



# The Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Review

## From the Editors

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**CW Anti-Racism Review  
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Dear Friends,  
We are happy to be able to be able to send you this third issue of the *Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Review*. In it, Erin Mansur, part of the extended community of the NYC Catholic Worker, demands that those who consider themselves to be white anti-racists stay in the game, not let themselves off the hook, and understand that for people of color, anti-racism work is relentless, exhausting, and never an extra-curricular activity.

Sekou Kimathi, connected to Emmaus House in Chicago, grapples with the insidious history and inadequate responses to anti-black racism in this country. Michele Naar Obed of Hildegard House describes her journey of collaboration with the Ojibwe community in Duluth around fighting the sex-trafficking trade, which disproportionately impacts Native women, and around resistance to Enbridge's Line 3 expansion. She points out that Catholic Workers have been no exception to the dominant cultural expectation that Native people communicate with us in English, rather than those of us who are

descendants of immigrants and settlers taking the time to learn the local Native language.

In an interview with Lincoln Rice, Jerica Arents, formerly of the core organizing board of Witness Against Torture (WAT), describes WAT's efforts to

become a more anti-racist organization—sharing successes and challenges. Finally, Jenny Truax has excerpted a piece from Robin D'Angelo's 2018 bestseller, *White Fragility*, which points out many of the common ways white people unintentionally shut down feedback about our own racist behavior. (Consider reading and hosting a community discussion around the entire book.)

Lastly, we have included some short pieces about a recent Decolonization Retreat at the St. Isidore CW Farm, some concrete steps for reparations, and a link to a newly published academic article on the history of the Catholic Worker and racial justice that was written by fellow CWAR editor Lincoln Rice.

**"where we are born into privilege, we are charged with dismantling any myth of supremacy. Where we are born into struggle, we are charged with reclaiming our dignity, joy and liberation."**

-ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN



## Undoing Racism: In Resistance to Exploitation and Beyond

### Michele Naar-Obed, Hildegard House Catholic Worker

Before Hildegard House was formed in 2014, I had begun to learn about the extent of sex-trafficking and sexual exploitation in the Minnesota Northland. In 2012, a representative from one of the Duluth nonprofits had spoken about the new comprehensive sex-trafficking task force that was underway in our area. She spoke of the need to launch the program quickly, because there was a lot of federal and state money allocated for sex-trafficking programs in our area that would fizzle out within five years. The stories, the problem, and the treatment for sex-trafficking was being told through the lens of the white-run nonprofit in northern Minnesota.

Meanwhile, the Native Sisters' group formed, and meetings were held in the home of one of our Indigenous spiritual leaders. At the same time, an Indigenous woman who was a survivor of sex-trafficking had co-authored a survey of over 100 Native women and girls who had experienced sex-trafficking on boats in Lake Superior. She often attended the meetings to raise the voices of the women who had shared stories with her. I, along with a couple of other non-Indigenous allies, were invited to the Native Sisters meetings. There, we watched our Indigenous friends fight their way into the

circle of nonprofits who were using these Indigenous women's experiences as talking points in order to get money for programs that would not be of any real benefit for the Native community's victims and survivors.

I tried to listen as carefully as possible to all sides. I felt a call to somehow bring the spirit of the Catholic Worker Movement into this mix. After a time of discernment with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, Hildegard House Catholic Worker came into being. The house and all that it would stand for was blessed by an Anishinaabe spiritual healer and elder, as well as a Benedictine sister. The Spirits from these two great traditions merged to guide and protect us and to offer healing. Over the five years that Hildegard House has been in existence, we have prayed, worked, and broken bread with our Ojibwe friends. In opening up our eyes to see beyond the symptom of sex-trafficking and into the roots of the disease of white supremacy, we are better equipped to be part of the healing.

In 2016, many of our Ojibwe friends from the Fond du Lac Reservation and from the Duluth area went to support the people at Standing Rock. When they returned home, they shared stories of the struggle there in the Dakotas. They also shared some lessons they had

learned in their coming together to fight the "black snake." The experience was much more than fighting a pipeline - it was bigger than that. It had, and still has, implications for all of us as living beings on this Mother Earth. Even though the battle against the Dakota Access Pipeline has ended, the war is not over. The beast of exploitation, greed, domination, capitalism, racism, and white supremacy continues to raise its ugly head.

At the annual 2017 Midwest Catholic Worker gathering at Sugar Creek, IA, during the planning session for our upcoming Faith and Resistance retreat, somebody suggested joining a resistance action against the Enbridge Energy tar sands oil line 3 pipeline expansion project. The Hildegard House community agreed



2016: Chicago dances against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)  
Photo Credit: BobboSphere (CC)

to ask our Ojibwe friends if there was a place for us in the resistance. Over the following months, we listened to and supported the struggle that our Ojibwe friends were undertaking in fighting line 3. We worked in newly-forming Indigenous-run camps; attended meetings and forums, feasts and powwows; and we listened. There were times when we felt our spirits became one, and there were times when we felt so frustrated in our differences. Either way, we didn't give up on each other.

The process that led up to the Faith and Resistance action undertaken by the Midwest Catholic Workers and the Ojibwe people of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (which includes our Fond du Lac friends), was and continues to be a work in progress. It was founded on an understanding that what we do is for the common good. We understand that our existence on this planet is made up of complex understandings and relationships in which all are important and hold a piece of the truth. Much of our process together was experiential. It had to be that way, because it is important for us non-Indigenous people to recognize communication by word demands that our Ojibwe friends use the English language. None of us from the CW have taken the time to learn Ojibwe. The English language is inadequate in communicating the identity of the Ojibwe people or the truths that they hold. We had to experience this at a level that transcends language of the mind into the communication of the spirit.

It was in that experience that we were able to work out a plan of action that allowed for the best parts of ourselves, in all of our diversity, to be present. We each experienced a little of that communication of the Spirit during the course of the Faith and Resistance retreat. We experienced it in our prayers, in the water ceremony, in our presentations, and in our visit to the Fond du Lac Reservation. We experienced the power of it all when we brought those sacred items from many, many spiritual traditions and the water filled with our prayers and our love and our promise that we would protect life.

Maybe one of the most important lessons we



*Trump enacts DAPL Executive Order  
Photo Credit: KarlaAnnCote (CC)*

learned is that the actions that we take together all start in prayer. As Catholic Workers, we are animated by the Spirit who speaks to and guides us through the Sermon on the Mount, the works of mercy, and our social justice teachings. Those spiritual teachings are universal. Our Anishinaabe friends are animated by their spiritual teachings and practices, which are also universal. If we are ever able to overcome the destructive forces of our world, it will be by the recognition of all the life-giving forces and the power of the Spirits of all the ancestors and the cloud of witnesses and the communion of saints and angels. Racism cannot and will not divide our relatives in the spirit world and we cannot let it divide us in our world.



# On Not Looking Away: A Challenge to White Allies

Erin Mansur

I am tired. Bone weary. The kind of exhaustion you feel before, during, and after a long illness. It is the kind of tired that makes you wonder if you have ever been well. This particular brand of exhaustion doesn't come from a disorder or disease but rather from an unrelenting quest to survive in a world that doesn't see any value in my existence. Whether I want to be involved in anti-racism work is not really the point. Mine is not merely a fight for rights. It is more a fight for existence.

This lends an urgency to anti-racism work that unfortunately is not present for most white people, even its advocates. It should be. Only when the urgency becomes life threatening will white anti-racists truly be able to make the kind of progress necessary to crumble the mountain of white supremacy and systemic oppression.

Once you have accepted the responsibility of acknowledging the systems of oppression and privilege that buoy our American lives, you start to notice them everywhere. You start to see with clarity that these are not isolated incidences of injustice that happened long ago and far away. They are daily. They are local. You may think you are overreacting at first. After all, you tell yourself, it can't be THAT pervasive. It is. As a member of a traditionally marginalized group, you learn around three years old that the world is more than just unfair. Imagine as a preschooler learning the world is unjust. Then as a young person on the cusp of adolescence learning it is deadly. You learn, in fact, that society is built upon the premise that your continued existence as a person of color is tolerated because you are born to bear the physical and emotional labor of the privileged few. If you are unable to serve in that capacity, your death might possibly serve as a better example for others who fail to fall into line.

This is not a false or extreme interpretation.

The physical labor expected of people of color to maintain white supremacy is well documented. What is

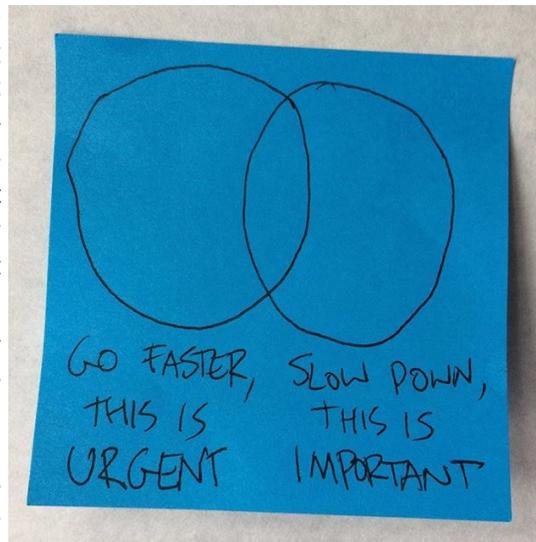
less documented is the extent of the emotional labor people of color are expected to take on. A simple definition of emotional labor is the process of regulating emotions and expressions in daily interactions with others. It

is an expectation, an assumption, that the person it is being demanded of will provide whatever information or nurturing response is needed without regard to what it costs them. In fact, outward displays of difficulty or an unwillingness to discuss the issue can be viewed as irrational or combative and potentially dangerous. American sociologist and academic Arlie Russell Hochschild first conceived the term "emotional labor," using it to describe the expectations of workers in the service industry. It later resurfaced in feminist discussions about the tasks our culture

assigns to women in domestic relationships without any expectation of reciprocation from their partners.

In this case, emotional labor means the assumption that people of color will be available at any time to define, to discuss, and to reassure any white person about any issues of race. It is often done without regard for the well being of the listener. It can be as simple as a co-worker pointing to the latest article in a newspaper and asking the closest brown face how they feel about an act of violence committed against a brown person. It asks a person of color in the moment to bear all the emotional labor after a lifetime already spent developing their own awareness and survival skills in an increasingly hostile world. It is a common habit that must be recognized and consciously ended. Helping a white ally in their evolution should not be demanded of any brown face in any forum the white person feels comfortable in. Ever.

I was recently asked when I was going to see the mini-series *When They See Us*, created, co-written, and directed by the incredible Ava DuVernay. It details the experience of five boys of color falsely accused and convicted of raping a white woman in 1989. The young men, called the Central Park Five, were later exonerated



Source: Vent Diagram

after the real rapist confessed and DNA evidence confirmed it. It is an important story and is proving to be a moving and groundbreaking piece of work. The assumption was that, as a person of color, I would want to, and would, see it.

I have no intention of seeing it.

Let me be clear. I have taught the events of that night to middle school students. I have heard several members of the Central Park Five speak. I have met them personally and shaken their hands and I do not have the emotional wherewithal to watch their stories dramatized on the small screen. I do not need to see the movie because I watch the evening news. While this injustice is monumental, it is not unusual. In fact, what is truly horrific is seeing that this level of racism is commonplace.

While I confess that I currently lack the emotional wherewithal to see the mini-series, I think it, and other works such as 13TH, the documentary about the prison pipeline (also by DuVernay,) should be required viewing for white allies. I do not want anyone triggered as proof that they are down for the cause. This series is based on fact. This isn't playing on your emotions or a display of violence for entertainment's sake. Requesting that white allies watch such films seems very similar to requiring German citizens to walk through the concentra-

tion camps they either passively chose to ignore or actively helped to keep working. It is reminding them of the very real fact that this is the water we swim in.

Other people of color have told me to take care of myself, and have respected my decision not to see films or read articles that may be triggering to me. The fact is that I only have to turn on the evening news to be triggered by events that make me feel unsafe as a person of color. White people may see the reports of people of color having the police called on them for walking down the street, leaving an airbnb, barbecuing on a lake, or otherwise living their lives, and think it is a shame. It does not, however, reinforce a fundamental belief that people of color have to live in a constant state of vigilance. To take a moment to look back at the more obviously horrific moments in history that emphasize the injustice, for me, is like pouring salt on the open wound.

Occasionally, my only option for maintaining my sanity is to stop and rest. That should not be an option for white allies. In fact, the opposite is true. Too many whites in our society have had uninterrupted childhoods. Even into young adulthood, they have had the chance to not see the strain and stain of those who maintain their privilege by their literal blood, sweat, and tears. Noticing the heartbreak is the least of your responsibilities on the road to race consciousness.



**Illustration by Peter Strain Toni-Morrison**  
**Source: Teaching Tolerance**

When you have the chance to look deeper, do it. You can flinch, but you cannot look away. Invariably there will be pain. If you are a compassionate human being, of course there will be pain. Most people stop at the pain. They think feeling bad about what is happening is enough. Because so many people refuse to even acknowledge such things are true, accepting that they are true feels like a step in the right direction. That is the point. It is a step. Not a full stop. Keep going.



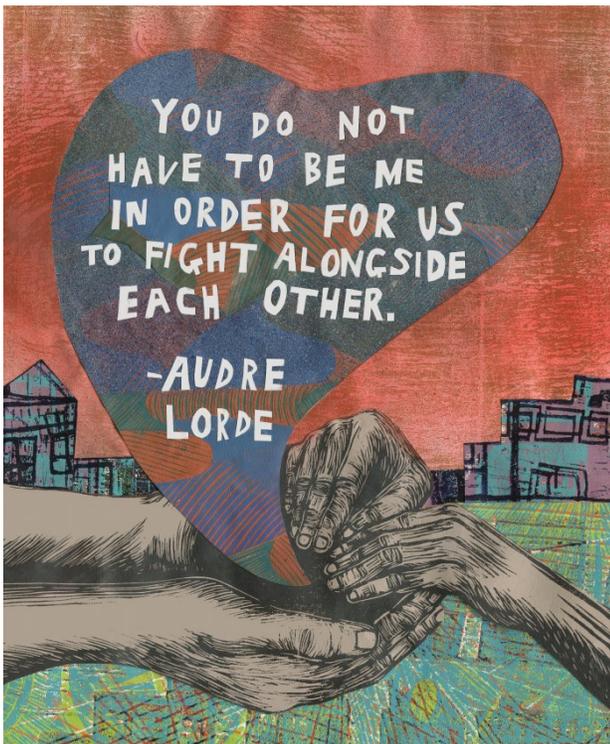
# White Fragility

Robin DiAngelo

**Ed Note:** This article, a book excerpt from *White Fragility* is reprinted from “Yes Magazine” with permission.

As a former professor and current facilitator and consultant, I am in a position to give white people feedback on how their unintentional racism is manifesting itself. In this position, I have observed countless enactments of white fragility. One of the most common is outrage: “How dare you suggest that I could have said or done something racist?” Although these are unpleasant moments for me, they are also rather amusing. The reason I’m there in the first place is because I have been hired specifically to do that; I have been asked to help the members of the organization understand why their workplace continues to remain white, why they are having so much trouble recruiting people of color, and/or why the people of color they hire don’t stay. They want to know what they are doing that is unsupportive to people of color.

...An example: I am coaching a small group of white employees on how racism manifests in their workplace.



**Illustration by Meredith Stern**  
**Source: Teaching Tolerance**

One member of the group, Karen, is upset about a request from Joan, her only colleague of color, to stop talking over her. Karen doesn’t understand what talking over Joan has to do with race; she is an extrovert and tends to talk over everyone. I try to explain how the impact is different when we interrupt across race because we bring our histories with us. While Karen sees herself as a unique individual, Joan sees Karen as a white individual. Being interrupted and talked over by white people is not a unique experience for Joan, nor is it separate from the larger cultural context. Karen exclaims, “Forget it! I can’t say anything right, so I am going to stop talking!”

The episode highlights Karen’s white fragility. She is unable to see herself in racial terms. When she is pressed to do so, she refuses to engage further, positioning herself as the one being treated unfairly. In the post-civil rights era, we have been taught that racists are mean people who intentionally dislike others because of their race; a racist is consciously prejudiced and intends to be hurtful. Because this definition requires conscious intent, it exempts virtually all white people and functions beautifully to obscure and protect racism as a system in which we are all implicated. This definition also ensures that any suggestion of racially problematic behavior will trigger moral outrage and defense.

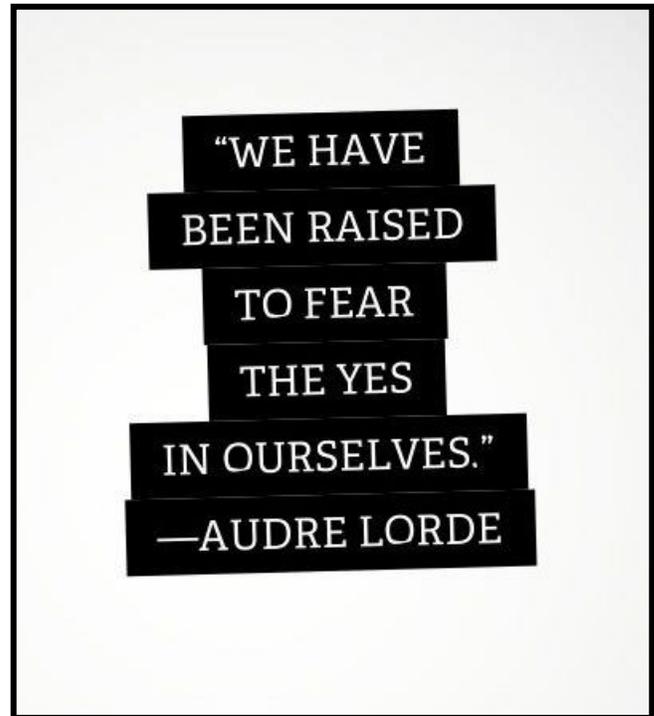
The large body of research on children and race demonstrates that children start to construct their ideas about race very early. Remarkably, a sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes appear to develop as early as preschool. Professor of communications Judith Martin describes white children’s upbringing:

“As in other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral predicament of living in a white supremacist society. Raised to experience their racially based advantages as fair and normal, white children receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. Therefore, they experience or learn about racial tension without understanding euro-Americans’ historical responsibility for it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it.”

Despite its ubiquity, white superiority is also unnamed and denied by most whites. If we become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, we often organize our identity around a denial of our racially based privileges that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white people's moral objection to racism increases their resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. In a white supremacist context, white identity largely rests on a foundation of (superficial) racial tolerance and acceptance. We whites who position ourselves as liberal often opt to protect what we perceive as our moral reputations, rather than recognize or change our participation in systems of inequity and domination.

One way that whites protect their positions when challenged on race is to invoke the discourse of self-defense. Through this discourse, whites characterize themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, and attacked. Whites who describe the interactions this way are responding to the articulation of counternarratives alone; no physical violence has ever occurred in any interracial discussion or training that I am aware of. These self-defense claims work on multiple levels. They identify the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social positions. The claims blame others with less social power for their discomfort and falsely describe that discomfort as dangerous. The self-defense approach also re-inscribes racist imagery. By positioning themselves as the victim of anti-racist efforts, they cannot be the beneficiaries of whiteness. Claiming that it is they who have been unfairly treated — through a challenge to their position or an expectation that they listen to the perspectives and experiences of people of color — they can demand that more social resources (such as time and attention) be channeled in their direction to help them cope with this mistreatment.

Let me be clear: While the capacity for white people to sustain challenges to our racial positions is limited — and, in this way, fragile — the effects of our responses are not fragile at all; they are quite powerful, because they take advantage of historical and institutional power and control. We wield this power and control in whatever way is most useful in the moment to protect our positions. If we need to cry so that all the resources rush back to us and attention is diverted away from a discussion of our racism, then we will cry (a strategy most commonly employed by white middle-class women). If we need to take umbrage and respond with righteous outrage, then we will take umbrage. If we need to argue, minimize, explain, play devil's advocate, pout,



tune out, or withdraw to stop the challenge, then we will.

White fragility functions as a form of bullying: “I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me — no matter how diplomatically you try to do so — that you will simply back off, give up, and never raise the issue again.” White fragility keeps people of color in line and “in their place.” In this way, it is a powerful form of white racial control. Social power is not fixed; it is constantly challenged and needs to be maintained.

In my workshops, I often ask people of color, “How often have you given white people feedback on our unaware yet inevitable racism? How often has that gone well for you?” Eye rolling, head shaking, and outright laughter follow, along with the consensus of rarely, if ever. I then ask, “What would it be like if you could simply give us feedback, have us graciously receive it, reflect, and work to change the behavior?” Recently, a man of color sighed and said, “It would be revolutionary.” I ask my fellow whites to consider the profundity of that response. It would be revolutionary if we could receive, reflect, and work to change the behavior. On the one hand, the man's response points to how difficult and fragile we are. But on the other hand, it indicates how simple it can be to take responsibility for our racism. But we aren't likely to get there if we are operating from the dominant worldview that only intentionally mean people can participate in racism.



## Ethical Extremes & Racial Dilemmas

Sekou Kimathi

In 1903, W.E.B DuBois said in the *Souls of Black Folk*, “The problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the problem of the color line.” Most Americans find themselves in-between that color line—neither affirming nor denying the color line that runs across, racialized bodies. They are refusing outright that the race problem is political. They are refusing recognition and participation within the confines of civil society. Anti-blackness is the axis on which capitalism rotates and governs our lives. There is no outside to run to; it is the world we live in. Commerce and exchange affects us all, even those like myself who have no desire to benefit from and participate in climbing the social ladder. It includes those “drop outs” from middle class white America—Catholic Workers, insurrectionary anarchists, and left-communists. There is no simple remedy for the racial tension that exists among us nor will it disappear.

So how do we deal with the racial dilemma without reducing grievances of particular experiences of oppression to games of identity politics or guilting our friends who are white into crippling shame? The poet Franco Berardi is insightful when stating, “The task of resistance movements will be creating (coextensive with the insurrection) autonomous structures for knowledge, existence, survival, psychotherapy, and giving life meaning and autonomy. This will be a long and potentially traumatic process.”

What is often offered as a solution or talking point to racial tension is what Indigenous anarchist Aragon calls “cosmopolitan materialism.” The notion of cosmopolitan materialism gives primacy to how a person is versus who they are. It emphasizes people’s affinities, rather than their inherent unchangeable traits. The fundamental problem with this tendency is that it lacks any racial analysis and unconsciously promotes colorblindness, especially in the hyper-racialized context of the

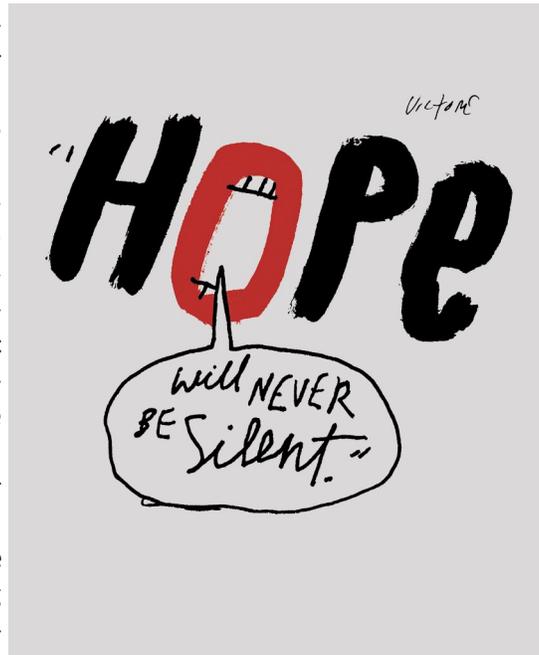
united states (occupied Turtle Island).

This is a nation that gave rise to modernity and capitalism through the enslavement of African peoples, genocide of the Indigenous, and indentured servitude of different ethnic European groups. A proper response demands more than cosmopolitan materialism. American life is organized explicitly around racialization; therefore, people within the Empire will have to incorporate an analysis to deal with this racialization. Multiculturalism is an antidote given by most leftist groups and NGOs to deal with whiteness by recognizing and giving space to a multiplicity of identities and creating safe spaces for marginalized identities. This only places a cute band-aid on a problem that can’t be solved, only explored. Neither cosmopolitan materialism nor multiculturalism will resolve the inherent race and class tension of our present age.

Confronted with the fragmentation of social life, today’s movements need to incorporate a spiritual dimension to the struggle. This is necessary to resist the only path presented before us by the overlords of capital: nihilism. Without the spirituality component, young

partisans are prone to becoming orphaned in our own separatist identities and burn out by losing the connections to a life in common.

We have no alternative to reclaiming spiritual commonality in order to confront the forces of neoliberal automatization which separate us from our own needs, desires, and homes. In this sense, we have no home, only each other, and that may be the only meaningful path forward.



**Harvey Milk Illustration by James Victore**  
Source: *Teaching Tolerance*

# Working Toward Anti-Racism Organizations

## Interview with Jerica Arents, former Core Organizing Board Member, Witness Against Torture

*Jerica Arents was interviewed by Lincoln Rice in September 2019.*

### 1) Could you provide a brief history of Witness Against Torture (WAT) and its current mission?

WAT started in 2005, when a group of people (many from the CW tradition) took seriously the work of mercy to visit the prisoner. Many Americans were horrified with the photos that were leaked of detainees being tortured in Abu Ghraib. At the time, Bush adamantly insisted that there was no torture happening at Guantanamo Bay. To address the abuses happening at the prison, 25 members of WAT traveled to the gates of the military prison in Cuba while fasting and in prayer. Though they were denied entry, they came back to the U.S. determined to do everything they could to shut the prison down. Since then, WAT has been devoted to closing Guantanamo and ending U.S.-sponsored torture worldwide.

### 2) How did you get involved with Witness Against Torture?

In early 2009, my friend Luke Hansen recruited me to go on a spring break trip to Washington, D.C., to protest the U.S. prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. That was the first time I put on the iconic orange jumpsuit and black hood, a symbol that sparks fear and anger in most American minds. For WAT, the jumpsuit and hood serves as a tool to bring the existence of these men — the majority of whom have been unjustly tortured and never charged — to the streets, to our communities, and to the axis of U.S. power.



**Photo Credit: Witness Against Torture**

### 3) How did Witness Against Torture become aware of the need to address its own racist culture?

As a mostly white organization, WAT was called into an anti-racist process by people of color within the community. I think the process became self-evident because of a few parallel, but equally urgent, needs. First, Dr. Maha Hilal, who is a longtime member of WAT, gently started challenging the rest of our (mostly white) community to consider the political and religious identities of the detainees in Guantanamo. The men are not neutral detainees; they share a key aspect of their identity in that they are all Muslim. Maha brought to us many years of academic expertise and lived experience in the analysis and discourse of Islamophobia, the unwarranted hostility toward or fear of Muslims or Arabs, or those perceived to be so. She challenged WAT to think about both the stereotyping of Muslims/Arabs as national security threats, and also the deeply-embedded and long held attitudes, beliefs, and U.S. policies rooted in frameworks of Islamophobia. (As Dr. Zara Zimbaro writes,

Islamophobia is the “most under-examined form of racism at work in the world today”.)

Secondly, with the emergence of the Movement for Black Lives in 2014, there was a strong current in our community to develop a stronger overt stance against white supremacy and racism. The Peace Poets

(from NYC) started to kindly challenge the rest of the WAT community to see the similarities between the anti-blackness and dehumanization in the U.S. prison system with the Islamophobia and dehumanization in the Global War on Terror. For many of us white folks, we were seeing white supremacy at work in ways we’d never realized before: state violence on the streets of Fer-

guson was state violence in Palestine, which was state violence in Guantanamo. The veil was lifted.

#### **4) How has Witness Against Torture attempted to become an anti-racist organization?**

WAT has attempted to become an anti-racist organization in two ways broadly: in the communal internal work of reflection and education, and in standing in active solidarity with organizations led by people of color. In 2014, and subsequently, we created a working group on white supremacy that was charged with identifying ways WAT could broaden our analysis. In 2015, WAT went through a three-hour anti-racism training as a large group. We partnered with the D.C. Hands Up Coalition and staged a direct action with the slogan, “Ferguson to Guantanamo: White Silence = State Violence.” In 2016, at the request of Tamir Rice’s family in Cleveland, we staged a lock-down action at the Department of Justice to open a wrongful death investigation. We started to see our potential “sites” for political theater as not just the national branches of government (the Supreme Court, the White House, and Congress), but also local police stations and jails. And, lastly, WAT has been able to offer some financial resources and turn out to POC-led organizations in the D.C. area.

#### **5) What struggles has the group encountered in deciding to become an anti-racist organization?**

Many! Many struggles. There are some people in our community who see the anti-racist work of education and reflection as a sort of distraction from the “real work” of closing Guantanamo. I think these members believe our resources to be scant, and broadening the scope of our work leaves little left to devote to the prisoners. Others, I imagine, find the language of racism and white supremacy abrasive. Still others find the lens of Islamophobia unhelpful, or not a particularly effective political strategy. And in this, there have been disagreements and conflict. WAT is truly multi-generational; there are oftentimes conversations using language that spans generations of discourse and political thought.

Because WAT is a community, and the work of anti-racism must first be done at the individual level before a community can shift their political trajectory or focus, we have struggled with the tension of individuals representing the group. We’ve struggled through hours-long

discussions about messaging. Though I can only speak for myself, I think some of the POC in our community have, at least at times, felt belittled or marginalized in their identities. I imagine white people who have felt



*Photo Credit: Witness Against Torture*

their opinions dismissed have become less active in WAT. And then, like other mostly white organizations, I believe that regular old whiteness is at play. It is the air that we breathe, the water in which we swim. So the simple questions - “Who has power?” “How are decisions being made?” “Who has access to the resources?” “Who gets the most air time?” and “How are values shaping the space?” - are forever relevant.

Through all of the struggles above, though, I’d like to believe we have taken care of one another. The tough conversations have led to new avenues, new ways to imagine what justice might look like. I hope we’ve cared for one another in this process, and that WAT members feel an overall strengthening of our ties together.

#### **6) What have been the benefits of the transition to become a more anti-racist organization?**

I believe we live inside systems, institutions, and communities that were racist when we inherited them. They continue to be so today. Our task, at this moment in time, is to do the work we’ve been invited to do to build relationships predicated on a vision of justice that leads to our collective liberation. The benefit of dismantling white supremacy in community – though I wouldn’t claim that we, or anyone else, have achieved the end goal – is to taste, briefly, the joy of existence when oppression is suspended and people experience freedom.

#### **7) Do you see ways that the Catholic Worker movement could benefit from the lived experience of Witness Against Torture?**

Both the CW and WAT function as small communities trying to live their values into the world. Like WAT, I think the CW struggles with the particular challenges of wrestling with these questions across a generational divide, and the clumsy way people use language to try (and often fail) to communicate complicated ideas that are always evolving. Right now, as I use language in this writing, I see myself failing to capture what I’m hoping to convey. But the hope is that we live in dynamic relationship with one another, and we assume people’s best intentions – even when the language fails.



# Resources and Announcements

## **Concrete Ways to Support Reparations**

If any of you or your wider community have a desire to see reparations happen in this country, below are two resources where you can participate directly and personally (contact St. Isidore for many, many more examples and opportunities at catholicworkerschool@gmail.com). For great resources that succinctly spell out the need for reparations, see Ta Nahisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*.

## **Soul Fire Farm Reparations Map for Black & Indigenous Farmers**

From their website: “The food system was built on the stolen land and stolen labor of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other people of color. Members of the Northeast Farmers of Color Network are claiming their sovereignty and calling for reparations of land and resources so that they can grow nourishing food and distribute it in their communities. The specific projects and resource needs of farmers of color are listed on this website. It’s simple. If you have resources, contact the farmer directly to share.”

## **Sogorea Te Land Trust and Real Rent Duwamish**

The Sogorea Te Land Trust and Real Rent Duwamish are community organizations that facilitate the opportunity for settler residents of San Francisco and Seattle to pay a voluntary, ongoing land tax or rent to the Indigenous Nations upon whose stolen land they live. The organizations create opportunities to re-envision what it means to live on Native land. The money collected goes toward the return of land and the revival of culture. If you do not live in Seattle or San Francisco, consider collaborating with the Indigenous Nation in your area to start a similar program. ✦

## **Improving the St. Isidore Decolonization Workshop—Support Requested!**

This past Labor Day Weekend, the St. Isidore CW Farm facilitated a two-day workshop titled “Native American Justice, History, and Decolonization.” It was a powerful weekend, with twenty-eight people coming together to explore the history of colonization and Indigenous resistance in the U.S., to delve deep into our own person-

al ancestry and immigration stories to better understand our responsibility, and to listen to Indigenous voices who are identifying harms and ways that settler descendants can participate in repairing them. Many people left the weekend committed to being agents of change in their communities, as well as to addressing and working on their own “fragility” around cultural appropriation.

Despite our best intentions, however, it was made clear at the end of the weekend that our workshop had been (unintentionally) designed only for white people and their learning. Though the people of color who attended the weekend expressed feeling welcomed and comfortable in our white space, they pointed out that the presented material was not helpful for them or applicable to their lives. We are thankful for their feedback, and are committed to finding ways to change this pattern. If you have any suggestions, please send them to us at catholicworkerschool@gmail.com ✦

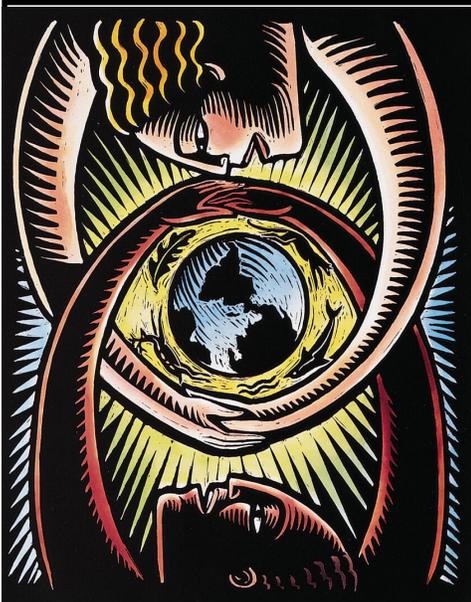
## **The Catholic Worker & Racial Justice: A Precarious Relationship**

CWAR Editor Lincoln Rice wrote an article titled “The Catholic Worker & Racial Justice: A Precarious Relationship,” which was published in the June 2019 issue of *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society*. The article critiques the movement’s embodiment as a white movement and the failure of its founders (Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin) to prioritize racial justice. The article contrasts this with the ways in which racism was addressed by two prominent African American Catholic Workers. The article concludes by offering suggestions for ways the movement can mine its own rich resources to become an authentically anti-racist movement. The article is available online at: <https://bit.ly/2IOZPMO> ✦

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One World Fall 2000 –Jennifer Hewitson

**“IF THE GOAL WAS TO INCREASE THE LOVE, RATHER THAN WINNING OR DOMINATING A CONSTANT OPPONENT, I THINK WE COULD ACTUALLY IMAGINE LIBERATION FROM CONSTANT OPPRESSION. WE WOULD SUDDENLY BE SEEING EVERYTHING WE DO, EVERYONE WE MEET, NOT THROUGH THE TACTICAL EYES OF WAR, BUT THROUGH EYES OF LOVE.**

**WE WOULD SEE THAT THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A BLANK CANVAS, AN EMPTY LAND OR A NEW IDEA – BUT EVERYWHERE THERE IS COMPLEX, ANCIENT, FERTILE GROUND FULL OF POTENTIAL.” — ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN**

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