

AWARE-LA STORY TELLING PROJECT

Thanks again for being willing to be a part of this multimedia and creative writing project. This is really exciting and requires effort and risk on the part of all of us storytellers.

At the end of this project, we hope to have numerous 2-3 minute stories posted on the web (on our website, a blog or maybe even YouTube) in which AWARE members tell their stories of why they are anti-racist, why they come to Saturday Dialogues or are involved with AWARE, and what current challenges they see that must be responded to with the values underlying our anti-racism work.

Below is some information on where this is all coming from. Attached are some articles from which the information on storytelling was pulled.

Background: Greensboro Project 2010

In January, the Active Resistance component of AWARE-LA announced the creation of a new campaign called the Greensboro Project 2010. Taking its name from a grassroots movement that was born in response to Jim Crow segregation in the south, this current campaign emerges out of the need to respond effectively and strategically to the continued, relentless and divisive messages and policies being driven by the White Racist Right. Whether it's the automatic objection to any reform proposed by the Obama Administration, the emergence of the Tea Party Demonstrations, or the wild rants of reactionary radio and "news" hosts, the underlying sentiment is one of hate, even though it has been successfully disguised.

In response, AWARE's Greensboro Project is a values-based campaign. Part of the success of the Right is the framing of issues within a set of values so that the conservative agenda doesn't get divided or stuck on different issues. On the left, we tend to be factionalized based on strategies, split on the issues or unable to see how our different issues are related and require our solidarity. This campaign will most likely be launched in full during a "flashpoint," such as the re-emergence of the immigration debate we can anticipate this year, when racism is sure to be exposed on the Right. Yet, we want to take it beyond that issue or any one issue. We want to build a movement, and that means bringing people together who share values and are working to build a larger vision for the city/state/country/world we want to live in.

In order to make any of this work, we need more people power – we have to build our numbers at our Saturday Dialogues. We are using storytelling as a strategy to do this.

Why Storytelling:

In AWARE, we have often talked about how to challenge racism in the moment. We have used role-plays and brainstorms to consider different strategies in what we might consider our efforts to change someone's mind about a particular way of thinking or seeing the world.

What we are focusing on now is a strategy for encouraging white people who may share similar values to us to take action – namely, to attend a Saturday Dialogue and hopefully contribute to the efforts of AWARE's work. Storytelling is the main strategy we are focusing on because it accesses the "affective," (emotions, feelings, sensations) rather than just "logic" (facts, statistics, arguments). In terms used by a nonprofit focusing on the power of storytelling called SmartMeme (www.smartmeme.com), this would be considered the "story of the battle" rather than the "battle of the story."

Marshall Ganz, a sociologist at Harvard, has written about the power of storytelling and used his theories to train organizers in the Obama for President movement. Attached are some of his articles, but to summarize, here is some of what he says:

- "Stories move us to act. Action requires risk and our willingness to take risks is rooted in our emotions, themselves rooted in our values. One way we can translate our values into the emotions that can inspire action is by telling a story."

- “They told stories of their own lives that allowed us to experience the values that drove them, allowed us to identify with them, and encouraged us to act on those values in our own lives.”
- “Points of intersection can become the focus of a shared story– the way we link individuals’ threads into a common weave. My story becomes “our” story when its project is our project, its crisis is our crisis, or its resolution teaches a moral common to us all.”
- “When we feel isolated, don’t see interests we share with others, have little access to common resources, we have no sense of shared identity, and we feel powerless. The experience of solidarity – or love – can challenge this. By articulating why we, as a group, are called to face this challenge, by calling up stories drawn from our experience, our shared culture, our community, we evoke values we hold that compel us to act.”

Your Story of Self to Us/Now:

As you begin to work on your story, consider some of the following prompts to address:

1. What lead you to become anti-racist?
2. Why do you come to Saturday Dialogues?
3. How does being part of a white anti-racist group help you work for the change you envision?

Here are some suggestions or guidelines, following Ganz’s model:

- You may include a pivotal moment that encouraged/encourages you or inspired/inspires you to be anti-racist and work with other white people for racial justice
- There should be a connection between self (one’s personal values, experiences, identities) and US/the communities we belong to (based on identity, faith, political goals, vision, etc.)
- There should be a connection to NOW (the current struggle(s)/crisis(es)/challenge(s) we are facing) – there should be some sense of urgency
- Consider the questions: Why is it that “we” are called upon to face this challenge? What is it in who we are that demands it of us? What is it in who we are that tells us we can do it?
- Express the CHOICES you’ve made in response to CHALLENGES that reflect your VALUES
- Use specific details, images, settings, reactions – take the listener to the time, place, or moment when important events happened, describing the choice(s), the reaction(s), the realization(s)
- There should be a clear CHALLENGE and clear HOPE expressed. Remember that hope cannot be abstract, it must be specific.
- For this project, it is important to make a reference to how working with AWARE or working with other white people helps you confront these current challenges and struggles in community, and maybe something about the vision for what we can create together