged, and we have begun to study the origins of this privilege, and we have begun to see not only how we benefit but also how we lose, then we can begin to deal with this emotionally. We can offer ourselves kindness, forgiveness, and a commitment to do better. This in turn will inform how we can deal with these matters strategically, together and accountable to our friends, our loved ones, and our adversaries (who also are sometimes our friends and loved ones). We can re-member ourselves as members of a vibrant community, with many different kinds of hearts beating, beating, beating. 🍷

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*Christopher Bowers a social worker, musician, and writer currently living in the occupied lands of northern California (in Coastal Miwok and Pomo territories). His ancestors are from so-called Western, Northern, and Eastern Europe as well as so-called North America. He is cofounder of Racial Justice Allies of Sonoma County and has been involved in various attempts at community-building and social justice. He is currently reevaluating what all of the above means and what new sacred possibilities might be available in all of these endeavors. He lives with his deep-hearted wife Jen Parr and their empathic, cuddle-loving dog, Freyja. A version of this essay was originally published as class content on [www.earthstarinstitute.com](http://www.earthstarinstitute.com).*

# Multicultural Hippie Roots and Spiritual Foundations of The Farm Community

By Douglas Stevenson



*Kids from homeless shelters and inner-city Nashville pose with Kids To The Country counselors at The Farm's "swimming hole."*

Photos courtesy of Plenty International

The Hippie movement that came into being at the end of the 1960s was spawned in part by a direct rejection of the consumer-driven materialism embraced by their parents' post-Depression-era generation, and it was elevated by an awareness of the essential spiritual nature and oneness of the universe and all people.

At the same time, the civil rights movement opened the eyes of young people developing a broader sense of cultural oppression. This awakening made it possible to recognize the expanding corporate influence as a shiny veneer of an ever-expanding military-industrial complex that was sending the youth of the nation to maintain colonial dominance over socialist movements around the globe.

Without waiting for society at large to change, the youth of white America took a fast track to integration through music. Blues begot rock and roll, with stages at clubs and festivals able to showcase artists of all ethnicities, changing hearts, minds, and lives on many levels.

The original founders of The Farm who left San Francisco were aware from the very beginning that the hippie movement was primarily a white phenomenon. The hippie culture's step away from privilege and wealth was in direct contrast to the trajectory of many in Black America, seeking to claim their fair share of the American Dream. Consequently, the community demographic was and remains primarily from the white middle class.

Our naive idealism aided what some might call the bravery it took to settle just 35 miles from where the Ku Klux Klan was founded. We were attracted to the beauty of the land, the climate and length of growing seasons, and the fact that we were able to acquire 1000 acres for only \$70 an acre. We were less sensitive to the fact that the deeper, underlying racism embedded into the Southern culture at that time would make people of color uncomfortable anywhere outside the community, and so they would be less drawn to live here. While much has changed over the ensuing decades, the Confederate flag still flies outside numerous homes around us.

In those early days, we recognized that in order to survive, The Farm

would have to make peace with our neighbors. It was a time when the children of rural America were leaving family farms for factory jobs in the cities. Here we were, a bunch of city kids, anxious to learn the homesteading skills the local folks took for granted. In a way, the community served as bridge to our neighbors' understanding of the greater cultural revolution that was taking place elsewhere in the country. Fortunately for us, a nearby Amish settlement that had come to the area before us had paved the way, demonstrating that hard work and honesty could surmount differences and generate respect, a standard we embraced.

## The Vow of Poverty

For the first 12 years, members of The Farm signed a vow of poverty, affirming a commitment of a life in service to humankind. It was good for our souls to get a taste of being poor, something we called living as "voluntary peasants." Those drawn to The Farm were heeding an inner call, to drop out of college, out of prescribed career paths, and leave lives of relative privilege to live in tents and old buses, deep in the woods, immersed in nature. Many inheritances were absorbed by the communal economic structure, donated to the dream of a society where all were equal, and as it said in the Bible's Book of Acts, "given to each as they had need."

After a few years, as the community got on its feet and felt solid, there was a recognition that the purpose was not just to establish the ultimate hippie commune. As the benefactors of western dominance over indigenous people both in our country and around the world, we recognized a responsibility to give back. The success of the revolution would come about, not by "bringing the top down, but by bringing the bottom up."

The Farm established a nonprofit called Plenty, based on the idea that there is enough for everyone, if we just share. An opportunity came to express our ideals in a real way, after a devastating earthquake in Guatemala in 1976. A couple of folks were sent down to see if there might be something we could do to help, and they came back with an important

observation. If our experiment as voluntary peasants were to fail, we could always run back to our parents and reclaim our position of privilege. If life fails you as an involuntary peasant, you die. The earthquake in Guatemala had left a lot of people homeless who might not make it through the approaching rainy season.

The dozens of Farm community volunteers who went to work in Guatemala returned with firsthand experience of true endemic poverty. We gained a deeper understanding of the entrenched colonial racism that still existed in the form of a 20 percent Latino society and government which maintained dominance over the 80 percent Mayan population.

The experience in Guatemala transformed the energy of the community, and we looked for more places to serve. Our work with Plenty took Farm members to the slums of Bangladesh and to the depths of desperation in Haiti. In 1978, a group of mostly white hippie volunteers moved into the heart of the South Bronx, taking over an abandoned building to start a free ambulance service. In the South Bronx it was apparent that our black neighbors, though materially poor, benefited from their strong community ties, and the hippies from Tennessee were welcomed into that community because they were there to help. Plenty's work came to define what The Farm was about and represented the best of who we were.

### Things Change

Bad luck, bad investments, poor management, and youthful inexperience came head-to-head with the US recession of the early 1980s. Creditors came knocking at The Farm's doors, and it became clear the community had to either change or lose everything. Our economic and societal structure changed in the '80s, from an income-sharing model, where no one held personal money, to more of a democratic cooperative, where adult members were expected to contribute financially to the community budget. It was up to each individual to maintain a commit-

ment to service in their own way, and together in smaller circles.

The ensuing years were a time when The Farm had to pull itself out of poverty and its members establish lives that were truly sustainable, developing skills that could support a family in modern times, while continuing to stay true to the core principle of Right Livelihood, work that is seamless with your ideals.

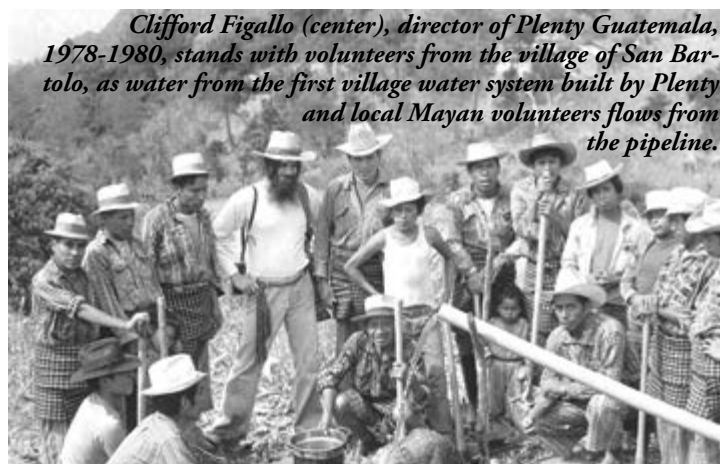
### Plenty International

Plenty International remains as a means for expressing those ideals. Plenty continues to manage and maintain a variety of programs and projects that support economic self-sufficiency, cultural integrity, and environmental responsibility in partnership with families, community groups, and other organizations in Central America, the US, the Caribbean, and Africa. Its base of support comes from people all across the country and around the world, and its volunteers and staff include people who no longer, or have never lived at The Farm Community. Ultimately Plenty is a tool that allows individuals to channel their beliefs into action.

Plenty's first soy nutrition project in Guatemala has been in continuous operation now for over 37 years. The Asociacion Dearthrollo Integral de Belen or ADIBE functions as a village cottage industry, marketing soy products like tofu and soy ice cream or "ice bean" throughout Guatemala.

Karen's Soy Nutrition Project works in the slums of Guatemala City, providing biweekly servings of fortified milk and cookies for the children of families living off what they are able to salvage and recycle from the Guatemala City dump.

In towns and villages of southern Belize, Plenty provides educational and technical support to primary schools, women's groups, and community efforts to reduce poverty, produce food, clean energy, water, and protect the environment. Gardens were started at all 50 schools in the Toledo District, teaching organic growing methods while supplying



*Clifford Figallo (center), director of Plenty Guatemala, 1978-1980, stands with volunteers from the village of San Bartolo, as water from the first village water system built by Plenty and local Mayan volunteers flows from the pipeline.*



*Plenty International soy technician Chuck Haren in 2016 working with some of the staff of Karen's Soy Nutrition Project (KSNP) to supplement the diets of children of families living off the dump in Guatemala City.*



*Plenty crew kids and local Mayan kids in Guatemala; Deborah Flowers, wife of the article author, and their two children (plus a third child from the Plenty crew) and local Mayan girls watch as water sprays from a new spigot.*



*Plenty Ambulance crew members and emergency medical trainees in the South Bronx.*

fruits and vegetables for healthy lunches. Students learn solar technology installing panels to provide light and power for classrooms, and to run pumps for village-wide water systems.

Since its inception Plenty has worked alongside Native American partners on a variety of projects. The Slim Buttes Agricultural Development Project at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota provides seeds, tools, soil preparation, and garden support so that Oglala Lakota families can augment their diets with fresh organic produce. Over the years, the project has grown from a humble start of six gardens in 1985, to as many as 400 gardens, involving up to 2500 tribal members in eight of the nine Pine Ridge Reservation districts.

Since its first response to the earthquake in Guatemala in 1976, Plenty International has continued to be an avenue for relief efforts after national disasters. Much of this is driven by the volunteers themselves, who come to Plenty as a way to facilitate their desire to help, after Hurricanes Mitch (Nicaragua 1998) and Iris (Belize 2001), in India and Sri Lanka following the tsunami of 2004, and more recent earthquakes in Haiti (2010) and Nepal (2015).

Relief efforts after Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav developed into a decade-long series of projects along Louisiana's Gulf Coast. Working with tribal leaders, Plenty provided emergency distributions of food and clothing to some of the most impacted Biloxi-Chitimacha Indian families. Since 2008, thanks to the efforts of Plenty volunteers, the annual "Bayou Christmas" has provided toys, books, groceries, and other aid to over 100 families.

Books To Kids was started after learning that virtually all of the books in New Orleans' libraries and public schools were destroyed after Katrina. Since 2006, Books To Kids volunteers have distributed free, quality books to disadvantaged children in Louisiana, Tennessee, and most recently, rural Kentucky. Over 250,000 books have been provided to children through schools, families, community centers, and libraries.

At The Farm Community in Tennessee, Plenty's Kids To The Country (KTC) program offers children from the homeless shelters and refugee centers in Nashville week-long experiences immersed in nature, a chance to explore creativity and learn conflict resolution skills away from the pressures of inner-city strife. Teachers and students from The Farm School, along with other volunteers, serve as counselors. Operating continuously now for over 30 years, KTC provides a valuable cultural exchange between urban children of color and the children growing up in the rural surroundings of The Farm Community.

### A Life Seamless with Your Ideals

Understanding your position of privilege is not about feeling guilt. It is about finding and acting on opportunities to make a difference. The ideals and beliefs we shared from the beginning still persist today: if you want to create peace in the world, be peaceful, and if you want to get along with your neighbors, be loving and respectful. Every one of us has the power and potential to make positive change, starting with how we treat those closest to us. From this strength comes our ability to leverage our efforts for greater impact, reaching across cultures to build community.

You can learn more about Plenty International and Kids To The Country at [www.plenty.org](http://www.plenty.org), and Karen's Soy Nutrition Project in Guatemala at [www.ksnp.org](http://www.ksnp.org). 🐦

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*Douglas Stevenson is the principal volunteer media interface and spokesperson at The Farm, once recognized as the world's largest hippie commune, now one of the most widely known ecovillage intentional communities. He is the author of two books, Out to Change the World and The Farm Then and Now, a Model for Sustainable Living, where he shares insights developed from over 40 years of life in community. Plenty has just released its own book, The Roots of Plenty: Tales from the "Hippie Peace Corps"; see [plenty.org/book-roots-plenty](http://plenty.org/book-roots-plenty).*



*Plenty volunteers and Mayan friends giving out tofu samples in Solola, Guatemala, 1980.*



*Farm member/Plenty volunteer and registered nurse, Elaine Langley, gives oral medicine to a child at an emergency response clinic in Haiti, after the earthquake of 2010.*



*Plenty Lesotho volunteers at a soy foods home demonstration in a Basotho village in Lesotho, Southern Africa.*



*Soybean ice cream for school kids in Guatemala.*

# Class-Harmony Community

By A. Allen Butcher

In my search for community I have looked to communal societies, community land trusts, cohousing, and others to find a form of intentional community that would be accessible to working class families without many assets other than an abiding commitment to cooperative living. I emphasize “families” because surprisingly to me, I have learned that the communities which practice sharing to the greatest degree are the least welcoming of children.

Raising a child in community had always been my dream. I had dropped out of college to join a rural commune called East Wind, only to be kicked out after eight years of work and commitment for having a child without getting permission from the community. Today East Wind Community continues to restrict its child population to about one child for every 10 adults, which is not a problem for them because they can always attract more young adults, many of whom, however, eventually want to have children, which often then as in my experience results in their having to leave their home.

I knew that many monastic societies were childless because of the inheritance issue, which is that children in communal societies often want a share of community assets when they come of age so they can leave the community into which they were born. Also, parents want to leave their children an inheritance other than the community itself. Unfortunately, other community

members often do not want the drain on communal resources that children represent. It is my belief that this is ultimately why the dominant culture is a private-property system and is not and never will be communal.

Still committed to the lifestyle, I joined another communal society, Twin Oaks Community, which attempted for about two decades to maintain a communal childcare tradition, in which parents give decision-making power over their children to the group. This was a wonderful experience for my child and me, yet sometime after we left Twin Oaks, their communal childcare program ended. Today, both of these communal groups use a collective childcare system where the parents are primarily responsible for their children, while the communities may refuse some or all support for the children. In this way communal groups push out people with children, or else give up communalism in favor of the sharing of private property in collective intentional community. These social dynamics also occurred in the communal groups of the Catholic Worker movement, and in the secular Israeli kibbutz movement before they changed from communal to a cohousing-like format; while the Hutterites and Bruderhof focus upon socialization methods for keeping their children in their communities, which the secular groups normally will not do.

I wrote a book which among other things discusses children in all of these communal traditions, titled *The Intentioneer's Bible*, and with that documentation I think it is time for communal societies to read the writing on the wall and admit that communal society and children do not mix well. As far as I know I'm the only person putting that truth about communal society into print.

I left the Federation of Egalitarian Communities with my child about the time that the cohousing movement was taking off in America, and I think that movement is much more appropriate for people with children,

except that it is expensive to buy into cohousing, which makes that type of community beyond the means of the working class. If a working class family is lucky they may be able to rent a cohousing unit, yet purchasing is usually not an option for the working class, so their time renting in cohousing is usually limited.

I spent a decade working for the cohousing movement yet never joined one because that community model is not accessible to working class people. Through hard work I eventually acquired a four-unit apartment building with the idea of creating some kind of child-friendly, low-income community, yet the rents are what support me now and I cannot give that up until I have some other kind of income.

I do have renters with children, and I keep my rents under the market rate, so in a sense I have created a small, child-friendly, working-class-friendly community (considering the local rental market). Yet what kind of community is this where I am the owner and everyone rents from me? This is far from the classless, egalitarian communal society I know and love. When I have to state my occupation I now write “Landlord,” which

is a particular breed of capitalist. However enlightened I may be, I am still a capitalist landlord. How could I call what I've created a “community”?

The realization finally came to me that I had gravitated toward a model of intentional community that is quite common, yet that most of us have

not acknowledged. In fact, when I first came to this city I lived in such a “community,” where the owner lived in the house while renting to myself and others. This and similar communities have been in the FIC Directory for decades.

It seems that a lot of people naturally fall into doing this kind of community, as I did. I wanted community, I could afford to purchase property, and that is how it happened. Yet what kind of community is this? Fairly recently the terms “coliving” and “cohouseholding” have appeared in the FIC Directory and this magazine; some of these instances must refer to this model of owner/renter community, yet those names do not clearly state that they are comprised of an owner with renters. The term “class-harmony community,” however, does clearly state the nature of the community as being comprised of two or more economic classes, with at least one capitalist-owner and more than one worker-renter.

Things get complicated in the communities movement when considering property ownership. Take for example Ganas Community. In the FIC Directory they list 80 members in eight different residences, with 10 of the members comprising the communal ownership core-group, while 70 others rent from them as in a collective community, sharing the core-group's commonly-owned property. The Directory chart does not explain that; one has to read their listing and extrapolate a little to understand it. Ganas states that a subgroup owns the property, and that subgroup is communal. So Ganas is both communal and collective, or a form of what I call an “economically diverse” intentional community, a category which includes community land trusts, while in this case Ganas is also a class-harmony community

I realized that this really is a common form of intentional community after reading the recent article in COMMUNITIES (issue #176) by Sky Blue

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**This model is the best opportunity  
for working class people with  
children to live in community.**

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and Betsy Morris titled, “Tracking the Communities Movement: 70 Years of History and the Modern FIC.” The authors include a category in their analysis of the 2016 FIC Directory listings which they call “Shared House/Cohousehold/Coliving,” yet the authors do not explain this category as they do the other forms (“coliving” could mean anything!), reporting only that this type of community accounts for 31 percent of the Directory listings. Only cohousing had a larger showing, at 39 percent.

Before the newest FIC Directory was printed, I transcribed much of the 2010 Directory into a database and ran a statistical analysis. I omitted listings stating that they had only one or two members, while Sky and Betsy went further in omitting listings with fewer than four members, assuming that forming communities will be counted in the future when or if they grow in membership.

Betsy and Sky counted 544 established US communities with “at least four adults living together on a site for at least two years,” while my preliminary count totaled 738 American intentional communities in the 2016 FIC Directory with one or more members, regardless of longevity. Among these 738 communities, 154 groups or 21 percent indicated that their land is owned by an individual or a subgroup of members, while 41 groups or 27 percent of that number are forming groups, according to my criteria of fewer than three adults, not Betsy’s and Sky’s criteria of fewer than four adults. (154 groups with land owned by individuals – 41 with fewer than three members = 113 groups) Divide 113 groups by 738 total listings and the quotient is 15 percent. The class-harmony communities of one owner or a subgroup of property owners plus renters comprises 15 percent of American intentional communities with three or more members in the 2016 FIC Directory.

Although most of us are unaware of the full extent of the class-harmony communitarian category, a few have started working with this subset of intentional communities. Jennifer Ladd published an article in COMMUNITIES issue #159 (Summer 2013) titled, “Yes, Wealthy People Want to Live in Community in Sustainable Ways Too! Fourteen suggestions from those who are trying it.” The author uses the term “cross-class projects” for this type of community, calling the landlords “primary funders.”

Jennifer Ladd created a nonprofit organization called “Class Action,” and for a few years has been networking people having money and/or real estate who want to build intentional community. Jennifer writes in her COMMUNITIES article, “Many people with wealth are looking for ways to leverage their resources for good—to help heal the environment and to support the emergence of a new culture based on cooperation and collaboration.” You may not have noticed that article, yet Jennifer’s work is

an indication of great potential for expansion of the communities movement. In my view, this is the best potential opportunity for working class people with children to be able to live in community!

Consider two indicators of the possibilities for growth of the class-harmony community model. First is part of Arthur Morgan’s legacy, the original founder of the Fellowship of Intentional Communities (the FIC’s former name) in the late 1940s at The Vale in Ohio. In *The Intentioneer’s Bible* I wrote the story of Celo Community, founded in 1936, which is an example of financial support for communitarianism by a wealthy conservative.

A significant source of support and of members for the forming of Celo came from the Quaker social service organization called the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and other anti-war pacifists. The irony is that the financing for the 1,250 acre land purchase came from a wealthy Chicago industrialist. William Regnery believed in the ideal expressed in earlier times of the “Roman citizen-soldier” and of the “Jeffersonian landed yeomanry” as the foundation of a democratic republic. George Hicks in his Ph.D. thesis titled, *Ideology and Change in an American Utopian Community*, wrote about William Regnery that he was, “a conservative businessman, a mild anti-Semite, a staunch opponent of President Roosevelt and the New Deal,...[yet he held] a nostalgic belief that people who lived in rural villages and earned their living by subsistence farming constituted the virtuous and self-reliant bedrock of republican government.”

This is an example of the convergence of opposing political-economic theories and ideals in the communitarian movement. William Regnery met Arthur Morgan and asked him, as Timothy Miller writes, “to suggest a project of substantial social value that he might underwrite.” It probably did not take Morgan long to come up with the idea of bankrolling a communitarian settlement. And the form it was to take was the School of Living’s design of homesteads leased from an association that owned the land. Because of this land tenure design, and the longevity of Celo Community, Celo is now considered to be the first successful community land trust. The initial Celo board of directors included Arthur Morgan, William Regnery, and Clarence Pickett, the executive secretary of the AFSC. (Timothy Miller, *The Quest for Utopia in 20th Century America, Vol. 1*, 1998, pp. 156-7, 231 n.100, quoted in *The Intentioneer’s Bible*, Amazon.com)

Second, for corroboration of Jennifer’s statement above about “many people with wealth...,” see the 2010 edition of the book *Philanthrocapitalism* by Matthew Bishop and Michael Green. The authors present Ted Turner, the founder of the CNN cable news channel, who gave \$1 billion of his personal wealth to the United Nations in 1997, calling upon others of the super rich elite who are “awash in money” to “give the money away that you have no idea what you’re going to do with.” About a decade later Bill Gates of Microsoft, Oprah Winfrey of daytime talk-show fame, Warren Buffett a.k.a. the “Wizard of Omaha,” and many others provide what Bishop and Green call “the most dramatic evidence so far of a movement—philanthrocapitalism—that has grown hand in hand with the rise in the number of very rich people on the planet.” (Bishop & Green, p. 5)

In his 2014 book, *Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State*, Ralph Nader writes that Warren Buffett and Bill Gates were “the first among the 114 billionaires



Patio socializing at Dry Gulch Community, the author’s class-harmony community in Denver, Colorado.

Photos courtesy of Allen Butcher



who signed a pledge to give away at least half their wealth to ‘good causes.’ When you look at their website [givingpledge.org], you’ll see that just on this list are possibilities that would take us beyond tilting at windmills.” (Nader, p. 181)

Jennifer Ladd in her article quotes Diana Leafe Christian in her 2003 book, *Creating a Life Together*, where she writes about creating community “When You Already Own the Property,” that “if you cannot or don’t want to release full control but still want to live in close proximity with others, please do so and enjoy it—but don’t advertise it as ‘community!’” (Christian, p. 24) For a long time I felt this way as well. No longer.

There you have it. Some people do not consider this type of community, what I am calling class-harmony community, to be a bona fide, legitimate form of intentional community, even though as much as 15 percent of all the listings in the 2016 FIC Directory with three or more members are class-harmony communities. This is the kind of misunderstanding and divergent opinion that proliferates in part because of vague terminology that engenders confusion about what is really involved.

Class-harmony community is a very old story. Consider one of the most famous historical class-harmony communities, New Lanark. This was a Scottish milltown acquired by Robert Owen through marriage in the early 1800s, which he turned into a form of philanthrocapitalism. He did far more than anyone else at the time to turn his factory into a socially-responsible manufacturing firm, providing social services for his 1,400 mill workers, mostly women and children, including among other things reducing hours of work, improving housing, giving every family a garden plot, and creating the first early-learning, developmental childcare facility. All of Owen’s later intentional community attempts failed, including the famous New Harmony community in Indiana, although today we know how to create successful secular communal societies through the use of time-based economics. Another historical example of capitalists creating community is Jean-Baptiste-Andre Godin’s “Social Palace” in France existing most of the last half of the 19th century.

What happened to that early communitarian class-harmony movement? True, Owen went too far with trying to transition his communities from collective community to communalism while knowing very little about it, losing much of his wealth in the process. Yet what really killed it was the advocacy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for class-conflict through their ideas of communist “scientific socialism.” They referred to Owen’s and Godin’s work as “utopian socialist,” denigrating and sneering at the “optimum little republics” which Owen, Godin, Fourier, Saint Simon, and others created or inspired.

In a sense, the contemporary class-harmony community movement counters all forms of class-conflict-inspired communism. The two are surely not the same thing, and if a class-harmony community movement is to emerge, it will likely be necessary to easily and repeatedly respond to charges that coliving and the rest is communist. That is actually the main reason that I suggest the name “class-harmony community,” as this name anticipates a coming storm of disrespectful, intolerant red baiting, by emphasizing peace and harmony between the socioeconomic classes of the wealthy, or at least the propertied class, and the un-propertied working class.

Economic and political inequalities among people have led to social conflicts all through the

history of civilization, yet at the same time through much of our history we have seen people give up their wealth to live in cooperation. This was advocated and practiced by the pre-Christian stoics and others, and continued through the entire history of Catholic monasticism and other forms of religious community, renewed in our time with what is now called “New Monasticism.”

Knowing now that communal society is inherently biased against children, we can add communalism to the list of cultural factors that limit the number of children that people want to have, along with urbanization and increased educational and career opportunities for women. This is another feather in the cap of communalism. Along with the reduction of resource usage through sharing commonly-owned property, communal societies also serve to reduce human overpopulation of the planet. This leaves collective and economically diverse forms of community like cohousing, community land trusts, and class-harmony communities to create child-friendly intentional community. 🌱

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*A. Allen Butcher is a former member of East Wind and Twin Oaks communities, currently living collectively in Denver, Colorado. Portions of this article were previously published by the author in the 2016 book, The Intentioneer’s Bible: Interwoven Stories of the Parallel Cultures of Plenty and Scarcity, currently available only as an Amazon ebook, and other portions are from a forthcoming book, Intentioneers and Illuminati: Interweaving the Parallel Cultures of Plenty and Scarcity via Myth, Allegory, Reason, and Mysticism. Contact the author at 4thWorld@consultant.org, and see www.Intentioneers.net.*



*Socializing outside the finished shop and guest room.*



*Shop and guest room construction at Dry Gulch Community.*



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# CREATING THE IDEAL INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY (OR REVITALIZING AN EXISTING ONE)



I, Sahmat, grew up in intentional communities and have lived in 10 of them. I have been so dedicated to Community with both humans and Nature that I've been called "The Community Guy". The communities I grew up in shared a fairly strong "sense of community". I call this deep and sustained sense of community "Common-unity" because it's a state of unity we share in common, with the unique individuality of each human and each species still honored. It's this state of Common-unity that I've found most valuable in life and to me it's the main reason for living in an intentional community. When a group is deep in Common-unity together, there's a shared sense of love, joy, and peace that tops any other group experience.

However, I've found that in all the communities I've lived in, the sense of community is not nearly as deep and sustained as it could be. It's precisely this lack of Common-unity that is the root cause of the catastrophic global suffering of racism, wars, child abuse, abuse of women, environmental and species destruction, etc. So the ultimate goal is ending global suffering through "Global Common-unity": the spreading of Common-unity throughout the world by forming a global network of Common-unity-dedicated Communities.

So I've spent my life learning how to create Common-unity-dedicated communities that share true Common-unity: a deeper and more sustained sense of community. There are two keys to starting a Common-unity community (or moving an existing community into deeper Common-unity):

1. The first key to Common-unity is for everyone to be "Common-unity-dedicated" as their top common priority. This doesn't seem to be the case in any existing community, which results in focus and energies being bled off into other priorities. So maintenance of Common-unity doesn't get enough time and energy.
2. The second key to Common-unity is to learn "Common-unity Skills"; skills that must be practiced to maintain Common-unity: Speaking from the Heart, Empathetic Listening, Emptying of Ego-attachments, Conflict Resolution, Consensus, Heart Wound Healing, Cooperative Housing, and Cooperative Economics. Modern culture does not teach us these skills.

We at the Alliance for Global Community have developed free workshops that train you in these Common-unity Skills. The workshops contain the Sharing Circle process developed by M. Scott Peck, a Nature connection exercise developed by John Seed and Joanna Macy, healing exercises developed by Byron Katie and Richard Moss, and exercises in creating Cooperative Housing and Cooperative Economics. We've tested various versions of these Common-unity Skill Building workshops over the past 25 years, and we've found them to be quite effective in teaching Common-unity skills that can help maintain Common-unity. If you'd like to start a Common-unity-dedicated community, or if you'd like to bring more Common-unity into an existing community (perhaps through a Common-unity sub-community or "pod"), you need to learn or improve these Common-unity skills as soon as possible.

To find out how to sign up for a free public Common-unity Skills workshop or schedule a free workshop for an existing group or community, please go to my website [thecommunityguy.org](http://thecommunityguy.org) There you can also find out how to get a free copy of the book "Skill Building for Global Common-unity".



COMMON-UNITY WITH HUMANITY AND NATURE

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**For information contact:**  
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# REACH

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs. In addition to ads intended to match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, Reach offers ads for events, goods, services, books, personals, and more to people interested in communities.

You may contact the Advertising Manager Gigi Wahba to place a Reach ad. Email [ads@ic.org](mailto:ads@ic.org), call 415-991-0541, or go to [communities.ic.org/ads/](http://communities.ic.org/ads/) for more details or to submit your ad online.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #179 - Summer 2018 (out in June) is April 24, 2018.

The rate for Reach ads is Up to 50 Words: \$25/issue or \$75/year; Up to 125 Words: \$40/issue or \$125/year; Up to 350 Words: \$60/issue or \$175/year. If you are an FIC Member you may take off an additional 10%.

You may pay using a card or PayPal by contacting Gigi online or over the phone using the contact information above, or you may mail a check or money order payable to Communities with your ad text, word count, and duration of the ad, plus your contact information, to: The Fellowship for Intentional Community, 23 Dancing Rabbit Lane, Rutledge, MO 63563.

Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are also invited to create a free listing in the online Communities Directory at [Directory.ic.org](http://Directory.ic.org), and also to try our online classified advertising options. Special prices may be available to those who wish to list both in the magazine and online.

**CAROLINE ESTES, CONSENSUS PIONEER, TURNS 90 ON MARCH 14TH.** As a founder of Alpha Farm, she has contributed much to the communities movement. Join us in expressing our appreciation to her by email, card or phone: [alpha@pioneer.net](mailto:alpha@pioneer.net) OR 92819 Deadwood Creek Rd, Deadwood OR 97430 OR 541-964-5102

## COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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**ALPHA FARM: UNIQUE CHANCE TO GET IN ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF AN ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY** in the beautiful coast mountain range between Florence and Eugene, Oregon. Mild Climate. To participate, you must be a "self-starter" with community experience and a vision. For more information, contact Bill at [alpha@pioneer.net](mailto:alpha@pioneer.net)

**ALPHA FARM IS A SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY FOUNDED IN 1972, LOCATED IN THE COAST RANGE OF WESTERN OREGON.** We are seeking new members to assist in our current revitalization and the development of new community income streams. Of particular interest are individuals with a cooperative mindset, skilled in Office Administration, Auto Mechanics, Infrastructure Maintenance or large scale Organic Gardening. If this sounds like you, please contact the Visitor Coordinator at [alpha@pioneer.net](mailto:alpha@pioneer.net).

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**HILLS, WOODS, PASTURES, GARDENS.** Currents is a small, rural, multi-generational community 14 miles outside the university town of Athens, Ohio. Co-op inspired, consensus that works, solar micro-grids, our own water system. In our 36 years we've made a good start; now, still inventing ourselves, we're actively seeking a next generation. Looking for some long-time friends/intentional family. Especially for people with small children or a group who have dreamed about building a life together. 162 acres which, with sufficient vision and sweat, might include... small-scale cooperative farming? Craft shops and home-based business? If you would like to help imagine and build and don't mind not-starting from scratch, please inquire. Housing options now available. Send inquiry to [heycurrents@gmail.com](mailto:heycurrents@gmail.com).

**ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE - AND WE ARE BUILDING IT.** Bread and Roses Collective is looking for new members to join our project of creating sustainable urban living for activists and change-makers. We have two Victorian houses, 10 adults, one toddler, and a half-acre organic permaculture garden in the progressive Westcott Neighborhood of Syracuse, NY. We are within a mile of three universities and a hotbed of local activism. The houses are collectively run as a consensus-based nonprofit. We require a commitment of at least a year, share our vegetarian food, and are committed to affordable housing. [www.BreadAndRosesCollective.org](http://www.BreadAndRosesCollective.org) 315-422-4924 [info@breadandrosescollective.org](mailto:info@breadandrosescollective.org)

**SPIRITSONG COMMUNITY --** We are a small community of five people wanting to be ten people looking for new members. We are located in Napa county, CA. We live on 37 acres of mainly wooded land 2 miles up a dirt road. We have several structures available for people to live in. We are off the grid of the Internet, we have organic gardens,

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**COWEETA HERITAGE CENTER AND TALKING ROCK FARM** are located in the mountains of Western North Carolina in a beautiful and diverse temperate rainforest. CHC is looking for others who would like to join together to form an Intentional Community embracing the principles of Voluntary Simplicity and Healing the Earth and Each Other. Simply put, we wish "to live simply so that others may simply live." It is a recognition that nature provides us with valuable services and resources that we can use to enrich our lives. Utilizing local resources, appropriate technology, and working cooperatively, we can discover creative ways to meet our needs as "directly and simply as possible.". Come join Coweeta and learn how to live lightly on the land and enjoy the Earth's bounty! Contact Coweeta for more info or to schedule a visit!! Contact Paul at [coweeta@gmail.com](mailto:coweeta@gmail.com).

**DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE**, Rutledge, Missouri. Come live lightly with us, and be part of the solution! Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage is an intentional community and educational non-profit focused on living, researching, and demonstrating sustainable living possibilities. We live, work and play on 280 acres of lovely rolling prairie, and welcome new members to join us in creating a vibrant community and cooperative culture! Together we're living abundant and fulfilling low-carbon lives, using about 10% of the resources of the average American in many key areas. Our ecological covenants include using renewable energy, practicing organic agriculture, and no private vehicles. We use natural and green building techniques, share cars and some common infrastructure, and make our own fun. We welcome individuals, families, and sub-communities, and are especially seeking women, as well as people with leadership and communication skills. Join us in living a new reality: sustainable is possible! 660-883-5511; [dancingrabbit@ic.org](mailto:dancingrabbit@ic.org)

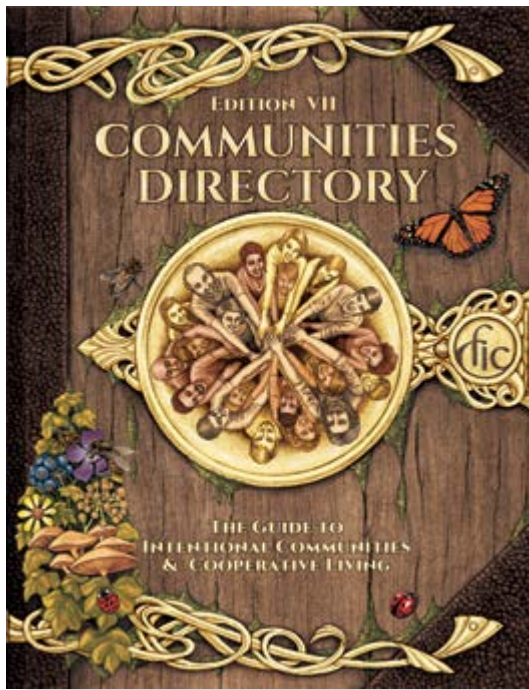
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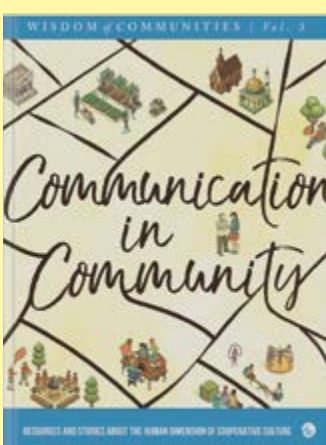
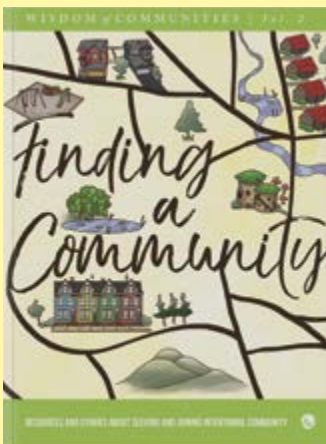
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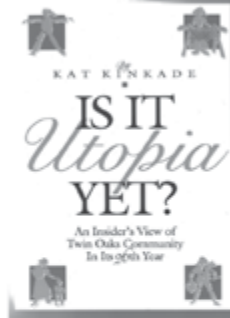
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## A NETWORK OF VENTURES FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

(continued from p. 78)

reinforce oppression, and to provide opportunities for audiences to imagine a better way to address emergencies. Actors will first perform a play that portrays real-life stories about how race and class oppression have shown up before, during, and after emergencies. The play is then run again from the top, but this time, audience members are invited to substitute for or simply join the actors onstage. The new actors are encouraged to improvise different and better outcomes, modifying the stories to be more life-affirming for all people. Just like practicing “stop, drop, and roll” in case our clothes catch fire, this troupe encourages people to practice being allies for each other in the face of disasters.

### Envisioning an Equitable and Ecological World

Many of our planetary challenges are fueled by climate change, which will destroy much of our human society if we don't radically change our ways. Bubbles of methane locked in melting tundra store climate-changing gas equivalent to all the carbon released by humans since the beginning of industrialization. Even if we as a global community stop burning fossil fuels, we are likely in for a wild ride of drought, heat waves, hurricanes, floods, and wildfires due to greenhouse gases already present in our atmosphere. Religious, racial, and ethnic tensions are increasing as people who lose their homes in these disasters seek new places to live. How will we be with each other on this ride—at each other's throats, or hand-in-hand?

A compassionate approach to welcoming refugees is a moral, safety, and practical imperative. Those of us who live in the developed world have contributed the lion's share of greenhouse gases to our atmosphere, yet people living on small islands, subsistence farmers in poor countries, and refugees who have left their homes due to drought and other natural disasters are experiencing the impacts of climate change first, and hardest. Refugees in their desperation are more likely to join the terrorist groups that show up to recruit members when times become tough. And refugees will continue to find their way here no matter how many walls and other barriers our government builds, where they will need homes and jobs if they are not to expand homeless camps in our towns and cities. This situation provides us with an opportunity to redistribute wealth while creating low-carbon-footprint living here in our own backyard. It is not enough to become aware of and resist oppression and planetary destruction—we must also create a positive vision for how we want to be with each other.

It's important that a diverse coalition of peo-

ple do this visioning, so that we work together for the common good rather than fight each other, and so that whatever solutions are proposed reflect the real needs of people who are struggling in our increasingly stratified economy. One such coalition that is working to mitigate climate change while addressing racial and class inequity is the Portland Just Energy Transition (PJET), a group that includes representatives from five local organizations supporting people of color and two climate-justice-oriented environmental groups. They have crafted a ballot measure for November 2018 to authorize a one percent tax on multinational corporations that do business in Portland. Funds generated by this tax would be spent on transitioning off of fossil fuels through weatherizing and solarizing homes and businesses, especially in low-income communities, through job training that addresses economic inequities, through local and sustainable food production, and through innovative “green” technologies. Whether or not this ballot initiative passes, the relationships formed by people from diverse cultures and perspectives working together on this project are creating a foundation for future collaboration to address our diverse and unified challenges.

Portland's Bureau of Emergency Management predicts that our city's energy, transportation, water, and sewage systems may be disrupted for many months after a massive earthquake that is predicted for our region. The more we plan ahead for this, the more likely we will have systems already in place and/or supplies ready for when such a disaster provides incentive and opportunity for implementing low-carbon-footprint infrastructure. A visioning project still in the forming phase aimed at creative emergency preparation and response has been initiated by Ridhi D'Cruz of City Repair. Members of this team plan to host a design charrette that will apply permaculture principles to preparing for and rebuilding our city in the aftermath of a major disruption. Ideas include creating more renewable and decentralized community-based energy systems, locally grown food, water catchment, human waste recycling, and community-centered housing. The team intends to include members of the Portland Just Energy Transition coalition and the Village Coalition, a group applying the village model to houselessness, as well as other groups representing diverse perspectives in the design charrette they are planning. This team may also gather ideas by travelling to places such as street fairs and shopping centers with City Repair's “T-Crab” mobile teahouse station and art supplies, inviting people to creatively re-envision their neighborhoods in light of a potential major collapse of our current infrastructure.

### Cultivating Sharing and Connection

Most humans enjoy giving to each other when there is space in their daily life to do so, and emergencies help to create these spaces by disrupting our business-as-usual lives. People flock to the streets in the aftermath of hurricanes, snowstorms, and earthquakes to see what they can contribute to the common good, melting class and racial barriers as they help each other to survive. Many report these times of crises as among the best moments of their lives, filled with brave purpose, caring, and camaraderie. People from afar are also motivated to send money and supplies to areas hit by disasters, not knowing whether their gifts will be used well. How can we direct our natural impulses for contribution in ways that lessen the impact of extreme weather events in advance and help us to respond effectively when they do arise?

CommonGoods Network, an Oregon-based nonprofit, has created an online platform called Kindista and also facilitates in-person events that encourage neighbors and other groups to share offers, requests, and expressions of gratitude with each other. This group is exploring modeling itself after the Enspiral Network based in Wellington, New Zealand, an innovative charitable fund that grew out of the Occupy movement there ([www.enspiral.com](http://www.enspiral.com)). CommonGoods' aim is to create a network where teams such as those described in this article provide financial and practical support to each other, and where everyone involved is invited to engage simultaneously as a donor, volunteer, and beneficiary of the network. My son Skye began to pilot this model during a trip to Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Maria. Over the past few weeks, he has coordinated with two friends who have joined him on the island, and brought suitcases full of folding bikes, batteries, and materials for off-grid solar. They toured the island collecting stories, offering donations, and distributing supplies. While describing the details of the Enspiral framework falls outside the scope of this article, some important tenets include an emphasis on working in deep relationship with one another, of seeking advice and mentorship, and of supporting responsible personal initiative. For Skye and his friends, the presence of loving family on the island, connection to informed mentors from groups like Grassroots International, and tangible support from family and friends from the mainland, lay the foundation for effectively contributing in Puerto Rico.

Another group that contributes to disaster-proofing here in Portland is a network of Neighbor-

hood Emergency Teams (NETs) that consist of volunteers trained by the city to offer search and rescue, first aid, and fire suppression services in emergencies. The Taborvilla NET, which includes those who live or work within the boundaries of four Portland neighborhood associations, has expanded their mission beyond training citizen first responders to also include using permaculture principles when designing systems of emergency recovery, building equity into emergency preparation efforts, and promoting community connection. A current initiative of this team is hosting “stone soup” potlucks and workshops at a demonstration emergency station in the backyard of an intentional community household called “ThriveHive.” Neighbors and others who are interested in emergency preparation bring an ingredient to contribute to a soup pot heated on a biochar stove, and then learn about the site’s water catchment, terra preta sanitation and composting systems, and their emergency herbal medicine and vegetable gardens, before sharing a meal together.

### Calling Each Other Into Our Highest Selves

We are all at risk of losing our lives to climate change, so it’s essential we learn to effectively collaborate and not be divided against each other as we work to change our life-destroying ways. As Victor Lee Lewis said in a seminar on systems thinking: “We are all in the same boat, but we are not on the same deck. While it is true that everyone dies if the ship sinks without rescue, someone shackled on a crowded lower deck without access to clean air and healthy food is having a different experience than someone strolling on the promenade after enjoying a banquet. We need to move through the painful process of addressing oppression rather than prematurely declaring that ‘we are all one.’”

Coalition building is hard work, as it requires us to transcend our cultural conditioning so that we stop stepping on each others’ toes. We carry prejudice, internalized oppression, and traumatic wounds stemming from generations of suffering that affect our relationships as we try to collaborate with people who are different from us. We have intersecting identities that create unconscious patterns of both domination and submission within us. Becoming aware of, naming, apologizing, and making amends for the ways we hurt each other is important, as is learning to step into our own power. There are ways and times for accomplishing this within our own identity groups, and other ways and times to skillfully build bridges with those who are different from ourselves.

An early step in coalition building is to create spaces to freely express our uncomfortable feelings without worrying about self-censorship and correct speech. Expressing our anger and grief in the safe company of those who share our life experiences as well as allies who are skilled in holding space without becoming reactive helps us to release these emotions. This creates room in our hearts to open ourselves to hearing the pain of others, and to begin crafting solutions that work for all of us.

From this place of strength we can begin to gain skills for listening to others who are not yet clued into how structural oppression operates in our culture, and the ways they participate in perpetuating that oppression. We can include them as allies in our work, finding ways to effectively and gently educate them as well as to hear their pain. We will only solve our life-threatening glob-

al and local challenges to health and safety by collaborating with more and more people who are on the edge of waking up to how we’ve all been impacted by our life-killing culture. We can call them into their highest selves through skilled and gentle feedback rather than calling them out with harsh criticism and accusations.

Through building networks of trust and collaboration, we can live through the coming transition with as much love, grace, and joy as possible. As Joanna Macy says, “We will probably not know in our lifetimes whether we are serving as deathbed attendants to a dying world or as midwives to the next stage of human evolution, but either way, our work is the same.” I feel much less despair and often surprisingly energized when I am addressing our planetary challenges in the company of committed family and friends. In the worst-case scenario of our ship going down in the upcoming barrage of disasters, I want to do so holding hands with others and singing. If we are lucky, hard-working, collaborative, and skilled enough to survive what’s coming, we will create a social foundation rich in the wealth of what creates authentic happiness for future generations to build upon. 🍷

*Melanie Rios lives with her partner and sister next door to Mt. Tabor, a large park through which she enjoys walking to her office at the ThriveHive community in Portland, Oregon. She serves as co-leader of the Taborvilla Neighborhood Emergency Team and Executive Director of the CommonGoods Network. She also works as a consultant for progressive and/or culturally diverse groups who are seeking to establish effective decision-making and conflict transformation processes in an atmosphere of mutual trust.*



*Jiro Isetani assists a “survivor” at an emergency response training scenario.*



*The author cooks up some soup on a biochar stove in her backyard demonstration emergency kitchen.*



*Ridhi D’Cruz facilitates a neighborhood design charrette.*

# A Network of Ventures for Community Resilience

By *Melanie Rios*

**A**s community-minded people, how can we address race and class oppression as we enhance our resilience in the face of escalating planetary challenges? How can we use our privilege to nurture strong networks of connection amongst all of us in the short term, while also working longer term to level the playing field? What kind of wealth redistribution would contribute to the health and happiness of all humans while also protecting other beings and the planet that supports our lives?

This article describes interconnected initiatives in and around Portland, Oregon that contribute to a web of emergency resilience efforts informed by social justice, earth protection, and community-building perspectives. It tells the stories of how teams throughout our city, in various stages of manifestation from dreaming to implementation, are encouraging us to study and counteract structural forces of oppression; to envision a more equitable and ecological world; to cultivate sharing and connection; and to call each other into our highest selves.

## Studying and Counteracting Structural Oppression

While acute emergencies often inspire acts of heroism and spontaneous sharing, they also provide an arena for race and class oppression to

arise on multiple fronts. Hurricane Katrina offers examples of how poor people and people of color are often the most impacted by disasters. In this case, it was known by the government in advance of the hurricane that the levees built to protect the poorer neighborhoods of New Orleans needed repairs, but the government chose to ignore these warnings. When the levees failed, a black man spent days rescuing people in a boat, and then was shot while walking through a white neighborhood by a vigilante. Police and military soldiers freshly arrived home from Iraq forced many people of color at gunpoint into a stadium, not allowing them to walk across a bridge to safety due to prejudice in the surrounding areas. Trucks with supplies were turned away from the city. Outside companies were awarded huge sums to clean and rebuild, but they pocketed the money while offering little in return. Undamaged houses were bulldozed to make room for new houses that were unaffordable to the people who had lived there. All in all, Katrina offers a portrait of what has come to be known as “disaster capitalism,” a phenomenon we see unfolding again in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Here in Portland, a multicultural “theater for the living” troupe is preparing to offer a platform for increasing awareness of how disasters can

*(continued on p. 76)*



*Skye Rios (right) discussing the application of solar chargers at el Centro de Apoyo Mutuo in Caguas, Puerto Rico.*



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