

AWARE-LA

Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere - Los Angeles

~ www.awarela.org ~

Why a White Space

When AWARE-LA began its base building via Saturday Dialogues, the founders and facilitators frequently opened the meetings with a discussion regarding the reasons for why we need to meet together as white people. This was essential because many participants were either hesitant to talk about their participation outside the group or were being challenged by friends or colleagues about why we would meet together only as white people.

In a culture that uplifts colorblindness, the challenges typically included charges that what we were doing was 1) divisive, 2) segregating, and/or 3) unhelpful. For a lot of us, it was initially hard to explain to others how white people meeting alone together could have positive results. Given U.S. history, skepticism is understandable. For many people of color, the idea that white people could (or should) be trusted to work on our issues amongst each other seems either laughable or dangerous.

As a response to participant concerns over how to give voice to our purpose, we spent time during several meetings brainstorming and honing the list of why we choose to meet as we do. Additionally, we grounded ourselves in calls by Civil Rights' era revolutionaries of color that white people should organize whites against racism.

“Whites who are sincere should organize themselves and figure out some strategies to break down the prejudice that exists in white communities. This is where they can function more intelligently and more effectively, in the white community itself, and this has never been done.”

—Malcolm X, interview with Jack Barnes and Barry Sheppard, *Young Socialist* (March-April 1965).

“It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (racism) is most manifest... The white people should go into white communities where the whites have created power for the express purpose of denying blacks human dignity and self-determination... There is no doubt in our minds that some whites are just as disgusted with this system as we are. But it is meaningless to talk about coalition if there is no one to align ourselves with, because of the lack of organization in the white communities. There can be no talk of 'hooking up' unless black people organize blacks and white people organize whites. If these conditions are met, then perhaps at some later date —and if we are going in the same direction—talks about exchange of personnel, coalition, and other meaningful alliances can be discussed.”

—Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, “Excerpts from Paper on Which the ‘Black Power’ Philosophy is Based,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1966, 10.

“Our alliance is one of the organized black groups with organized white groups. As soon as the organized white groups do not do the things that would benefit us in our struggle for liberation, that will be our departure point... We don’t hate white people; we hate the oppressor. And if the oppressor happens to be white then we hate him. When he stops oppressing us then we no longer hate him. And right now in America you have the slave-master being a white group. We are pushing him out of office through revolution in this country. I think the responsibility of the white revolutionary will be to aid us in this.

...Black Power is people’s power and as far as organizing white people we give white people the privilege of having a mind and we want them to get a body. They can organize themselves. We can tell them what they should do, what their responsibility is if they’re going to claim to be white revolutionaries or white mother country radicals...But anything more than that they will have to do on their own.”

—Huey Newton, “Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party, Cultural Nationalism, SNCC, Liberals and White Revolutionaries,” *The Movement*, August 1968, 8.

Out of this reflection upon the historic calls for us to organize white people and our own brainstorming, each part of the resulting document was vetted by many voices and it has been revised over the years. The most important issues we tend to highlight when we do not have time to read the entire document is that 1) we were asked to do this work by people of color, 2) we are not meeting together to learn about other people, but instead how to cultivate an anti-racist white culture, and 3) this is intended as a complement to multi-racial work.

See below for the final version of the document.

Why a White Space

For many, it sounds contradictory: “It’s racist if just white people get together. Isn’t that segregation?” The following are our reasons for gathering as a white anti-racist community:

1. People of color shouldn’t always have to be the ones to educate white people about racism and oppression. We are taking responsibility for learning about racism, our own white privilege, and how to challenge it as white people.

2. In order to challenge racism and dismantle white supremacy, white people need to unlearn racism and discover the ways we enact white privilege. This is a long, difficult, and sometimes painful process. It’s helpful to have a space where other white people engaged in this process can support and challenge us, without having to always subject people of color to further undue trauma or pain as we stumble and make mistakes. Having a community of white anti-racist people gives us hope, helps us grow our practice, and gives us strength to stay in it for the long haul.

3. A commitment to anti-racist identity and practice as a white person can sometimes mean increased alienation and conflict in our lives, especially with other white friends and family who disagree with us. AWARE is a space where we can get support from people who are experiencing similar struggles as anti-racist white people.

4. AWARE is a space for white people to figure out what it means to be an anti-racist white person and challenge racism in all areas of our lives. We cannot expect people of color to have all of the answers for us on how to transform ourselves and other white people. As white people we are well equipped to understand what it means to be white, as well as a white anti-racist.

5. AWARE is a place where white people can begin to build a new culture of white anti-racism, and learn the skills needed to transform the larger white community.

6. AWARE is a supplement to, not a replacement for, multi-racial dialogues between white people and people of color. It’s important that white people give space in their lives to learning from and bearing witness to people of color’s experiences of racism.

7. A white space serves as a resource to people of color who want to work with white people but don’t want to have to spend all their energy dealing with the racism of white people.