

BUILDING CAPACITY AND CULTIVATING INTERDEPENDENCE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

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Meetings on racial justice often resemble nothing so much as a bazaar filled with peddlers offering the all-purpose answer. The reality is that the problem has no single or simple solution ... If there is one answer; it lies in recognizing how complex the issue has become and in not using that complexity as an excuse for inaction.

– Ellis Cose, author, columnist and contributing editor for Newsweek magazine

PART ONE – CULTIVATING INTERDEPENDENCE IN COMMUNITY CHANGE PROCESS by Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

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Introduction

Over the last few decades communities across the U.S. have experienced a significant domestic migration and immigration, often of populations from different racial and ethnic backgrounds than the current population. The Brookings Institution reports, “Hispanic, Asian, and black populations continue to migrate to, and expand their presence in, new destinations. They are increasingly living in suburbs, in rapidly growing job centers in the South and West, and in more affordable areas adjacent to higher-priced coastal metro areas.”¹ For some predominantly white communities this is the first major racial change since white people moved onto Native American lands. Communities experiencing such rapid changes in the racial and ethnic composition of their populations have often faced tension and turmoil.

As a consequence of this tension and turmoil, some individuals have fled, destabilizing local housing markets. Some communities have changed their laws to enforce exclusion; others have increased institutional barriers to affordable housing and stable employment based on citizen status through prejudicial practices and policy changes (examples listed below²); and in some communities, residents have been victims of harassment and hate crimes.

¹ “Diversity Spreads Out: Metropolitan Shifts in Hispanic, Asian, and Black Populations Since 2000,” by William H. Frey, Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program. The Brookings Institution. March 2006.

² Recent examples: *Pennsylvania*: “Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta told a gathering of Westmoreland County Republicans that he will not back off a controversial ordinance that fines landlords for renting to illegal aliens and revokes business licenses of firms that employ illegals.” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, “Hazleton mayor defends law for illegals,” by Paul Peirce, 7/13/07. *Michigan*: “This year, police have investigated cross burnings in Dearborn Heights and Trenton and racially motivated graffiti in Warren. Warren’s mayor drew fierce criticism when he called his city a “fortress” against crime coming from Detroit, whose population is mostly black.” *Detroit News*, “Racial divide haunts Metro Detroit; Livonia store controversy, Detroit mayoral election and suburban cross burnings reopen old wounds,” by Brad Heath and Catherine Jun, 9/22/05. *Georgia*: “Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue signed a bill requiring jailers to check the immigration status of anyone arrested for a felony or drunk driving. Local officers will be trained to start the deportation process for illegal immigrants they encounter during routine law enforcement.” *Los*

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The FBI reported that hate crimes rose 8% in 2006 and they are still being underreported by victims, as well as by the police.³ Of the 7,720 single-bias incidents in 2006, 52% were motivated by racial bias and almost seven out of 10 incidents⁴ were committed against blacks.

The unremitting gaps between people of color and whites in basic areas such as education, health, and employment are debilitating and destructive. Those who are actively engaged in combating racism and improving race relations have limited resources and are challenged on how to address all of these issues effectively and to sustain the progress that has been made. One critical task is to better assess the impact of different approaches to mitigate structural racism and consider different ways of working together, using approaches collectively, in order make the best use of the current limited resources. Creating a track record of organizations *working interdependently* across different approaches over a sustained time on specific community issues may be a possible tool to improve our effectiveness. To determine the value of collaborative efforts, we should consider creating multi-approach plans for community change processes that are tenaciously implemented, and then document whether such plans actually increase the likelihood of achieving progress toward racial equity.

Creating ways to work interdependently to address structural racism has several potential benefits:

1. We are more powerful when we address racism together rather than alone, in part because it is much harder to “divide and conquer” when we are allies in our work.
2. Due to the complexity and depth of effort it takes to address racism, collaboration could help us to use our scarce resources more wisely.
3. It is well-known how racism mutates and how retrenchment occurs, we must also evolve and grow as a field of practice.
4. Developing interdependence among race relations and racial justice organizations is one of the foundational components of movement building.

Interdependence is based on a belief that each group's work has value and that the work can be strengthened through collaboration and accountability. It could also provide a strong defense, and the ability to be more proactive about how racism mutates and the patterns of retrenchment. A description of how racism mutates is shared by Joseph Barndt in his book, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*: “Instead of disappearing, however, racism has mutated into new forms that are in fact far more devastating. The velvet glove symbolizes and represents racism's magical power to hide and delude. Racism has assumed new sophisticated forms that are not readily apparent and whose primary weapons of enforcement are bureaucracy, psychology, and public relations. The ‘velvet glove’ of racism creates an illusion that it does not exist and therefore is far more difficult to detect and eliminate. Yet its power to oppress no less that of open and blatant racism.”⁵

Interdependence is more than just of way of working differently on issues. It is a critical component of movement building. The building of a social movement usually is characterized by: intentional actions with some degree of

Angeles Times, “Dispatch From Tifton, GA.; With a Little Help From Neighbors; After six savage slayings of Latinos in a small city, police seek recruits who can lift culture barriers,” by Jenny Jarvie, 7/9/06.

³ “Defining Hate in the United States,” by John Ireland. *In These Times*, May 9, 2007. www.inthesetimes.com/article/3132/defining_hate_in_the_united_states/.

⁴ “FBI describes thousands of hate crimes in 2006.” Posted by Mike Carney, November 19, 2007 in Crime, <http://blogs.usatoday.com/ondeadline/2007/11/fbi-describes-t.html>, accessed July 9, 2008.

⁵ Barndt, Joseph, *Understand and Dismantling Racism*. (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press), 2007. p. 39

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coordination among groups that share common concerns, identities, and core values; collective action that “has to be maintained over time through some type or degree of organization”; and a shared collective identity that “enables people to see themselves as part of the broader ‘we’ and not engage in activities that are not bounded by a narrow definition of ‘self-interest.’”⁶ All of these are pressing reasons both for building the capacities of race relations and racial justice organizations to work interdependently and for encouraging the support of foundations committed to investing in racial equity work.

Finally, it will be essential for race relations and racial justice organizations to create a national network which could be the structure needed to support and to sustain the process of cultivating interdependence, Organizations, through this network, could learn about the effectiveness and the impact of strategies, work collectively to be innovative, create accountability mechanisms, and respond to national incidents with strong and effective racial equity messages. It could also be a vehicle for organizations to work collaboratively toward building a movement for change.

Race Relations and Racial Justice Work: Pathways of Analysis and Change

Race relations and racial justice organizations tend to use different approaches to achieve their goals. The approaches can be grouped under three very broad pathways described below, and explained in detail in the following section:

1. *Racial and Ethnic Competency and Development* – Working with individuals and institutions to build their competencies around the concepts of race and ethnic differences (including knowledge and awareness), and in some cases, develop skills to address power dynamics, racism, internalized white supremacy, and internalized racism.
2. *Race Relations and Reconciliation* – Working to build relationships across racial and ethnic groups to effectively work on community issues and build collective action against racism.
3. *Racial Justice and Equity* – Working to achieve social justice goals, particularly those that involve racial/ethnic equity, through changing laws and institutional policies and practices.

The goals and strategies of each pathway sometimes overlap; each pathway has its strengths, limitations, and trade-offs. Many organizations using different paths still have similar goals for addressing institutional racism, but have different views about how to stimulate change. Each pathway has something to contribute, and clarity among individual organizations on what their strategies can and cannot accomplish in the long term is imperative to understanding their roles in the change process and in the context of a community's history. When implemented collectively in a high-quality manner, *each path can be critical in addressing structural racism in a community change process.*

What could be the impact if groups pursuing racial equity along different pathways worked together rather than separately on a community issue? Take for example, a grievous but common racial incident in too many cities across the U.S., a police shooting of an African American male or Latino. Some organizations will organize the

⁶ *Building Organizations in a Movement Moment*, Beth Zemsky and David Mann, Social Policy, Spring-Summer 2008. p. 12.

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community and insist on such actions as creation of a community-police advisory board to ensure police accountability to the community, and specifically communities of color, and demand legal consequences for the officer(s) involved. Other organizations might be invited into the police department to increase the awareness and sensitivity of officers and create an accountability structure to lessen racial profiling by police officers. Still other organizations might focus on relationship-building by creating youth development programs for police officers to work with youth of color by providing mentoring or coaching sport teams. Each of these groups is making progress in addressing this grievous incident. Some possibilities if they were working collectively could be creating shared messages to the police department and the community, strategizing in dealing with covert and overt resistance, and finding common ground on the issue among the different constituency groups and then widening their circle of allies. And, indeed, if we track their progress in working collectively, we might see a different level of impact.

Tensions and Barriers to Interdependence

Too often, groups taking different pathways toward racial equity coexist uneasily in communities, at times even working at cross-purposes to each other, due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of each other, as well as both organizational and systemic barriers. For example, in the short term, some organizations may not consider working collaboratively to be time well spent, especially when they are struggling with limited capacity to meet community challenges. Inadequate funding⁷ for race relations and racial justice organizations triggers competition for funds, thus encouraging adversarial rather than collaborative relationships. In response to foundation funding requirements, organizations often must show why their work is uniquely qualified to achieve the desired change – thus putting each in the position of having to advocate for their approach to the work at the expense of another. In addition, though collaboration is often encouraged by foundations, the funding and the time necessary to build collaborative relationships are not always adequate.

Another set of challenges concerns how organizations and individuals pursue their particular race relations and racial justice pathways. It is relatively easy to see the importance of each in a community change process and the impact they each can have in improving race relations, strengthening personal and institutional competencies, and addressing structural racism. Unfortunately, groups don't always pursue a particular pathway in a manner consistent with their intent. Some of the challenges they face:

- The first challenge is operational: building the capacity of organizations, developing competencies to lead race relations and racial equity work in communities, finding time to mentor staff and volunteers, and evaluating the impact of strategies to assess whether they are meeting short-term outcomes.
- A second challenge is how messages get diluted due to pressure or perceptions about how key stakeholders and financial supporters will respond. This response is sometimes due to the scarcity of funds which results in changing the terms, or how strategies are described in grant proposals. It also involves our own limitations: a) our racial identity development stage, b) our fear of conflict, and c) the tendency to rationalize the resistance of others as just part of the learning process rather than attributing it to the ineffectiveness of the strategy.
- The third challenge stems from our capacity as a “field,” with few established principles, insufficient accountability mechanisms, the lack of a professional association or community of practice, or the absence

⁷ Will Pitz and Rinku Sen, *Short Changed: Foundation Giving and Communities of Color* (Oakland: Applied Research Center, 2004), p.10

Please do not quote without authors' permission. Please send comments to mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us of national or regional gatherings (except by approaches e.g., multicultural education, community organizing).

- The fourth challenge is that in some cases, an organization's practices and policies better represent the system they are trying to dismantle than the just and inclusive system they are trying to create. Though organizational strategies may focus on creating equitable institutional practices, sometimes the mirror is not held up internally to an organization's governance structures, human resource policies, and recruiting practices.

The one seemingly intractable tension is between approaches focused on reforming institutions versus approaches working toward transformation of institutions and systems. Though they may seem at first glance polar opposites, they are rather the ebb and flow of social change. The perception is that reformation and transformation are working against each other, which leads organizations to creating adversarial relationships. There can be assumptions that the reformist approach is colluding with the status quo or that the transformative approach is naïve and its goals unachievable. There is some reality to these assumptions, based on whether the pathways described above are implemented to their full intent. It is important to understand the incremental changes involved in a change process which leads toward social transformation. It is necessary to heighten our awareness and understanding of the cycle of change, historical patterns of how racism mutates, and the stages of social change movements.⁸ This is essential knowledge needed to move toward interdependence.

There are other sources of tension among race relations and racial equity organizations which sometimes lead to marginalization of organizations that take different approaches or use different strategies, even though their missions also focuses on addressing race relations and racial inequities. These tensions include:

- Debating the *appropriateness and effectiveness of different strategies*, and how and when to use them in communities.
- Believing *there is only one particular way change happens* (e.g., we must change individuals and institutions will follow, or visa versa) without being willing to acknowledge that no one size could possibly fit all circumstances and contexts. This belief has led to the creation of a hierarchy of approaches.
- Disagreeing over whether the *process of change should start from the "bottom-up," "top-down," "middle-out,"* or from multiple entry points.
- Debating if the *work should focus exclusively on racism or if all oppressions should be addressed collectively.*

Organizations also regularly face limitations that challenge the concept of interdependence:

- *Limited time*, often consumed in responding to the daily demands of programs, staff, volunteers, and community issues, makes it difficult to spend the time necessary to build collaborative working relationships.
- Many organizations have *limited capacity to evaluate and assess their work*. Further, they are often pressured to assess their singular impact, rather than their contribution to an overall vision for racial justice.
- The *funding is competitive and it does not encourage collaboration* in the context of an overall community change process.
- There are *few incentives for organizations to work together within a community* to establish a set of strategies sufficient to meet both short-term and long-term goals.

⁸ For more information, see the book *Doing Democracy* mentioned earlier by Bill Moyer which includes case studies on five social movements.

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- Without an established community of practice among organizations and between organizations and scholars, there are *missed opportunities to learn what is working and to share lessons* as well as increase our understanding of the nuances of racism.
- Smaller organizations fear that they would be lost in the process of interdependence and collaboration and would be asked to contribute in ways they could not. Organizations may also be fearful how it will shift resources from already overextended capacities or programs. Other unknowns that may effect decisions of organizations to work with others are: what conflicts might arise, or *what organizations would have to relinquish or change to work differently with other groups.*

Since many race relations and racial justice organizations work in isolation or do not have strong partnerships with each other, what sometimes results is a misperception among them that a shared vision does not exist.⁹ To dismantle racism will require a robust collective approach, as well as a shared understanding that racism is structurally embedded in all systems. One of our responsibilities, at this critical time in history, is to answer the question:

Will building interdependent and collective relationships in a community change process with organizations using different approaches bolster our effectiveness in addressing structural racism in communities?

What Do We Need to Do?

Organizations working on race relations and racial equity would do well to reflect on their traditional ways of working and to think about what is possible if they can create interdependent relationships and processes and consider functioning as a “community of practice” with a common vision to create a just and equitable society. Community organizations’ creation of joint strategies to support individuals in different racial identity development stages¹⁰ as well as organizational development stages (e.g., multicultural organizational development theory¹¹) are essential components of fully developing a community change process that addresses structural racism.

It is important to guard against sending a message of exclusion to colleagues whose power or racial analysis differs from ours. It is equally important to create strategies for maintaining solidarity, even when there are conflicts, so that we don’t help others to “divide and conquer.” Our differences need to be addressed respectfully and we need to fully leverage our respective capacities.

Understanding the collective impact and unique contributions of our respective pathways in a community change process, creating relationships and partnerships with each other, and devising plans so our strategies may work

⁹ In 2001, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies’ NABRE program sponsored a national How-To Forum to explore how race relations and racial justice organization from across the spectrum of approaches can collaborate to address community issues. What we learned from this process is many organizations were “pleased to discover the ways they could work together and surprised to witness the similarities among their visions for dismantling structural racism.” M. Potapchuk, *Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations*. (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004) p. 3.

¹⁰ Wijeyesinghe, Charmaine L., and Bailey W. Jackson III, *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

¹¹ Cross, Elsie, Judith H. Katz, Frederick A. Miller, Edith W. Seashore. *The Promise of Diversity*. New York: Irwin Professional Publishing, 1994; Scheie, David M., with T. Williams and Janis Foster. *Improving Race Relations and Undoing Racism: Roles and Strategies for Community Foundations*. Minneapolis, MN: Rainbow Research, Inc., 2001.

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interdependently likely will yield significant benefits. Hierarchies of approaches, whether spoken or unspoken, tend to hinder progress. Broadening our views on how change happens and then considering the role of each pathway of race relations and racial justice work plays in making different types of change could lead to our work becoming more effective.

Paul Kivel reminds us to keep in mind our larger vision, in his book, *You Call this a Democracy?—Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides?*:

“If we understand that we are engaged in a common struggle with many fronts, our strategies would be less competitive and more effective. We wouldn’t be fighting for ourselves and our interest group, but for our neighborhoods, communities, and for all people in a common humane future. We may have different needs and different visions, but none of our needs will be met or our vision realized unless we can overcome our differences and work together to dismantle the system ...”¹²

The challenge of dismantling structural racism is too complex and multilayered for us to assume that any one organization or pathway can offer all the answers or foresee all the potential repercussions.

Working interdependently and continuing the development of organizational capacity means:

- Believing we are greater and more powerful together than each of our component parts;
- Strengthening our work through generating a shared vision, creating principles of practices and establishing accountability among organizations and with our communities;
- Understanding the unique role of each of our pathways of work in a change process;
- Discussing partnering with each other through the change process or adapting our strategies to ensure multilevel approaches are being used to initiate and sustain change;
- Educating foundations and donors that each race relations and racial justice pathway needs to be present in a community change process; and
- Assessing how we conduct business and identifying ways that the dominant culture and white privilege may be influencing our goals and strategies.¹³ The question to continually ask is, “Do our policies, practices, and relationships align more with the very system we are trying to dismantle, or do they reflect the system we are trying to create?”

Cultivating interdependence is about more than just increasing our collaborative efforts. It is an opportunity to improve the impact of our strategies, assess whether they are sufficient, and invest in being innovative and transformative. History has taught us how racism mutates, how racial sorting evolves, and how retrenchment consistently happens. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change describes progress and retrenchment as “the dynamics of the struggle for racial equity. Historically, racial equity gains in specific areas have always been threatened or eroded by efforts to reinforce white privilege in other areas (e.g., Federal fair housing laws bar race discrimination but local zoning laws prevent affordable housing construction).”¹⁴ Interdependence can be about strengthening our capacity individually and collectively, co-creating a national understanding that *race does matter while changing the assumptions and the messages about race, and transforming systems, so there are not disproportional racial outcomes for children and families.*

¹² Paul Kivel, *You Call This a Democracy?—Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides?* (New York: The Apex Press, 2004), p. 157.

¹³ M. Potapchuk, *Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations*. (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004) p. 59.

¹⁴ Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, *Dismantling Structural Racism: A Racial Equity Theory of Change*.

Obviously race relations and racial justice organizations understand all too well how racism is embedded, and that the process to transform systems is long and complicated. Pursuing the path of interdependence could help lessen the usual change obstacles and serve as a catalyst in movement building. By no means is interdependence being presented as a missed opportunity or an indictment of how groups work together. We know too well how the system of racism operates. Race relations and racial justice organizations have made progress in addressing racism through their strength, tenacity, and resilience. The time may be ripe for us now to take the next step toward interdependence.

A Community of Practice

A community of practice for organizations working on race relations and racial justice would strengthen our effectiveness in addressing structural racism in communities across the nation. The definition of a community of practice is simply: “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”¹⁵ A community of practice would include three components:

1. *The Domain* – Involvement implies a “shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. They value their collective competence and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may recognize their expertise.”
2. *The Community* – “Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.”
3. *The Practice* – “Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways to address recurring problems. This takes time and sustained interaction.”¹⁶

It will be important for organizations to create the structure of their communities of practice. Elements of the community of practice could include: creating basic process points and principles for interdependent relationships; creating accountability mechanisms regionally and nationally; tracking the nuances of racism; developing a best practices clearinghouse; and sharing the latest research and policy debates, including scholar and activist convenings to create learning dialogues.

Some of the questions which could be addressed to lead to an interdependent process are:

- How do organizations frame a racial justice agenda and see themselves as part of a larger movement?
- What are different approaches' roles in a change process to create racial justice?
- Is there a way to know how to introduce a particular approach in a community change process? What needs to be present in a community for an approach/strategy to be most effective?
- Do we need to modify the way communities are typically assessed as this work begins (e.g., learning about how residents talk about race, understanding past change processes and what strategies were used, mapping current competencies and capacities by sector), so we can learn to phase in approaches to focus on individual awareness, strengthening relationships, and institutional change?

¹⁵ From Etienne Wenger's website about community of practice. <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>

¹⁶ *ibid*

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- What is our accountability among race relations and racial equity groups and how do we support each other's effectiveness?
- What are reasonable, feasible, and meaningful indicators for success or progress for the work of the community of practice (e.g., learning, relationship-building goals toward interdependence), and for the work that the members of the community of practice implement within communities and organizations (racial equity and race relations goals)?

Questions individual organizations can reflect on¹⁷:

- What does your approach assume about individual change and human nature that informs the types of programs and activities you do? (For instance, people are changeable; people are unchangeable; inner change comes from awareness of one's deepest values and the need to align one's behaviors with one's values; inner change comes from healing of emotional distress, etc.)
- When, how and with whom is your approach most effective?
- What does your approach assume about collective change, and the links between collective and individual change? (For instance, changing the attitudes of individuals will lead to changes in institutions; changing laws and policies will lead to changes in individual attitudes; change requires top-down and within-system allies; change requires outside pressure and organized demand from large numbers of constituents, etc.)
- What assumptions does your approach make about people with significant power? People with little power?
- What ultimate outcomes are your programs and activities designed to achieve?
- How do these outcomes contribute to the overall movement toward justice and equality for all people? What else is necessary, and how do you influence or contribute to outcomes that are not in your direct control? How does your approach fall short of contributing to the overall movement toward justice and equality?
- Who and what informs your organization's thinking about future goals, priorities and intended outcomes?

Interdependence and Movement-Building

Bill Moyer, author of *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*, defines social movements as “collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated, and mobilized, sometimes over years and decades, to challenge the power holders and the whole society to redress social problems or grievances and restore critical social values.”¹⁸ Cultivating interdependence among race relations and racial justice organizations could strengthen our work by generating a shared vision, creating principles of practice and establishing accountability among organizations and with our communities. It is potentially our best strategy for lessening retrenchment, responding to mutations of racism, and for making progress toward mitigating structural racism.

As mentioned earlier, interdependence is a key component in movement-building. Douglas McAdam, professor at Stanford University and author of two books on social movements, offers a critique of the limitations of contemporary social movement theory and what we need to do differently in response. The following passage about McAdam's critique is from Bill Moyer's *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*:

¹⁷ Some of these organizational reflection questions are from the national How-To Forum, Creating Collaborative Approaches to Address Racial Injustice in Communities. More information about the forum is available in the publication, *Holding Up the Mirror: Working Interdependently for Just and Inclusive Communities*, Maggie Potapchuk. (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies) 2002. p. 11-17.

¹⁸ Moyer, Bill, with JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley, and Steven Soifer. *Doing Democracy: the MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2001. p.2.

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- “Lack of study of movement dynamics and movement outcomes. While there has been considerable attention to movement emergence issues, there has been comparatively little work on movement dynamics and movement outcomes ...
- “Too little focus on activities of activists, particularly in framing processes. In studies of the emergence of social movements there has been more emphasis on structural factors that facilitate and constrain movement emergence, and less focus on the actual activities of activists who create social movements. In particular, activists’ efforts to frame issues in such a way as to build the support of various constituent have received little research attention.
- “Absence of a focus on activists’ work that creates social movements, that is, the agency of activists. McAdam notes that ‘the everyday activities of movement participants’ have been, ironically, ‘a neglected topic in the study of social movements.’ We know little about the lived experience of activism or the everyday strategic concerns of movement groups ... the movement’s own ‘theorizing through practice.’
- “Insufficient focus on movement actions in the framing process. Social movements convey their framing of an issue to the public in two ways: through public statements and through their public actions. ... There has been too much focus on the verbal and written words of social movements and not enough focus on the way in which the actions themselves frame issues.
- “Insufficient attention to non-movement actors. Research has tended to be too movement-centered and has not paid sufficient attention to the other actors in a situation, for example, the government, the media, and other ‘bystander publics’.”¹⁹

If we are working toward creation of a movement for racial equity, a community of practice could strengthen our journey toward racial equity. The following are some initial steps to help build such a community.

Define who we are: The last national directory of organizations, focused on racial reconciliation, was created in 1999.²⁰

Frame the issues: Recent research about framing racial equity messages has been conducted by three national organizations. Implement a national dissemination process to share the research and provide community organizations the tools and training needed to communicate racial equity messages more effectively.

Determine what’s working: There has been no national effort to increase the capacity of organizations to evaluate their work or to create a central clearinghouse to share practices and strategies.²¹ Evaluation is needed to: “reflect and refine what is being done; celebrate and publicize accomplishments and successes; expand engagement through information sharing; and to learn what differences the strategies made in the short- and long-term.”²²

Engage power holders in understanding the problem: One of the steps identified for movement building is engaging power holders in recognizing the problems, particularly whites. White privilege remains a vague concept to most

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.108-109.

²⁰ *Pathways to One America in the 21st Century: Promising Practices for Racial Reconciliation*, The President’s Initiative on Race. January 1999.

²¹ Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, Center for Assessment and Policy Development and MP Associates are partnering on a website, named www.racialequitytools.org to be launched in early 2009. The site will support communities working to reduce the effects of historical and current racism and related forms of privilege, racism and disadvantage. The resources included on the site will be based on their ability to help people and organizations plan and implement sufficient strategies to make a difference in their racial equity, social justice, anti-racism and/or inclusion work.

²² www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org, produced by Center for Assessment and Policy Development and MP Associates. Tipsheet cited by Sally Leiderman, CAPD.

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mainstream institutions and white power holders. Until there is a common understanding of structural racism and an historical awareness of the myth of white supremacy and its legacy, we will hamper our progress and our ability to sustain change. Understanding white privilege is a 21st century leadership capacity. It's imperative for leaders, both white people and people of color, to have tools to analyze policies, outcomes, and institutional practices and create solutions which address the root causes and not symptoms.

Philip Klinkner shares his historical observation of whites' responses to understanding the problem, in his book, *The Unsteady March*:

“But if white Americans . . ., have had powerful reasons ever since slavery to defend the various racially unequal political, economic, educational, and social arrangements they inhabit, then these shifts in public opinion may be significantly limited. We might expect that popular willingness to espouse the principles of racial equality that elites have sponsored since 1940 may not be matched by willingness to embrace policies that might actually transform those arrangements in major ways. Instead efforts to achieve such transformation are likely to be criticized on many grounds and accompanied by feelings of resentment. That is clearly what has occurred after every previous period of racial reform. And numerous studies of public opinion data provide substantial reasons to believe these reactions remain powerful in modern politics.”²³

Create a network of race relations and racial justice organizations: A community and strategic network is necessary for movement building. We need to work together to educate the American public about the costs and the debilitating realities of racism. There has been much discussion about the Bush Administration for its atrocious response to Hurricane Katrina and Rita. While we continue debate the Bush administration's response, it would be appropriate to examine how race relations and racial justice organizations responded. It's not about just improving our collective response to the next Hurricane Katrina, *it is about* the effectiveness of our strategies to confront structural racism, to motivate residents of this country to be outraged at the racial disparities, and increase their understanding of the implications of racial inequities to respond differently.

“Without a grand strategy, the disparate activists and groups involved in a movement do not have a common, consistent basis for planning, organizing, and evaluating their efforts and supporting each other. This leads to inefficiencies and unnecessary dissidence as groups go off in contradictory directions.”

—Bill Moyer, *Doing Democracy*²⁴

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²³ Klinkner, Philip A. with Rogers M. Smith. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 1999. p. 324.

²⁴ Moyer et al., *Doing Democracy*, p. 17.