

Why This Issue?

Things feel darker in the United States. Political division is growing wider, white nationalists have stepped back into the mainstream as we saw with the rally in Charlottesville, mass shootings from Las Vegas to Parkland have racked our collective heart, and the police continue to serve as an institution of oppression rather than justice. We are grappling with the ugly, messy reality that for all its blessings, the technologies that connect us on the Internet have also left us open to manipulation. These times feel uncertain; they make us feel afraid. In this issue, we wanted to highlight the experiences of those who struggle for liberation in the face of this fear. After an analysis of the current culture of fear, we present the reflections of those who work against oppression. We asked them two simple questions: What does liberation look like to you? What practices help you to find it?

Jenny Truax starts off this *Round Table* by describing the culture and systems of fear that feed oppression in the U.S. "The imagination of the U.S. seems to be drowning in a sea of fear. We live in an unprecedented age of fear, isolation, and disconnection." Sharing some of the symptoms and foundational causes of this fear, she reminds us that "We have so much unlearning to do if we are to win the imagination battle" in which fear is currently far too dominant. Dr. Amber Johnson, a professor-activist at Saint Louis University, asserts that the fight for liberation must center on concrete, revolutionary actions more than abstract ideals. "Liberation is something we must invent and live. It is a generative verb, a constant state of becoming and being."

Amelia Romo Olivas reflects on her time at the Universidad Sin Fronteras (University Without Walls) and how it shaped her work for liberation within her indigenous heritage. "I began to understand liberation through the radical praxis of decolonizing." Rosalie Riegler, an oral historian and Catholic Worker, describes her journey from "saying no" to "acting no." Johnelle McGee, an anti-discrimination activist, speaks to how her experiences as a Black woman inform her fight against oppression. "Understanding my different identities, and how those identities impact my experience, has been very liberating." Our centerfold features the radical tenderness project by kristen trudo. Check out more information about it on the backpage!

Sandra Tamari shares her experience fighting against colonization as a Palestinian woman in America. "We do not have to wait for our oppressors to grant us liberation," she reminds us. "Liberation means being courageous enough to speak your own truth, not waiting for permission to assert your identity, and standing in your own glory." Sarah Nash reflects on how the Ferguson Uprising sparked a journey where the fight for "social, political, and racial justice" became central to her experience of faith. She shares with us an insight from a South African anti-Apartheid activist and Anglican Priest that false theologies can birth and sustain oppression and that we must embrace a theology of liberation that "gives hell, hell."

Because the book *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne marie brown was mentioned by quite a few of the authors for this *RoundTable*, we decided to include a book review by Dr. Kira Banks! We also reprinted the Midwest Catholic Worker Statement on Racism and included a reflection by Karen House's own Megan Macaraeg. In her reflection, she writes, "The statement is both necessary and timely. For a movement that is largely composed of white people, it's an essential step - one that is important to the health and growth of the movement itself - to publicly name the way racism functions, both in the larger movement and within individual communities."

Debbie Walters, an educator, student, and guest at Karen House, did an interview for this edition of *From Karen House* and shared what has been the most meaningful for her during her time as a member of our family. "To me, Karen House means a community, more than just a building... Karen House is simply caring. That's what my kids always say. It's been really great." And, last but not least, in a rousing edition of the *Catholic Worker Thought and Action*, Larry Chapman calls upon those in the St. Louis community to fight against the NGA development that is being constructed in Karen House's neighborhood. "The process that will remove any physical evidence that a community ever existed here is now underway."

Liberation looks different for each person, and yet, the themes of solidarity, love, and acceptance stand out in each testimony. These are frightening times, yes, but we can hold a light in the darkness and find liberation wherever we are. It must be a collective struggle that values each individual's unique way of contributing to the work. We long for liberation, and we must trust that God will lead us through the valley of the shadow of death and toward fresh green pastures.



- Mary Waters



Cover: Gregory Fister
Centerfold: Kristen Trudo

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Mary Waters, Sarah Nash, Jenny Truax, and Haley Shoaf. As always, letters to the editor are welcomed.

Our Age of Fear: An Imagination Battle

by Jenny Truax

"We are in an imagination battle. Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because, in some white imagination, they were dangerous. And that imagination is so respected that those who kill, based on an imagined, racialized fear of Black people, are rarely held accountable. Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. Imagination turns Brown bombers into terrorists and white farmers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break fear free... We have to imagine beyond those fears. We have to ideate - imagine and conceive - together."

-adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*

It feels like this country's imagination is drowning in a sea of fear. We are living in an unprecedented age of isolation, suspicion, and disconnection. Manifestations of fear are everywhere: unrelenting gun violence, unprecedented political segregation, and violence of all kinds targeting African Americans, transgender people, and women (just to name a few). For me, the national discourse on immigration, and how it has evolved, is a prime example of our increasingly fearful culture. Our government literally hunts people down, removes children from parents, and "disappears" people into black holes where they often can't even be located by their families, much less access legal counsel. All this happens in the name of "national security" and "safety." In her book *Rising Strong*, Brené Brown describes three symptoms of our fear-based culture: either/or thinking, sorting into factions, and fear of emotion. Her work has helped me to better understand how fear harms us, both at personal and systemic levels.



"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." - Nelson Mandela
Source: <http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/17966/1/The-Process-of-Psychological-Liberation.html>

1. Either/Or Thinking

One of the hallmarks of this age is either/or thinking. In contrast to both/and thinking, this is a simplistic "you're either with us or against us" mindset that infects people of all political persuasions. I can fall into this when I catch myself listening for mistakes instead of listening for understanding and empathy. Our movements exhibit it when we claim, "You're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem." When I think about how I've talked about racism over the years, this binary-thinking has shown up as, "I'm either BAD and RACIST or I'm doing it PERFECTLY." This false dichotomy hasn't given me new skills or resilience, it's only contributed to fear in the form of white fragility, making me feel brittle and fearful around the topic of racism. Belonging is one of our deepest needs as humans and the either/or mindset weaponizes this belonging with arbitrary lines and also leads us to the next symptom, sorting into factions.

2. Sorting into Factions

Our culture of fear is characterized by a polarization



Jenny Truax is enjoying her work with NCCJ St. Louis doing anti-oppression education, and on the side, she is creating a Harry Potter-themed St. Louis treasure hunt.

into like-minded factions that interact less and less. In [The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart](#), Bill Bishop describes our current condition as: "We now live in a giant feedback loop, hearing our own thoughts about what's right and wrong bounced back at us by the television shows we watch, the newspapers and books we read, the blogs we visit online, the sermons we hear, and the neighborhoods we live in." It's a phenomenon that happens across the political spectrum, no matter how "progressive" or "radical" we identify; we sort ourselves into factions, and we're afraid or hateful toward people who we don't perceive to be in our camp. Brené Brown delves further into this fear-based typecasting: "The sorting we do to ourselves and to one another is at best unintentional and reflexive. At worst, it is stereotyping that dehumanizes. The paradox is that we all fall back on this ready made filing system, but we resent it when we're the ones getting filed away."

3. Fear of Emotion

None of us can escape fear at a personal level when we are shrouded within it at the societal level. Another face of this age of fear is that we are afraid of emotion and vulnerability. We don't like how emotions feel to us and we're overly worried about what people will think. I know I wasn't taught how to sit with discomfort, strong feelings, or conflict. Like many people raised in this country, my caregivers tended to model avoidance and passivity with occasional blow-ups (passing on what had been taught to them). Our fear of emotion has many consequences. Miriam Greenspan, psychotherapist and author of [Healing Through the Dark Emotions](#) describes one: "[D]espise our fear, there is something in us that wants to feel all these emotional energies, because they are the juice of life. When we suppress and diminish our emotions, we feel deprived. So we watch horror movies or so-called reality shows... We seek out emotional intensity vicariously, because when we are emotionally numb, we need a great deal of stimulation to feel something, anything. So emotional pornography provides the stimulation, but it's only ersatz emotion - it doesn't teach us anything about ourselves or the world."

The U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks provides another example of the inability to deal with difficult emotions. One possible response to the attacks that might have led to real national healing and a stronger sense of community is described by Brené Brown: "If...we are allowed to talk openly about our collective grief and fear - if we turn to one another in a vulnerable and loving way, while at the same time seeking justice and accountability - it can be the start to a very long healing process." Instead,

those in power directed people's attention towards a shared hatred, creating an ideological enemy (a pattern that continues today). As a result, massive racial profiling of Muslims and people of Arab and South Asian descent ensued, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was created, and protracted and deadly wars were initiated. This created an emotional diversion away from dealing with our shared emotions of fear, helplessness, and grief, preventing real healing as a nation. Sixteen years later, fear embeds our communities, permeates everything, and chips apart our social foundation.

Laying Fear's Foundation: Capitalism, White Supremacy, and Patriarchy

Shifting from symptoms and into causes, we see that this age of fear is borne from some of our country's most foundational values: capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Because these forces are so embedded in U.S. culture - almost like the air we breathe - their effects on our lives can sometimes be difficult to see, so let's have a closer look.

Capitalism, one of the most powerful factors in U.S. society, relies on certain essential values to operate. In [The Origin of Capitalism](#), Ellen Meiksins Wood observes that "the dictates of the capitalist market...regulate not only all economic transactions but social relations in general." In other words, our ways of interacting with each other are directly affected by the values ingrained in capitalism. **Competition** is one example of these values that has a particularly nefarious effect on us as human beings. Competition means that we learn how to "play to win," that we have to be exceptional at everything, and that we definitely need to be better than our neighbors. As a result, we are increasingly isolated and we often lack skills to collaborate and share.

Competition is closely related to **individualism** which, as it turns out, is actually harmful to our physical and mental health. Psychologist John Cacioppo, who studies the physiology of loneliness, observed that "As a member of a social species, we don't derive strength from our rugged individualism, but rather from our collective ability to plan, communicate, and work together. Our neural, hormonal, and genetic makeup support interdependence over independence." Furthermore, the two strongest predictors for a long life directly contradict the value of individualism: having a few close relationships and creating daily face-to-face connections with others (called social integration). These two factors are stronger predictors than either exercise or clean air for living a long life. Reporting on these findings, psychologist Susan Pinker observed that "Social isolation is the public health risk

of our time." The value of individualism, a cornerstone of capitalism, is literally killing us.

Another underlying value of capitalism is **scarcity**: the idea that there isn't enough to go around and that somebody is going to have to go without (and it better not be me). A scarcity mindset causes us to constantly compare ourselves to others. It can make our interactions with other people more transactional rather than relational. I've noticed this in myself when I forget to ask friends how they are and skip immediately to the "business at hand" of what I need from them. Scarcity is a sense of "never enough" and can manifest in our self-talk and in the way we work. Often, my self-talk erupts with "never enough" without me even realizing it: I didn't get enough sleep, I wasn't kind enough, I didn't get enough done...the list goes on and on. Through all these examples and more, capitalism's enforcement of scarcity, individualism, and competition keeps us as a population feeling precarious, off-balance, and afraid.

White Supremacy

When white nationalists converged in Charlottesville last year to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, they chanted, "You will not replace us," and "Jews will not replace us." The fear embedded in this chant

is palpable. And, considering it was a gathering of all white men, maybe it was an expression of grief that the "American dream" has proven to be a myth, even for them. "White men are the only people allowed to fully believe in the American dream, and perhaps that is the cruelest thing to have ever been done to them and the world that has to suffer their anger, as they refuse to let go of a fantasy that we were never allowed to imagine ourselves in." (Ijeoma Oluo)

But white supremacy is more than a one-time gathering of extremists with tiki torches and nooses. It is a whole ideology created during Colonial times to extract resources from people of color and to funnel them towards people who had "achieved whiteness." Dehumanization and fear-mongering were key components of settler colonization and slavery and this dynamic persists today. Obviously the equation of "white fear and dehumanization = systemic oppression towards people of color" lives in the present tense, not just the past tense. The relationship is cyclical and mutually reinforcing; when white people think of people of color as less-than-human, it's much easier to fear them, which leads to further dehumanization. White fear means, and has always meant, unrestrained violence towards people of color in this country. As adrienne maree brown observed, "Trayvon

Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because, in some white imagination, they were dangerous."

Patriarchy

Like white supremacy and capitalism, patriarchy is a ideology of domination that relies on, and reinforces, a culture of fear. Patriarchy shows up in countless ways, from unequal pay scales for women (especially women of color), to hate crimes against LGBTQ people, to the hierarchical and rigid gender roles that prevent people from being their authentic selves.

Patriarchy often shows up as toxic masculinity, which is a dysfunctional way that heterosexual cis-gender men perform/enact gender. According to Eric Mankowski from Portland State University's Gender and Violence Intervention Research Team, toxic masculinity includes four main concepts: 1) suppression



Source: <https://eddierockerz.com/2018/02/26/the-new-racial-capitalism-by-jackie-wang/>

of anything stereotypically feminine, 2) suppression of emotions related to vulnerability, like fear, sadness, or helplessness, 3) male domination over women and other men, and 4) aggression. Toxic masculinity aspires to strength but is, in fact, a very specific way of living in fear. This fear looks like the compulsive avoidance of ever seeming tender, weak, or somehow less than “manly.” As rigid and harmful gender roles are taken to the extreme, toxic masculinity creates a culture of fear for everyone it encounters: men, trans people, non-binary people and women alike - everyone!

Because we live in a country where it’s easier to buy a gun than to buy Sudafed for a cold, toxic masculinity taken to the extreme has a particularly deadly outlet here. Gun violence is ubiquitous in the U.S.: in our homes, on the streets, and in the increasing amount of mass shootings. The shooters in these mass killings - who have been almost exclusively heterosexual, cisgender white men - take male dominance to the extreme of wanting to exert control over life and death itself. Many times their motive or their victims are related to being rejected by women. Patriarchy tells men they are entitled to women and toxic masculinity causes them to lose it when this doesn't come true. These shooters are often very plugged into gun industry marketing which directly appeals to this desire to dominate, often using a carrot and stick approach: promote the idea that having a whole bunch of guns will make you feel manly and tough (carrot), and then promote visions of social collapse and discord to make you feel the need to buy enough weapons to start your own personal army in self-defense (stick). Salon writer Amanda Marcotte observes that “Our country is saturated in guns, and yet the mythical “good guy with a gun” who is supposed to stop these mass shootings has yet to actually be produced. That is because the good guy with a gun is a myth, propped up to justify toxic masculinity’s obsession with guns, and nothing more.”

All of this leaves me wondering if good news and hope exist at all. If they do, where are they? We are set up to live in fear by white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy and understanding and unlearning this is a lifetime effort of resistance. The good news is that we are hard-wired for connection with each other. Brene Brown reminds me that “Courage is contagious. Every time we choose courage, we make everyone around us a little better and the world a little braver.” I’ve seen this proven so many times that I believe it with all my heart. As we seek to resist in this age of fear, let us consider adrienne maree brown’s question thoughtfully: “What are the ideas that will liberate all of us?” In our next articles, several incredible people will share their answers to this question. Let



Source: <https://thinkingraceblog.wordpress.com/2017/05/03/critical-race-theory-from-the-perspective-of-jordan/>

us all commit daily to practicing courage, building each other up, and choosing connection.

Sources/Further Reading/Acknowledgements

- [Rising Strong, Daring Greatly](#) - Brené Brown
- [Emergent Strategy](#) - adrienne maree brown
- St. Louis Anti-Racism Collective’s work on white supremacy and capitalism
- [The Origin of Capitalism](#) by Ellen Meiksins Wood
- Susan Pinker’s TED talk: “The Secret to Living Longer May Be Your Social Life”
- “The Men Taking Classes to Unlearn Toxic Masculinity” - Olivia Campbell
- “Toxic Masculinity Is Killing Us in Many Ways”- Amanda Marcotte
- “The Anger of the White Male Lie” - Ijeoma Oluo
- Roundtables: *Gun Nation* (1998), *Dismantling Sexism* (2013)

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Remembering the Verbs of Liberation

by Amber Johnson

The fight for social justice is clouded with nouns, including social justice and liberation. They are the things we fight for; the things that push us to become the change we wish to see (to borrow Ghandi’s words.) They are worthy battles that many people are fighting, so what must we do to achieve them?

First, we must stop reciting the mantras of justice as nouns and focus on them as verbs. A communication-centered approach to social justice requires a keen focus on the term “social” (St. Hilaire, 2014). Social justice is a social issue, which is why its primary focus is societies. There can be no definition of justice without locating and understanding the social context (Scheiter, 2015). The “social” in social justice refers to a particular type of interaction. “Social justice relies on various modes of action and organizing, including advocating change, building community, improving governance, and reorganizing markets” (Huffman, 2014, p. 8). To be social, one must be “doing” something with others. Whether it be engaging in dialogue, community, and/or performance, we are all doing something within our social contexts to create a culture of “social” justice at the interpersonal, organizational, institutional, and systemic levels. In short, justice is something we must cultivate as an activity, a way of life, a verb.

Shifting toward a culture of social justice requires sharing more stories in social interactions so that bodies are humanized and no longer subjected to stereotypes or deemed undeserving of justice. “Exposure to new people, when combined with participation in the movement, made it possible for people to create new understandings of themselves in the world” (Riggs, 2015, p. 186). The stories we tell matter. The way we frame those stories matters. Who listens to our stories matters.

Liberation is a state of thinking that allows our minds to explore the depths of our imagination. Liberation is a state of being that allows our bodies to walk in their truths no matter what that truth looks like. Liberation is a state of living that allows each and every one of us to

thrive beyond mere survival. To liberate is to allow ALL life to expand and fold in on itself in love. Audre Lorde reminds us that liberation cannot exist in the master's house or with the master's tools. Octavia Butler teaches us that it cannot exist under this existing sun. It must be a wholly new experience that generates a new sun and a new ideology. Liberation is something we must invent and live. It is a generative verb, a constant state of becoming and being.

When I think of liberation and justice, the required verbs that come to mind are freedom, love, healing, affirmation, and a sense of belonging. To be honest, I am not sure that liberation and justice rooted in freedom, love, affirmation and belonging can exist in the United States because domination, hate, fear, and dis-ease are so pervasive. We are constantly re-traumatized by social injustices and are forced to continue fighting without proper time to heal from those traumas. But I’d like to believe that as we keep actively pursuing the verbs of justice, true liberation will free us from the geographic tentacles that keep us traumatized and far away from thriving. This is what I seek: A liberation that gives legs to the possibility of new suns, new language, and new worlds where social justice is a cultural state of perpetual living.

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A Mestiza Consciousness for Liberation

by Amelia Romo Olivas

In the summer of 2014, I attended community meetings in my hometown of San Antonio, Texas called Universidad Sin Fronteras (University Without Borders) through the Southwest Workers Union. It was an intergenerational space of mostly all “Chicano” peoples from varying socioeconomic statuses and gender identities and we all came together to theorize and apply ways of decolonizing our lives. Historically, Chicanos are the descendents of Indigenous Mexican people, a meztizaje, or mixture, of European, African, and Indigenous ancestry who typically reside on the traditional lands of Anahuac, Turtle Island, and/or Abya Yala, outside of the settler-colonizer nation states of “Mexico,” “the United States of America,” and “Canada.”

Universidad Sin Fronteras as a metaphysical space, rather than a physical location, was where I began to understand liberation through the radical praxis of decolonizing. I challenged myself to begin unlearning not only the colonial mindsets and habits that I inherited, but also the harmful ways of relating to myself and others that capitalism and settler-colonizer cosmología (worldview) had primed me to operate from. For example, I began to question my relationship to time and time-keeping, asking myself about ways to view time outside of “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc.” or weekdays vs. weekend. I began to challenge capitalist constructs of “productivity,” the separation of “work life and personal life,” and other ways in which I am conditioned to split and dismember myself. Because of this work, I have come to understand a decolonial lens and process as a state of being where my spirit can be liberated. Liberation through

a distinctly white liberal lens had me thinking more along the lines of “equality” and in ways that just felt insufficient. I found myself constantly trying to measure up to the standards of whiteness and “maleness” by performing the toxic “climb the ladder” competition, or by participating in a “professionalism” that forced me to repress my accent so as to not sound “chola” or “too Xicana/Mexicana.”

The politics of respectability run deep, particularly in migrant communities where first and second generations

of people born in the U.S.-occupied lands on this side of the Rio Grande seek to assimilate in order to be respected. Respectability politics, in all of its poisonous and insidious forms, is a distraction from collective liberation for marginalized communities. I use “distraction” because respectability politics are often disguised in liberal policies and mindsets, promoting mild-mannered civic engagement or “freedom” while actually upholding and maintaining systems of power and privilege. Do we rely on the heavy policing of economically looted communities in order for these communities to be considered “safe?” Do we consider voting and conforming to every new racist voter ID law, which systematically bars poor and marginalized folks from true democratic

Art: Ricardo Levins Morales

participation, as the gold standard of “civic engagement?” Do we perpetuate the unchallenged notion that the only way to be successful or worthy of creating and uncovering knowledge is by pursuing an “education” within the exclusive space occupied by the academic industrial complex—the ivory towers of 4-year universities?

Asking these questions in a community space helped to begin breaking down the stereotypes and racist, clas-

sist, homophobic, and xenophobic notions that we’ve internalized about each other. It also allowed me to think about liberation in a new, or rather, distinctly old and pre-colonial, way: through a radical decolonial lens that invites us to think beyond the identities and realities we were born into and to creatively imagine solutions for a world with borders, weapons of mass destruction, and militaries that occupy and de-stabilize self-governing communities.

I recently attended a workshop of activists, educators, and cultural workers centered around decolonizing our activism. At one point, the facilitator led an activity where participants were asked to close their eyes and imagine that the border located just two hours away from us simply did not exist; that instead, it was a river where our children could play and we could cross the river, be in community with people from both sides, and enjoy the desert air. He asked us, “What does it look like around you? What does the sky look like? How are we getting around from place to place? What are we wearing?”

The answers from the participants sounded like “I see hovering crafts and flying cars and we have to wear protective hologram shields on our skin to protect it from the sun because by then, greenhouse gases would have destroyed all the layers of the atmosphere and...”

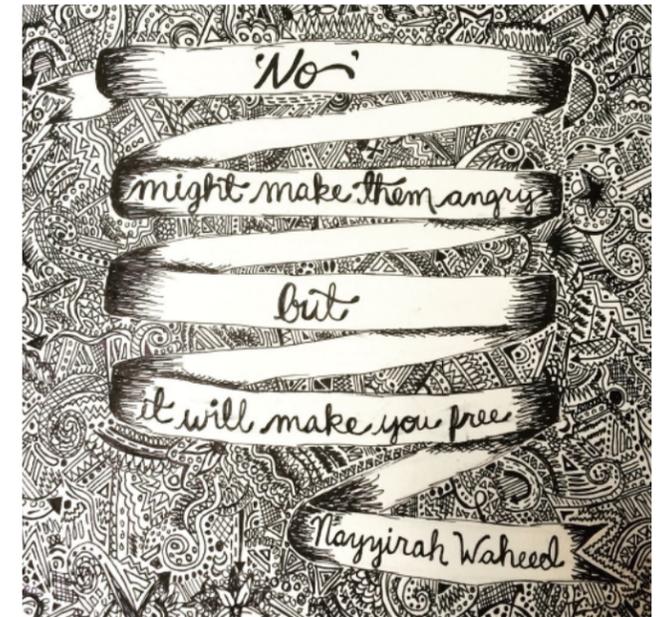
The facilitator interrupted and asked, “So this is a futuristic society?”

“Well yeah,” someone responded. “You said asked us to picture a world without borders and that’s not happening in our lifetime.”

The facilitator looked around, his face a mixture of heavy sadness but also of deep knowing. “I have led this activity in many activist and social justice training circles and the answer doesn’t change much,” he said. “It’s always either a futuristic society or a society of the ancient past. So what you all are telling me is that it’s easier to picture yourself dead than to envision a world without borders. They really did a number on you, verdad?”

What are the implications of this exercise? It revealed to me that many of us who are in the work, neck-deep in the struggle for a truly just and fully actualized world free of violence, borders, and oppression, cannot actually picture ourselves, and maybe even our own children, living in that world. Perhaps it’s easier to picture a liberated world lifetimes from now because we spend so much time and energy resisting oppressive structures simply to survive and exist. We have to think creatively outside of our colonized cosmologies (ways of relating to self, others, and the Universe/the Sacred/the Divine) and apply frameworks about what our communities and identities can look like outside of our lived realities of oppression.

We must work toward liberation in our everyday lives, doing that which nourishes us to imagine a world where we are free from existing structures and constructs of reality and identity. For me, working towards a collective liberation through my Yanawana/San Antonio community happens during our ceremonies as I am invited to imagine



Source Unknown

new ways of healing myself. It’s through this ceremonial community that I’ve come to understand the ever-immortalized words of Gloria E. Anzaldua, “I change (heal) myself, I change (heal) the world.” I utilize indigenized movement practices through Danza Mexika Chichimeca, acknowledging my interconnectedness to the earth as I am made up of all the elements present on Earth and in the stars. This allows me to know myself and the natural laws that govern us, to be a part of a community of living beings on this planet, and to remind me of who I am and of my ability to heal myself.

Despite forced conversions and assimilation, prayer, in the form of songs passed down through generations, also reminds me of the resilience of our communities and renews a sense of hope and love for all people living under colonial repressive societies in me. My spirituality informs every aspect of my work, whether it’s the healing and identity formation work I do with college students at the Center for Women where I work full-time or organizing to protect our communities from new-age colonialism in the form of gentrification. I must understand my own power and privileges in this society while also creatively and actively seeking to unlearn those constructs and realities that keep us in chains.

I live una experiencia (an experience), un conocimiento (a knowledge) de una Nepantlera. Gloria E. Anzaldua describes una Nepantlera as “between worlds, in the middle; neither here nor there,” but in the indigenous Nahuatl language, nepantla literally translates to “balanced, as things should be.” When I imagine myself and the world around me as free, liberated, it’s informed by what once was and I am reminded that we can’t know where we are going if we can’t conjure and remember where we’ve been.



Amelia Romo Olivas (she/her/hers) is a Xicana danzante, cultural worker, educator, and feminista descolonial from the Sacred Land of the Spirit Waters, Yanawana, currently occupied by San Antonio, TX. Her work is centered around re-connecting and re-remembering indigenous ways of knowing, honoring traditions and healing our communities and Mother Earth.

“Acting No” is Liberating

by Rosalie Riegle

I’m an 81-year-old white woman, healthy by the grace of God and good vegetables, and I’ve been protesting, or “saying no,” ever since the Vietnam times. Protesting helps to liberate me from fear, and because I’ve had practice, I’m no longer afraid when the Ninja Turtles, aka the Chicago Police Department, line the streets when we march in protest.

Now, moved by a world that’s skidding into chaos, I am called once again to join with others in moving from “saying no” to “acting no,” and participating in nonviolent civil disobedience, which may result in jail or prison.

Am I afraid? Not as much as I used to be, and here’s the story why...

It’s the spring of 2004. I’m sitting with other Catholic Workers at a Resistance Retreat, planning an action of civil disobedience at Offutt Air Force Base, home of STRATCOM, which has its hand on our nuclear triggers. I had been arrested several times before, but they were all “yogurt busts,” meaning that the action “goes down easy” and carries no real risk of jail time. But at Offutt, there was a risk, so part of the preparation for newbies like me was listening to people’s prison stories so we would know what to expect.

Listening to these tales, I realized that I had little idea why middleclass people would choose to go to jail and knew even less about how to do it—what it’s like to go to trial, to receive a sentence, and to go to jail or prison by choice.

How does anyone deal with the complete loss of freedom? With being cooped up with people they don’t know? With bad food and worse language? With noise and guards and just the newness of never having control of anything in one’s life? How do parents and spouses and children feel about the arrests and how do they cope when a loved one leaves for prison? What happens to people’s “real” lives? I knew that the world of prison both reflected and magnified the racism of our society, but just how much difference there would be between the prison experiences of people of color, and a white grandmother like me, I was yet to learn.

After listening long into the night and the next morning, I decided I could do it, that I could risk the six-month prison sentence. So, I crossed the line at Offutt, along with seven others. It was a carefully orchestrated action in which we en-

tered the base on an open roadway, knelt down to pray, were asked to leave, politely refused, and then were arrested.

Well, we didn’t go to prison. After three visits to Omaha and a final bench trial, I received only probation, a fine, and a scolding from a judge who said I was “old enough to know better.” I was relieved, of course, but I ached to do more. And, I had many, many questions. I wanted to know why people chose to engage in civil disobedience, how they prepared, and how they found prison do-able. I wanted to see if learning about civil disobedience from those who participated would change that first feeling I had, that yes, I could do this too.

So, I did what I’ve done for years when I had questions: I listened to learn. My experience at Offutt was the beginning of my third oral history project. Years later, the 180 interviews I conducted and edited resulted in two books: Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community (Vanderbilt University Press, 2012) and Crossing the Line: Non-violent Resisters Speak Out for Peace (Wipf and Stock, 2013).

What did I learn in the thousands and thousands of words I collected? Most importantly, I learned that prison is do-able and that I can do it too, even as an 81-year-old woman. It’s not easy and it’s not fun, although the narrators in both books have loads of funny stories, but it is possible if you are in good health, as I am. (No one recommends arrestable actions to those with health problems as prisons and jails are notorious for medical malpractice.)

I learned the importance of resisting with a community and following one’s conscience. I originally drew the conclusion that one had to be comfortable with both the planning and the action itself, but thanks to recent Catholic Worker resistance retreats, especially the one in Minneapolis in 2016, I now recognize these earlier conclusions as cultural products of my own white, middle-class, Catholic, educator background. Now, I am learning from people of color to be more comfortable with loud resistance and less orchestrated actions. But to be truly liberated from a fear that can paralyze, I must resist.



Source: christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/october/biblical-liberation-theology.html



Rosalie Riegle is a grandmother and oral historian who has loved her 35-year involvement with the Catholic Worker. When not watching the hummingbirds hum at her Michigan cabin, she’s planning for her next travel adventure.

Finding Liberation in Understanding Identity

by Johnelle McGee

To me, liberation means to be free. Free from something or someone holding a person back from being great. I recognize liberation when I see people from different social justice groups stand up to the larger groups. Throughout my life, gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and ability have majorly contributed to the person I am now and to the person I hope to become in the near future. I realized at an early age that because I am female, a lot of my opportunities would be limited. Bring female and being Black in this world has always been a struggle because of the belief that men, specifically white men, are smarter, stronger, superior, and overall, just better than women.

Understanding my different identities, and how those identities impact my experience, has been very liberating. In fact, I am currently an active anti-discrimination activist, whether it is for bullying, sexism, ageism, or disability, because of my identities and past experiences. Race and ethnicity play a huge role in my everyday life. Because of my race alongside my gender, it is twice as hard for me to succeed without having connections. When people look at me, the only thing they see is an African-American woman. Most people draw the conclusion that because I am both an African-American and a woman, that I am a low class, uneducated person who probably comes from a terrible background. I am always happy when I am able to show these people that I am indeed educated, and that I am considered lower-middle class. I am poor, but not destitute, and regardless of where I come from, I try to focus on where I am going. Everyone needs to realize this when they come across people and not judge them based off of their physical appearance.

While my background consisted of drugs, violence, and homelessness, I did not let these obstacles hinder me from succeeding. Moving from Chicago to Saint Louis was the best decision my family made. While the move did not make my life any easier, it allowed me to see the many struggles that

people face. Being socially located in the center of the chaos of drugs, violence, and homelessness gave me an advantage over other kids and teens because I had a lot of support from outside people. These people gave me a ton of chances to make my life and my family’s life better. This struggle taught me to not judge people by where they come from and it still reminds me to remain humble and not forget where I came from. It is still shaping me to become a woman who fights for what I want and need and who fights for those who are discriminated against.

In social settings such as school, many people thought that I came from a high class family who was well-educated with a lot of money. My teachers and peers thought these things because that is what I allowed them to think. I wore

all of the latest clothes and shoes with nice hairstyles. I did not want them to think that I was just another poor kid who didn’t have a family that cared about her. But in reality, I was a poor kid whose mom was struggling to keep food on the table.

At school, I was bullied every day. They bullied me because they were threatened by my intelligence. People did not like that I publicized my intelligence, but I felt like I had to prove to everyone that I could be whatever I wanted to be.

Today, I am very open about my sexuality and I am very understanding to those who are not open about theirs. People often become depressed from holding in their feelings about having sexual attraction toward the same sex. The fact that human sexuality is complicated and may never be completely understood should make people not want to judge others.

My ability to recognize my flaws, as well as the flaws within society, enables me to succeed. It helps me to remain liberated. No one is perfect, and I know I can still improve myself in every way and help others succeed in becoming liberated too.



Source: mymelodyofwords.wordpress.com/2015/06/03/freedom-poem/



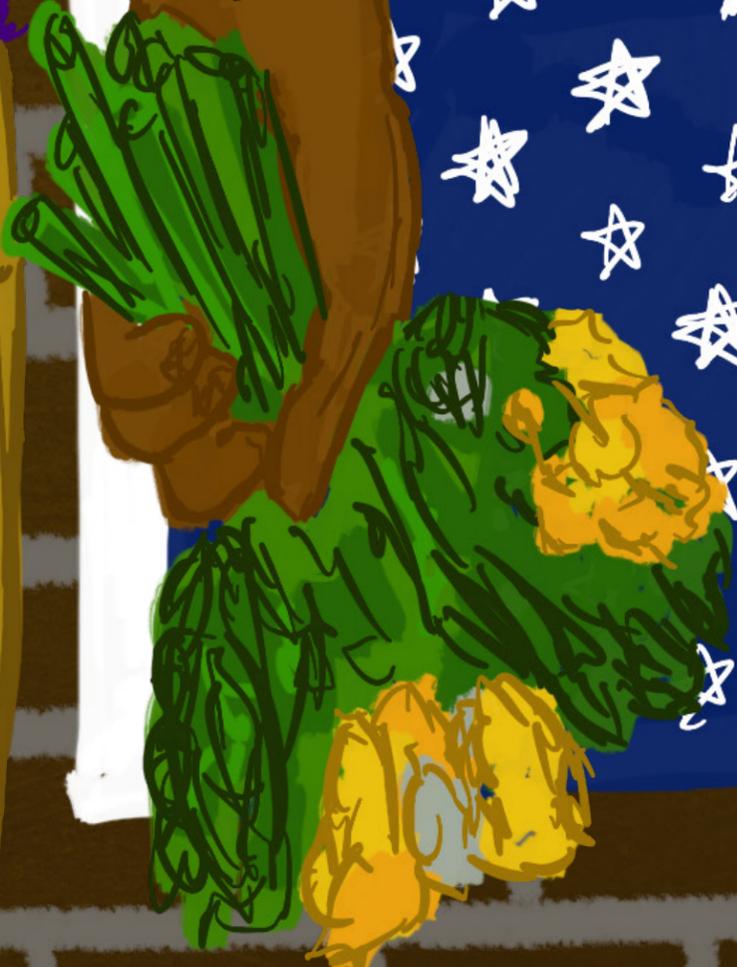
Johnelle McGee is a third-year Cyber Security major at Maryville University who enjoys all things music.

radically tender
is a reminder.
a poem. a prayer.
a gift.
a chance to breathe
in the flowers.
a love letter.
a call. a response.
an act of resistance.

and i had to tell myself that
i've already won.
we've already won.
-brittany ferrell



and im here.



"it's okay to be
soft and angry."
-joe shepherd

Liberation Starts with Me

by Sandra Tamari

When I was 20 years old, I was a shy and insecure student at the University of Florida. It was a time of campus protest as an anti-war movement was building against the first U.S. attack in Iraq. I was learning more about my Palestinian and Arab identity as I was being pulled into leftist circles. As a Palestinian woman with many strong ideas (in spite of my shy nature), I was given different platforms to speak my truth. After becoming more involved in the anti-war movement, I took to wearing my kuffiyeh around campus. A kuffiyeh is the black and white Palestinian scarf that symbolizes Palestinian identity, pride and resistance. In 1990, it was not the common accessory that it has become today, so wearing it was a deliberate act of resistance.

One day after class, a classmate of mine came up to me and said that my kuffiyeh scared her. I was stunned into silence. My identity, culture, and people scared this woman. What could I say to such unfettered racism?

Nearly 30 years later, adulthood has given me more courage to stand against racism. I would like to think that I would not be silent in the face of a comment like the one I heard that day as a young student. If I were the person that I am today, perhaps I would have responded that her racism made me scared. But as a young person, I had an internal dialogue that gave me pause about my Palestinian identity—the media said Arabs were violent, our stories were dismissed, and I didn't know enough to push back.

That internal dialogue, often called internalized racism, still happens inside of me as I am fed a steady diet of the dehumanization of Arabs, Palestinians and Muslims. I do not see positive depictions of my people in the mainstream media and I still engage in a complicated calculation whenever someone asks me, "Where are you from?"

However, that internalized racism dies a little death every time I surround myself with other Palestinians. In Palestinian spaces, I do not need to question my understanding of the world and I do not have to explain why I am angry, sad, or despondent. I can just be.

This gives me a taste of liberation. To me, libera-



Source: <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/palestine-liberation-organization/>

tion means being courageous enough to speak your own truth, not waiting for permission to assert your identity, and standing in your own glory. We do not have to wait for our oppressors to grant us liberation. Of course, liberation is tied to the liberation of the land, being free from state violence, and having the freedom to move, but liberation must start within ourselves. Decolonization means setting our own agendas, dreaming bigger than the current reality allows, and being the best that we can be.

My friend and Diné (Navajo) poet and scholar, Orlando White, recently told me, "Be who you are with courage." I try to do this by shedding the socialization that made me think small and lose faith in the possibility of creating real change. I am now conscious of how the colonized mind shrinks our collective potential. I want to create spaces where people can be their full selves.

My current work as an organizer for the Adalah Justice Project, a Palestinian human rights organization, gives me opportunities to create liberated

spaces. Recently in Peñasco, New Mexico, a group of Black, indigenous, and Palestinian artists and activists convened. In our four days together, living in tight but cozy quarters, we engaged deeply with one another. We learned from each other's history and experiences under colonialism. We discovered that decolonization is possible even before our oppressors lift their boots from our necks. And we agreed that decolonization begins when we talk with one another and resist the fragmentation of our communities. Decolonization happens when we define our goals for ourselves as a collective. It happens when we cook together. Decolonization happens when we share our spiritual practices, languages, and cultures instead of giving into the divisiveness colonial contexts impose on us.

We must know who we are in order to realize our liberation. We do not need a map for the way forward; we need a compass. We will reach our beloved community without a sense of our final destination as long as we trust the people we are walking with.



Sandra Tamari is partner to the amazing Steve, mother to Amal and Jad, and friends with the best dog ever, Ollie. She also has a cat.

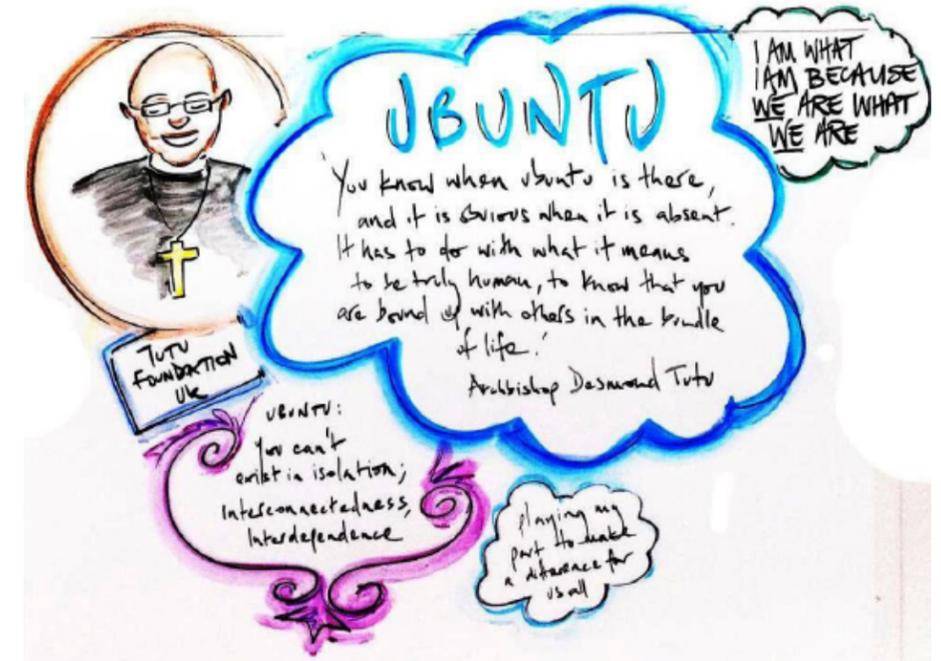
"Giving Hell, Hell:" A Lesson from South Africa

by Sarah Nash

This past summer, I spent nine weeks at a residential leadership course in South Africa called the Volmoed Youth Leadership Training Program (VYLTP). The purpose of VYLTP is to develop young leaders of faith from around the world in the spirit of the young people who engaged in anti-Apartheid resistance. On just my second night, as I sat alone at the kitchen table suffering from jetlag while the rest of the delegates slept, Fr. Edwin Arrison, the director of the program, walked in and joined me. After sharing the usual series of getting-to-know-you-questions, Fr. Edwin very directly asked me about my "journey to justice," expressing a particular interest in understanding how I, a white woman, became involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, and how my Christian faith intersects and informs that work.

After jokingly asking Fr. Edwin how late he wanted to stay up, I began to share my story with him. I talked about my upbringing in a very white, very Catholic family, attending grade school and Sunday Mass at an almost all-white, upper-middleclass parish in the East End of Louisville, Kentucky. I told him about the weeklong faith-based urban immersion retreat I attended in high school and how I decided to join the small "progressive" Catholic Church that had hosted the retreat. Yet, despite its progressive values and location in a West End neighborhood where over 90% of the residents are Black, the congregation was still almost completely white, with most of its congregants, including myself, commuting from the East End.

I shared with him about how when I moved to St. Louis to start my studies at Saint Louis University, I attended the 9:00pm student Mass on campus. Again, the congregation was almost entirely homogenous, consist-



According to Desmond Tutu, ubuntu is "the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. Source: <https://thehunni.wordpress.com/2014/03/31/culture-and-community-in-my-classroom/>

ing of mostly white, upper-middleclass college students. I acknowledged that while worshiping in these spaces, I never actually noticed the race and class-based segregation of my church homes. When Fr. Edwin asked me what changed, I began speaking about the state-sanctioned murder of Michael Brown, Jr. and the subsequent Ferguson Uprising. As I began interrogating my own whiteness and class privilege, I became increasingly disillusioned by the St. Louis Archdiocese's silence and inaction and eventually left the Catholic Church. I remained unchurched for almost a full year before participating in a clergy-led "Moral Monday" action at the Eagleton Courthouse where I witnessed in the streets, for the first time in my life, what Dr. King called the "Be-



After a two-year hiatus from school, **Sarah Nash** will be returning to the classroom this fall in an MDiv/MSW dual-degree program at Eden Theological Seminary and the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

loved Community.” It restored my faith to see Christian pastors and Jewish rabbis, black and white St. Louisians, young and old folks, marching together, “praying with their feet,” and collectively demanding that the Department of Justice take action to end the well-documented abuses and injustices happening in Ferguson.

As fate would have it, I was released from custody at the same time as Rev. Starsky Wilson, who, after discovering that I did not have a church home in St. Louis, invited me to visit St. John’s Church (The Beloved Community) where two and a half years later, I am a Deacon. Furthermore, it was through my relationship with Rev. Starsky that I was able to get connected with VYLTP and travel to South Africa for an intensive faith-based, anti-racism leadership program. My faith, I concluded, could no longer be separate from my work for social, political, and racial justice; they had forever become interconnected.

Fr. Edwin gave a knowing smile as he began to share a story with me that Archbishop Desmond Tutu had shared with him decades earlier when Fr. Edwin was a young person engaging in faith-based anti-Apartheid resistance. Here is my summary of his story:

In a dream, Archbishop Desmond Tutu dies and goes to heaven. When he arrives at heaven’s gate, he knocks and St. Peter comes out. “Who are you?” St. Peter asks, and Desmond Tutu replies, “What do you mean who am I? I’m Archbishop Desmond Tutu!” “Okay, let me go check and see if your name is in the book,” St. Peter says as he walks away. A few minutes later, St. Peter comes back and informs Desmond Tutu that his name was not in the book and that he must go to hell. Utterly confused, Desmond Tutu leaves and St. Peter

goes back inside. A few hours later, St. Peter hears a BOOMING knock at the gate and when he goes to see who is there, he sees the devil himself. “St. Peter,” the devil says, “there must be a mistake. That Tutu guy you sent to us, you must take him. He’s giving us hell down there!”

“You see,” Fr. Edwin said, “that’s the purpose of theology—to give hell, hell.”

In that moment, I could almost feel my brain explode, and I think Fr. Edwin could feel it too, so he continued speaking: “We were only able to end the system of Apartheid after we deconstructed the theology of Apartheid.” In my journal that night, I wrestled deeply with what Fr. Edwin had shared me. If Apartheid was a theology in addition to a political and social system, what theologies/systems do we worship in the United States? The theology of mass incarceration? The theology of “Make America Great Again?” The theology of white supremacy? How can we deconstruct these false theologies while simultaneously reclaiming a theology of liberation that gives poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and all other contemporary manifestations of hell, hell?

Although I do not know exactly what it will look like in my life, I do believe that “giving hell, hell,” and deconstructing oppressive theologies/systems are an essential part of doing the work of liberation, especially for white Christians. As I continue to discern the next steps of my life’s journey and figure out how best to “give hell, hell,” I do so with so much gratitude for the people I met and the lessons I learned during my time in South Africa; they have become forever interwoven into the fabric of my being.



A photo of the 2017 VYLTP participants with Desmond and Leah Tutu. Sarah is standing the fourth from the right and Fr. Edwin is kneeling in the front left. Photo from Sarah Nash

Reading for Liberation

Book Review: Emergent Strategy

by Kira Banks

Editor Note: This is an excerpt from Dr. Kira Banks’ video review of Emergent Strategy; reprinted with permission.

Emergent Strategy is all about change. adrienne marie brown takes inspiration from Octavia Butler’s books Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents where the main character comes up with a religion of sorts called Earthseed that’s all about change. An excerpt from Earthseed is, “All that you touch you change and all that you change changes you.” Octavia Butler’s words serve as a bridge between what is and what could be. It’s a hope for what could happen if we could work together in collaboration, being vulnerable, and building new narratives and practices. I really liked her framing of what sort of leadership we need as we move forward to change and shape the world.

In the book, adrienne marie brown talks about impacted leadership, privilege support, and feminine leadership. Impacted leadership is having people who are most affected and impacted by the problems at the helm and in leadership positions. Privilege support is the idea that people who acknowledge their privilege in an area actively support those who are in these leadership positions. Feminine leadership speaks to how we need to shift how we hold power. It doesn’t just mean women leaders, it means people being willing to lead with femininity and lead in a different way than we have historically.

Another gem in this book is hearing about adrienne marie brown’s lovely mentor relationship with Grace Lee Boggs. On Grace Lee Boggs’ wall is a quote “Building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual.” I love that quote because it’s a reminder that as individuals, regardless of our belief systems, we have spiritual daily practices that connect us with something outside of ourselves. In reality, community and building community and relationships is how we do that in the collective.

Here’s a little bit from Emergent Strategy: “We are creating a world that we’ve never seen. We’re whispering it to each other cuddled in the dark and we’re screaming it at people who are so scared of it that they dress

themselves in war regalia to turn and face us. Because of our ancestors, because of us, and because of the children we are raising there will be a future without police and prisons. Yes, there will be a future without rape, without harassment, without constant fear and childhood sexual assault, a future without war, hunger and violence.



With abundance, with gender as a joyful spectrum where each of our bodies is treated like sacred ground - whether we have insurance or not.” I want all of those things and more. This book helps you think about how we each shape the world, how it changes, and how we can work collectively together to shape change. It shares so much wisdom, not only from adrienne marie brown, but also other activists and movement leaders. I think this book will leave you with so many thoughts and ideas that you’ll have to read it with a friend or with people in an organization that you’re affecting change with.

This book has helped me in a couple ways. First, it’s made me slow down and be more intentional about the relationships that I’m creating so that I can be in community with the people that I’m working with to create change. Another way is that it has pushed me to vision, to think beyond where we are. It’s not that I didn’t do that before, but there’s a way in which her words and the way she puts it all together makes you feel light and like we can fly forward to our destiny. I know that sounds dramatic, but this book has made me expand my vision and dream a little bit bigger. That’s exciting!



Dr. Kira Hudson Banks is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Saint Louis University and focuses on race, racial identity, and intergroup relations. This review, along with many other helpful videos on racism and oppression, can be found on her new YouTube channel “Truth 2 Power.” You can also find her on Facebook as Dr. Kira Banks.

Lament. Repent. Repair.

An Open Letter on Racism to the Catholic Worker Movement

The following is a reprint of "Lament. Repent. Repair. An Open Letter on Racism to the Catholic Worker Movement"

This is a letter for the Catholic Worker movement from many of us who gathered for the 2017 Midwest Catholic Worker Faith & Resistance Retreat. It is a letter for the Movement as a whole but specifically for the white Workers who have come to find meaning, value, and hope in our communities, our work, our shared Aims and Means, and our collective tradition. It is a letter about racism.

Racism is a cultural phenomenon that creates institutionalized patterns of discrimination against people of color so as to consolidate and bestow power and privilege to white people. Confronting anti-black racism has been the focus of the last three Faith and Resistance Retreats. It has led to many questions: Is there racism in the Catholic Worker? What does it look like and why is it there? Study, activism, conversation, and prayer have led the authors of this statement to a painful conclusion: The Catholic Worker is a racist institution. It is a white-dominated movement that, despite its best efforts, often perpetuates the culture and systems that marginalize and oppress people of color. We have come to realize that we engage in white supremacist practices. Adopting the language of critical race theory, we use the term white supremacy to name any political or socio-economic system where white people enjoy a structural advantage over people of color. It is with this in mind, that we reach out to you, our fellow Workers. This letter is an invitation to join us as we ask: How do Catholic Worker systems and cultural practices perpetuate white privilege? How can we make amends for our participation? How should we move forward?

Lament and Repent

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8-9

We recognize that before we can repent and before we can make amends, we must name the wrong we have committed. We begin with our laments.

We lament our blindness towards whiteness. Though we may engage in conversations about race and racism, we often speak as if "race" is something only people of color experience, ignoring the impact our own "white" identity has had on us. Those of us who have committed our lives to social justice work often believe racism is a problem we have "solved" in our personal lives and thus fail to explore

the experiences and realities of whiteness. Without seeing whiteness, we ignore our continued complicity and participation in racism. Thus, we refuse to come to terms with the power, privilege, and wealth racism bestows on white people (a part of white supremacy), absolving ourselves of a crucial component of racial justice work.

We lament our failure to recognize and confront racism's systemic nature. Racism is a hate infused into every single institution, perpetrated on the structural level and not just by an individual or group. We have failed to expose how white supremacy utilizes legislative policies, cultural norms and perceptions, social dynamics, and systemic violence to prioritize white interests and perpetuate white reality. While we may be able to identify the explicit manifestations of racism, we often miss its subtle, implicit forms.

Similarly, we lament that we have failed to recognize the ways we perpetuate many of these same sins: in the dynamics of our communities, in our workspaces, in our deference to white donors, and in our often-absent systems of accountability to those we profess to be laboring for.

We repent that:

The Catholic Worker movement is not generally accessible or appealing to people of color. We know this because there are only a handful of non-white Catholic Workers.

Communities of color have been ignored, undermined, and undervalued in the Catholic Worker movement, particularly since the beginning of World War II, when pacifism became a greater focus for the movement. We give lip service to the truth that the Movement needs more racial diversity, but this is often done without honoring the voices and aspirations of people of color in the Catholic Worker movement. By doing this, we exclude their valuable contributions (present and future), we fail to learn from their perspectives, and we leave members of our community unsupported and undervalued.

We often fail to examine our community decision-making structures, our finances, and our social interactions for patterns of white supremacy.

We often unquestionably prioritize our ideological purity, interpreted from our own personal understanding of scripture. This can manifest itself in an unwillingness to fully support the visions of grassroots communities of color in fighting for their own liberation.

Even with so many white workers in the Movement, few communities have prioritized the responsibility of engaging other white folk to address white supremacy.

Repair

More than simply recognizing and describing this truth, we desire to articulate a way forward. All acts that sever our relationships with God and each other must be atoned for and made right. We desire to make amends to those who have been harmed by racism in the Catholic Worker, and we desire to dismantle racism in the Catholic Worker. In making suggestions for how to move forward, we do not mean to ignore the racial justice work that many Catholic Workers are already engaged in; in fact, many of the suggestions are drawn from work that Catholic Workers have already begun. We would like to expand the conversation, however, so that we can better support one another in strong and courageous action.

Let us first consider expanding the Aims and Means to reflect our strong commitment to anti-racism work. Let us also keep racism a part of our conversations, round tables, workshops, and retreats. We aim to utilize the resources that exist in the Catholic Worker community to facilitate discussion, reflection, and action that supports anti-racism work.

Second, let us remember that being an anti-racist movement is not simply a label we can claim for ourselves. It is a way of being in the world that affects our work and our relationships. Being an "anti-racist" community and institution is impossible without true accountability. As a predominantly white movement, we need to center the voices and visions of communities of color who are targeted and directly impacted by our unjust systems. It is essential that we follow their lead and support them in the ways that they ask us. Our goal is not to recruit people of color to the Catholic Worker. But we recognize that the Catholic Worker will be a more just and diverse movement if we support black and brown struggles and actively work to dismantle white supremacy in our communities.

Third, let us honestly examine the complex dynamics of a white Catholic Worker house operating in a predominantly black neighborhood. Are we taking resources from the local community? Are we contributing to gentrification? Do we see ourselves as saviors among the less fortunate? In what ways can we step back and let the neighbors lead us?

Fourth, our access to resources and power indicate less that our work is righteous and more that we live in a world where other white people like to invest their wealth in white-led organizations. Let us come to terms with the fact

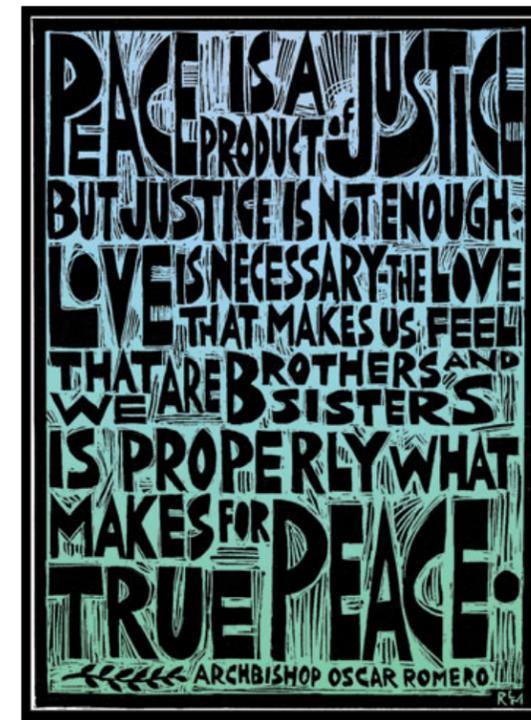
that the accumulated wealth and income of our white donors is inextricably linked to the system of white supremacy that has extracted wealth from the stolen labor of people of color (many of whom we serve daily). We can create our own Jubilee by tithing money to support communities of color in their self-determined pursuits. Maintaining control over how the money is spent and to which of our programs (or other Catholic Worker communities) it is allocated is not being a good steward; it is perpetuating privilege.

Finally, more than just giving of our financial resources, we have the chance to utilize all our resources and assets to support grassroots organizations of color. The land and properties we rent and own – which exist on land stolen from Native Americans – can be used to provide spaces for these organizations. We can learn the visions of people of color so as to be accountable to those visions for liberation; assuming we can lead people of color to racial freedom is another expression of white supremacy. In a world that constantly assaults the bodies of people of color, we can volunteer our bodies to stand where they are needed in local struggles for racial justice.

And so we, white Catholic Workers, have the chance to ask ourselves: Are we willing to commit our lives and our communities to the work of healing from a culture of racism? Are we willing to prioritize this work, knowing that racism is at the root of many injustices? Will we struggle to hold each other, our community members, and

Movement family accountable to this goal? And though we may never feel perfectly ready to begin this, let us not forget that fear of imperfection is a tool of white supremacy. May God grant us the strength to continue this lifelong work of building the new in the shell of the old as we journey towards liberation together.

In love and resistance,
The Midwest Catholic Worker Faith
and Resistance Gathering 2017



Source: Ricardo Levins Morales

A Local Reflection: The Midwest CW Statement

an interview with Megan Macaraeg

Editor Note: In March, Jenny Truax interviewed Karen House community member Megan Macaraeg on her reactions to the statement.

JT: What is your initial reaction to the Midwest CW statement, as a Woman of Color who is also a Catholic Worker?

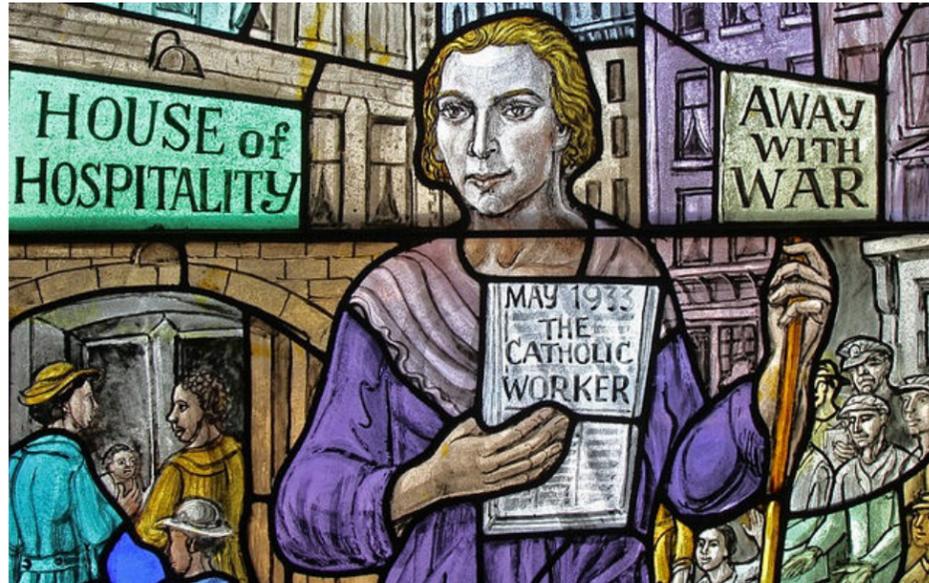
MM: The statement is both necessary and timely. For a movement that is largely composed of white people, it's an essential step - one that is important to the health and growth of the movement itself - to publicly name the way racism functions, both in the larger movement and within individual communities. The Catholic Worker can have an important role in popularizing what it means to be a movement that does powerful anti-racism work.

None of our movements are exempt from white supremacy and racism. All white-led institutions have benefitted from the extraction of resources from people of color and it is important to analyze how this has happened in different spaces, including our intentional communities and faith communities.

After 15 years organizing in communities of color, I had a lot of hesitation about stepping into white-led movement. This statement, and the work the St. Louis CW has been doing for years to combat racism, makes it possible for me to claim being a Catholic Worker. White-led groups, who are largely supported by white sources and donors, often don't acknowledge how they've benefited from racism. They try to act as if they are "neutral on a moving train,"* which we know is impossible.



Megan Macaraeg lives and works at Karen House. Before KH, Megan worked as a community organizer for more than 15 years supporting the leadership of people of color to fight for dignity and justice. She was recently gifted "Emergent Strategy" by a dear comrade and will get very evangelical in a friendly way about reading this book right now.



In May 1952, Dorothy Day wrote: "We must talk about poverty, because people insulated by their own comfort lose sight of it." Her words sixty-plus years ago still ring true today, especially about race. We must talk about race, because people insulated by their own whiteness lose sight of it. Source: Flickr / Jim Forest

After reading the Karen House values statement, noticing how white community members were engaging in movement work by following the lead of organizers of color, and seeing that the community was making attempts to both address power dynamics and become more diverse, I felt like I had come home in some ways.

JT: Catholic Worker reactions to the statement have been mixed, some people are thrilled about it and others have expressed some strong opposition to it. What is your take on this?

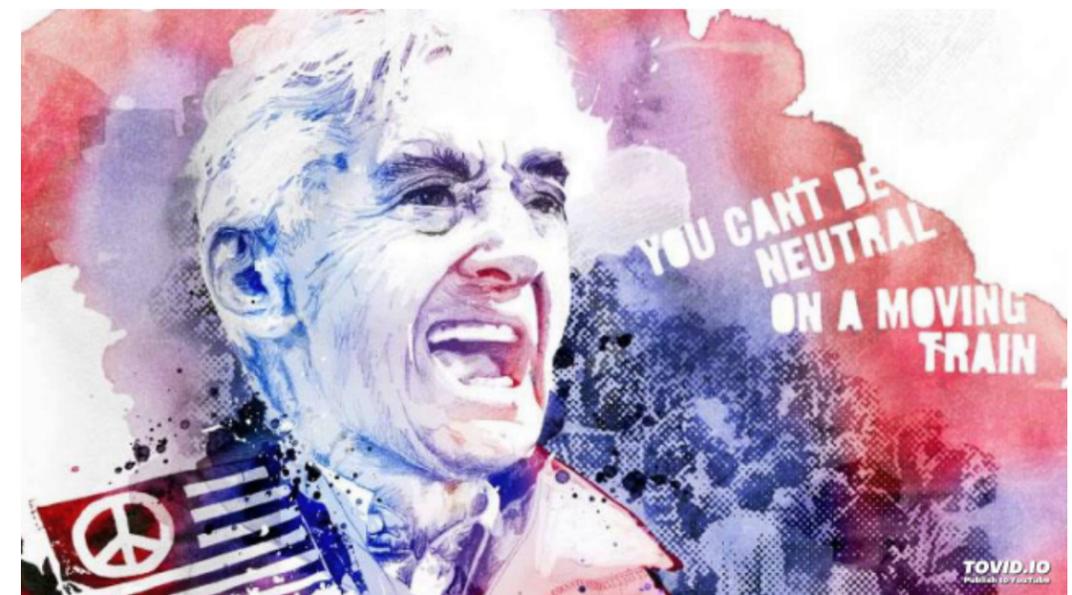
MM: First, I don't see a contradiction in being an anarchist movement and also recognizing that we have institutionalized culture and practices. All movements have

some institutional aspects. It seems like a distraction to overly focus on this, rather than being willing to seriously look at our racism. What are we sacrificing by only focusing on this one word? It feels like both an avoidance and a fight for ideological purity, and the result is that we don't actually do the hard work to investigate our structures for racism. The opposition to the statement doesn't have the feel of generative conflict. The question is not "how can we settle this conflict," but rather, "how can this conflict be generative and move us forward together?"

The statement seemed to elicit a painful response for some (white) people of "you are stealing my legacy from me" or "you're saying that CWism is wrong." Our movement has always evolved, and if it's going to survive, it must continue to evolve. Change is both difficult and inevitable and we have to remember that we are siblings in this work. Some of the harshness and reactivity has felt like an attempt to enforce a specific culture and to squash dissent. In her book, *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown observes that "we tend to slip out of togetherness the way we slip out of the womb, messy and isolated and surprised to be alone." How long will it take for us to learn to slip into togetherness while we still have time, the way trees always reach for each other under the ground? The winds of fascism are blowing strong and we need all the togetherness and collaboration we can muster, lest we are all blown over, isolated in silos of our own making.

JT: Where do you see the St. Louis CW in this statement?

MM: I think it's important to recognize that it's hard for people of color to both join and stay in the Catholic Worker, and we must look at the reasons why. It can be really isolating, and I frequently feel tokenized as a multiracial person in a small community of white people. It has helped me to decrease the power dynamic between guests and community so that I feel more like I'm working "with" the guests and not "for" them. This has enabled me to create closer relationships with the other people of color in the house and to create a feeling of



"we're all in this together."

It takes time to shift culture. We are trying to create a house culture where deprivation isn't valued or glorified. We've developed a practice of financially supporting self-care, budgeting a \$50 monthly stipend that we expect and encourage community members to use explicitly for self-care. We are trying to explicitly acknowledge that everyone comes to the house with different identities and backgrounds and we are trying to be personalist in our expectations around money and work.

JT: What are your thoughts about the movement moving forward?

MM: We need to consistently center how all oppression, and especially racism, shows up within our communities themselves. In my own experience, there was a door to walk through at Karen House because the community was already doing anti-racism work. We cannot expect people of color to join this movement if we are ignoring racism. When our house structures, documents, rules, and values statements are created by all-white groups of people, you can assume that they have racism embedded in them. And the decision to not re-examine them is a decision to maintain a racist status quo. Again, you can't be neutral on a moving train.

**You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* by Howard Zinn
**Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown





From Karen House

by Haley Shoaf

Debbie is a guest at Karen House. She lives in the house her three younger children: Courtney (14), Casey (13), and Montreal (9), and her three grandkids, ages 10, 8, and 3. For this "From Karen House," we interviewed her about what has been happening in the house, what she is most excited about for the future, and how she keeps going.

Q: What has been going on in the house recently?

A: We had a few people move out, so there are not as many people here. What was exciting was Spring Break! We closed down for the week and cleaned the whole house. We did the backyard and lots of volunteers came in and helped us. Also, Adrianna's birthday was on April 1st and Greg made cupcakes! As far as what's been going on with me - things have been exciting and exhausting. I have been going to school, and having my kids and grandkids here. Those are the two main things.

Q: What does Karen House mean to you?

A: To me, Karen House means a community, more than just a building. It's pretty cool. There's a lot of volunteers and volunteering. Sunday morning brunches are really exciting. I have a lot of gratefulness. Karen House is simply caring. That's what my kids always say. It's been really great.

Q: There have been a lot of new additions to the weekly calendar at the house - tell me about those:

On Fridays, we have our chilli meal and open house for people to come eat chili. We also have an open meal on Saturdays - fried chicken. And on Sunday, there is the brunch, and the clothing room is open to everyone.

Q: What has been the best part of those meals?

A: The best part of the community meals is meeting the people who come to eat. There's a nice amount of people who come and it's been really great. Instead of one day, we can provide a meal three days a week! It's fun and exciting and it has been going well. People have been very grateful.

Q: What are you most excited about for spring?

A: Taking spring classes, which will be exciting and challenging. I'm also looking forward to springtime activities here at Karen House. I'm working to finish school and move out, not soon, but pretty soon. I'm waiting on housing. I'm going for my Bachelor's degree in early childhood education. I have my



Haley Shoaf is a longtime Karen House volunteer and member of the Round Table's editorial board.

Associate's degree, so I did a bit of subbing over the winter. It's been pretty great for the most part, and I'm excited for more of it.

Q: How do you keep going?

A: How do I keep going? Goals. And determination. Goals, determination, and will. And prayer. Of course prayer, that should have been first! I do a lot of praying and a lot of reading. Sometimes I'm exhausted, and when I say exhausted, I mean exhausted. I'll wait until 10pm to study, after the kids go to sleep. And sometimes I'm up until 3 or 4am. I homeschool one of the kids and her homeschooling starts at 7:15am! So, sometimes I'm exhausted, but determination and prayer is what gets me through.

Q: What are your hopes for the future?

A: In the future, I hope to run a daycare. I want to find a building and open up a daycare, one where I can live on-site. That is my goal: finish my Bachelor's degree and open up a daycare in a building where I can live on-site. That is where I'm heading and I can't wait! The thought is exciting and I just know I'm going to do it!

Q: Anything else people should know about the house?

A: Donations! We need a lot of food donations. Some have been coming in and it's helpful. We also need toiletries, so food and toiletries. Especially chicken - I'm a really big chicken eater and we can never have too much chicken! So if people wanted to donate chicken, that would be great.



Debbie helping to cook a feast at Karen House!
Source: KH Facebook Page



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

Resisting the NGA in St. Louis

by Larry Chapman

When St. Leo's Catholic Church was razed in 1978, Pastor and Servant of God Father John Shocklee ensured that the cornerstone would remain in place at 23rd and Mullanphy in recognition of the community and for future inspiration. For more than 40 years, residents in this community have kept this spirit alive by welcoming new neighbors and small businesses, working with elected officials, paying their taxes, and caring for the land. The presence of the combined St. Leo's and St. Bridget's parish was key in the spiritual guidance of this effort. But in 2016, through the collusion of our elected officials, the United States Air Force (USAF), the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), and private businesses, all of the homes and land, churches and businesses in a 100-acre site around St. Leo's were seized to "make way for" a new "NGA West." (See Sheila Rendon's article "Loving Our Neighborhood and Saving St. Louis Place" in the Summer 2017 Round Table). The process that will remove any physical evidence that a community ever existed here is now underway.

The NGA is a USAF combat support agency. St. Louis City seized hundreds of our neighbors' property with the intent to embed a military installation and high-risk terrorist target in the midst of its citizens. This agency's main purpose is planning and implementing the most "sophisticated" warfare known to humankind. The notion of waging war on the backs of the poor is not just a concept, those who represent us have literally planned it and the effort to carry it out is now underway. It would be funded with tax dollars, so whether your home was seized or if you live thousands of miles away, this would be done with your money and in your name.

I say "would be done" because this is **not** a done deal.

As exiled residents searched for new homes, they brought St. Leo's cornerstone with them. It currently sits accessible to all at the corner of Howard and Knapp with a small votive light always burning. It remains in the care of the community where Father Shocklee left it as a sign of hope for the future. Through the intercession of Father Shocklee, our continued resistance will be fruitful and St. Leo's cornerstone will be returned to the sacred ground at 23rd and Mullanphy where it belongs.

We were deceived into thinking that the NGA only wanted



Larry Chapman, standing at the site of the proposed NGA headquarters.
Source: <http://www.welivehere.show/posts/2016/9/18/progress-for-who>

100 acres. In January 2018, St. Louis City officials initiated Board Bill 219, the NGA Protection and Enhancement Zone Special Use District. (Please read Bill 219.) In short, this would extend the USAF/NGA's control in our community by an additional 958 acres, or a half mile radius beyond the initial 100 acre site. If passed, even more neighbors and local services would be impacted, and because it is considered "an emergency measure," it would take effect immediately upon passing.

Throughout this ordeal, Karen House has remained in solidarity with her neighbors. For the last 40 years, Catholic Workers have helped to nurture and weave this treasure that we share—community. A sign hanging on Karen House's front door reads, "Immigrants and Refugees Welcome." (And St. Louis calls itself a "sanctuary city.") But because Karen House is located in this newly proposed zone, if Board Bill 219 passes, **the work happening at Karen House and the people living there will be prohibited.** At best, everything within this zone will be deemed "conditional use," discouraging long-term

Larry Chapman is a longtime St. Louis catholic worker and a first-time published author in the Round Table!

investment and expansion and therefore sabotaging the current development that so many have worked to make happen.

If you are a St. Louis City resident, I urge you to contact your alderperson and have them vote no on Board Bill 219.

Neighborhood residents are engaged. We are currently meeting with city officials to advocate for a Community Benefits Agreement. We also continue to vigil, fast, and pray (Every Sunday at sunset on the corner of 23rd and Cass) that hearts and minds be changed. We will keep planning and taking action for peaceful, life-creating development in our community. Unfortunately, some within and outside this zone continue to hope that the injustice inflicted upon our displaced neighbors will somehow benefit themselves. Everyone is anxious and under stress wondering how to raise their families or to sustain their businesses amid such uncertainty. The NGA is not supposed to be completed until 2024 and they are already behind schedule!

While the NGA may be behind schedule, we in the community are not! We are steadfast in our resolve to maintain our integrity and to assert our right of self-determination.

The 100 acres that were seized from our neighbors are still owned by the citizens of St. Louis City. The contamination that was sprayed there by the USAF as an experiment sixty years ago has been remediated. Any money spent on site preparation is not a waste, but rather an investment in the future of North City. There is no way we can undo the injustice done to those who were uprooted; For this, we must repent and atone.

As Catholic Workers, we oppose God's resources being used for war and we stand against the proliferation of war, whatever form that may take. We must demand our elected officials abandon this destructive course, end their negotiations with the USAF/NGA, and commit to a peaceful and cooperative life that nourishes and regenerates our community.

A question is often asked by well-meaning others to the people who were uprooted from their land and homes; to the families who had watched their grandmothers and fathers work hard to provide a stable home and hope for their future; to the people who, after being in their homes for two or three generations, were given just sixty days to vacate; to the elderly who had settled into a community where they felt secure and safe, a community they had helped build and preserve: "But, did they (the City) treat you fairly?"



Source: Unknown

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106

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We could always use your help!

Please call 314-621-4052 to find out how you can get involved!

Sunday Brunch & Friday Dinner

The community currently offers two open meals, each serving food to around 50-100 of our neighbors each week. We could use help cooking and serving both these incredible meals (and cleaning up afterward)!

Dinner Cooks

We could also use volunteers to help provide our guests with dinner! You are welcome to either come and cook at the House or bring a meal from your home and warm it up here.

Housetaking

Our housetakers are the backbone of our outward-facing ministry! Answering the doors and the phones with compassion, handing out sandwiches to our neighbors and looking them in the eye with a smile -- these are the small, personal touches that define the Catholic Workers.

Karen House Needs:

- Box fans
- Brunch supplies (OJ, milk, butter, eggs, buttermilk biscuits, ground pork sausage)
- Fresh socks & underwear
- Small bottles of shampoo, conditioner, and lotion
- Bikes
- Cash donations. Help us pay the bills and maintain this old, loving house!

the radical tenderness project is a soft space for folx at the intersections to breathe in the flowers.



Source: Instagram / radicallytender

Check out this project and more of kristen trudo's work at www.radicallytender.com or @radicallytender on Instagram.



Megan Macaraeg at Karen House's Sunday Brunch!

Check KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, resources on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more! Our website has a HUGE trove of resources on racism, white privilege, and the Black Lives Matter movement!