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Looking for Color in the Anti-War Movement



by Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez

Source: Colours of Resistance



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Colours of Resistance (COR) is a grassroots network of people who consciously work to develop anti-racist, multiracial politics in the movement against global capitalism. We are committed to helping build an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, multiracial, feminist, queer and trans liberationist, anti-authoritarian movement against global capitalism. We are committed to integrating an anti-oppression framework and analysis into all of our work.

Colours of Resistance is both a thinktank and an actiontank, linking the issues of global capitalism with their local impacts. For us, this means working locally on issues such as anti-war, police brutality, prison abolition, indigenous solidarity, affordable housing, healthcare and public transportation, environmental justice, racist immigration policies, and many more. Colours of Resistance acts as a network for us to share support, ideas, and strategies with one another across our diverse communities.

Colours of Resistance fights global capitalism with the goal of eradicating all systems of oppression that capitalism feeds and needs. We are dedicated to addressing oppressive power dynamics in our organizing. This means noticing, and changing when necessary, dynamics that may include whose voices are heard, which priorities are chosen, what actions are taken, who does the work, and who gets the credit. As one step towards this, we aim to have our network organizing collective made up of at least 2/3 people of colour and 2/3 women, and we seek to go beyond mere tokenism by recognizing the leadership of women of colour in particular.

We recognize that both organizers of colour and white organizers have roles in our work, and that these roles may be distinct from one another. For example, resisting white supremacy is not the sole responsibility of people of colour - white organizers have a responsibility to confront and challenge racism in white communities while working in solidarity with organizers of colour. Solidarity does not mean being paternalistic white 'saviours' but working alongside, and looking to the leadership of organizers of colour.

Our collective work as a network includes but is not limited to producing a zine, a website and published articles, sharing ideas through local meetings and email discussion lists, and facilitating workshops and events. While we use the internet as a networking tool, we believe that real resistance comes from real communities and are committed to rooting our work in community-based organizing.

Colours of Resistance first emerged in North America as a response to our growing feeling of a gap between what has been labelled as the 'anti-globalization' movement in the 'West' and the day-to-day organizing efforts in communities of colour to resist the impacts of global capitalism. We share a common critique of the lack of power/privilege analysis among predominantly white and middle-class anti-summit protests in the 'West' and are building a network of people who understand anti-oppression work as integral to any progressive movement building.

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Women, Raise Your Voices

In anti-war organizing by people of color, women are always a dynamic force—and the number keeps growing. Women of Arab origin head the list wherever they are found. Oakland's Women of Color Resource Center listed 10 reasons why women should oppose the war in its Women, Raise Your Voices! Campaign. Last spring, the WCRC held a conference of leaders of women's organizations across the country and continues to build on its belief that women are key to the anti-war movement.

Anti-war groups of color have been working to join forces and form alliances. Nationally there is RJ911 (Racial Justice 911, meaning September 11, 2001), a network that has held two national meetings of people of color. It is still being built. In the Bay Area RJ911 was the main sponsor of an inspiring day when Bay Area activists formed and marched together for the first time as a contingent of color on February 16, 2003. Korean drummers banged out Mexican rhythms while Puerto Ricans danced salsa with blacks and Filipinos, and a sizeable number of Chinese marched with Latinos, thanks to having organized together for lowcost housing.

San Francisco's Institute for Multiracial Justice held meetings in April and June bringing together activists from various groups who wanted to develop new tactics for anti-war work. From Los Angeles, Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), the tenants' rights group of families, and others of color brought members to the Bay Area to join in and learn from local anti-war activities.

Across the land, activists of color are working to develop the right strategy and tactics for organizing a movement that will grow beyond its initial, semi-spontaneous stage. They know, as do many white activists, that building a multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-class movement is our best hope...for preventing illegal and inhuman assaults on the world's most vulnerable people. For holding back the most powerful, most frightening empire ever seen. For transforming society into a world of peace with justice for all living creatures.



A Chicana writer, educator, and social justice activist for over 40 years, Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez has published six books on popular struggles in the Americas. Currently she is director of the Institute for MultiRacial Justice.

Part I:

Why “Anti-War” has to be “Anti-Racist” too

As a speaker at a San Francisco anti-war rally last fall, I tried to emphasize the importance of seeing the threatened war on Iraq in terms of this country's racism here and around the world. In that spirit, I ended my comments with a chant by some activists of color marching to the rally: “One, two, three, four/ We don't want your racist war!”

Few people in that mostly white crowd of some 15,000 chanted with me or clapped. I was troubled, but later that day a Bay Area anti-war movement leader told me, “You got off easy. In the 1970s, Black Panther leaders like Bobby Seale and Dave Hilliard were booed when they mentioned racism at early anti-Vietnam war rallies.”

Seeing racism as a separate, secondary issue is an old problem in the U.S. peace movement, which does not always realize that it must be anti-racist as well as anti-war. Today, with the “Permanent War” becoming all too permanent, that realization is all the more crucial. Do people really think the expanding U.S. empire will be stopped by white folks alone?

The education, mobilization, organization, participation, and leadership of people of color in the anti-war movement have been recognized as important far more today than previously. More people of color can be seen at demonstrations than during the Vietnam war. We sometimes find people of color in the leadership of anti-war organizations. For example, they compose half of the Steering Committee of the national coalition United for Peace and Justice, which also voted to make people of color half of UPJ's co- chairs and half of its Administrative Committee. Anti-war teach-ins in Spanish and bilingual publications are being produced.

Such changes are good but questions persist. Why, for example, is there not more color in today's anti-war movement when the troops who fight and die are disproportionately black, brown, and red? Why isn't there more color when those who pay such a heavy price for cutbacks in vital social services due to military spending are often people of color?

The first answer is the way that racism conditions the attitudes and conduct of many anti-war activists, often without their realizing it. There are also obstacles within communities of color, frequently rooted in experiences of racism, that impede their own anti-war organizing. We can begin with some thoughts about the first problem—how racist ideas and practice among white activists hold back building the strongest possible anti-war movement.

“Diversity Is Not Our Job”

Throughout history, U.S. peace groups have been primarily composed of and led by whites, mostly middle-class men. On one level, this happens because anti-war whites usually reach out first to friends or acquaintances and this means other whites. That still holds true today for the anti-war movement and its frequent partner, the anti-corporate globalization or global justice movement. It has often held true for the white-led solidarity movements of recent years, like the main organizations supporting popular struggles in Central America, for example.

It also holds true today even in racially diverse cities like San Francisco. The problem became obvious to this writer when four coalitions put on the big February 16, 2003 demonstration (Feb. 15 elsewhere). At meetings I attended of their coordinating committee, out of 25 representatives you might find a half dozen of color and an even smaller proportion under 40 years of age (few of whom played a leading role in the discussion).

Far too many cases have occurred across the country of white activists showing ignorance, indifference, or arrogance toward people of color. Incidents might be as major as the Washington, D.C. protest against the World Bank and the IMF on April 16, 2000, when no Black or Latino leaders were asked to speak at the main event—an amazing omission, given the colors of Washington, DC. Or they might be as minor as when a Chicano in Sacramento, California encountered a peace activist leafletting at a food cop. He asked if there would be speakers of color at the event she was promoting, and the activist replied, “Diversity is not our job.”

Cases of whites refusing to acknowledge and accept leadership from activists and organizations of color head the list of structural problems. Not calling on activists of color at meetings or favoring those deemed “the most articulate” has been noted. White activists starting coalitions without input from or serious outreach to people of color and then calling the coalition “citywide” have occurred, in places such as New York. White activists have used their greater resources to dominate a coalition.

Sometimes the conflict concerns tactics. For example, whites planning civil disobedience may forget that immigrants and others of color risk jail, deportation and special police violence for participating. As a Chicano organizer commented, “there are young white activists who do not think beyond the fact that they can get arrested and be out of jail overnight with no serious problems. They do not recognize that white privilege—combined with class privilege—can make this happen.”

Often the problem is culture clash. It might be marginalizing non-English speaking immigrants and rarely thinking of the need for translation of literature, meetings, or slogans. There can also be conflicts about style of work as basic as how a meeting is chaired. Participants of color may end up feeling that a meeting had a very “white style”—meaning a tendency to move in a strictly linear direction, with no time allowed for building trust and new leadership.

The problem can be hard to finger at times. A person of color at a mostly white meeting may feel that veiled power relations are in operation, but be unable to identify just how. One Chicano student activist commented that while white-dominated meetings may be supposedly “leaderless,” actually informal and therefore unaccountable leaders are calling the shots. Those same dynamics can be observed in all-white meetings, but the feeling of exclusion usually intensifies for a person of color.

Such problems led to sharp criticism on a KPFA (Pacifica) “Hard-Knock Radio” program, in which hip hop activists discussed whether the anti-war movement was a whites-only mission. One person said that organizers will call for peace around the world but “when it comes to people of color here, they just want Peace on the Plantation.”

In Oakland, Youth Together has worked intensely in five high schools with school-wide teach-ins, workshops connecting the war with budget cuts, and mobilizing for major demonstrations.

Other groups doing similar work in Oakland include the Youth Empowerment Center and the East Side Arts Alliance. Bojil (formerly Olin) has done leafletting and made flags, along with Conscious Roots and San Francisco City College students, as part of the Schools Not Jails Coalition. These youth, who include many Latinos, also do media work.

In LA, Youth Organizing Communities with its Students Not Soldiers campaign has made military recruiters know they are unwelcome at two high schools including Roosevelt, the nation’s largest. YOC has also worked to make students aware that their parents must register with school authorities that they do not want personal information about their children given to the military. In Chicago the SW Youth Collaborative-Generation Y Project, with a strong base among Arab and Palestinian residents, has also done educational work on Palestine, Iraq, and other key issues. They will launch a Still We Rise campaign this fall.

The educational and organizing work that can bring more people of color to oppose the Bush wars and empire-building must emphasize the connections with people’s daily lives and how they are hurt in material ways. Self-interest exists and must be shown. But there is another kind of consciousness to be raised.

Let us remember the anger and sense of injustice people of color in this land can and do feel when they learn of what the U.S. has done to millions of people around the world, mostly people who look and struggle and suffer like them. The killing of up to 8,000 civilians in Iraq during the bombings last spring should be personally unacceptable to us all. It is a moral imperative that we affirm their humanity and thus our own. Never has there been a more important time to stand and shout at this nation’s rulers: No, no, not in our name.

Go To Church Already

Another crucial and often neglected constituency is church-goers. Anti-war organizing grew in Williamsburg, New York, as a result of El Puente’s building a base in local Catholic churches. On Good Friday this year some 5,000 Latinos in Williamsburg participated in a march combining the message of Good Friday with anti-war spirit. In Chicago, a community Methodist church brought together 100 other churches—mostly of Latinos and Blacks—in a coalition that held demonstrations and other anti-war activities.

In Washington, DC last May, more than 1,000 grassroots Black people attended a peace rally at the Plymouth Congregational Church. Talk about the war and domestic evils such as police brutality and denial of health care stirred the crowd. Damu Smith, who heads Black Voices for Peace, emphasized that the event was “coming out of the Black experience.”

’ As anti-war organizers often ask, why aren’t people of color (as well as whites) doing more in the churches, especially since the leaders of all major denominations have spoken out against the U.S. wars?

defined as “against imperialism” rather than “for peace.” Fighting U.S. imperialism echoes their own historical struggle, dating back to slavery. Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina issued a statement in late 2002 taking that anti-imperialist perspective even further. It emphasized the importance of “concretely linking the struggles of all People of Color and the oppressed internationally for a better world.”

From all this organizing experience, one message emerges: perhaps the most effective way to build anti-war activism in communities of color is first to establish a base within each community, to begin where the people are, and grow. Organized activists of color then come to the table with white groups much more ready to form coalitions or alliances. At the same time, we can hope that the Anglo activists have developed anti-racist views and practices among themselves. We should also affirm the value of organizing according to communities other than those defined by color, such as women, gays, students, elders, the disabled, artists, and others.

Learning From Our Histories

Among the tools useful in advancing our anti-war organizing today is teaching our own histories of anti-war work. Martin Luther King spoke out against the Vietnam war in 1967 despite being strongly advised that he should “stick to civil rights issues” or lose support. Julian Bond of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s (more recently Chair of the NAACP) opposed the Vietnam war. That cost him the seat he had won in the Georgia state legislature. In Harlem, thousands of African Americans marched against the draft. One sign carried the unforgettable words of Vietnam war resister Mohammad Ali: “No Vietcong ever call me nigger!”

Among Asian Pacific Islanders, intense organizing took place from coast to coast. It included the Bay Area Asian Coalition Against the War, the Asian Coalition Against the War in New York, and the Van Troi Anti-Imperialist Youth Brigade of Vietnamese people in Los Angeles. Japanese Americans organized in San Francisco’s J-Town, and Filipinos also in that city. At times activists in the three cities demonstrated simultaneously.

One of the best-kept secrets about the anti-Vietnam war movement is the Chicano protests during 1970 in various parts of California. They even included Fresno, in the conservative Valley area, and culminated in the August 29, 1970 Chicano Moratorium against the war in Los Angeles. Some 20,000 people marched that day. In the middle of a peaceful rally we were tear-gassed, chased, and sometimes beaten by hundreds of police. Repression by police that afternoon left three Chicanos dead. Rubén Salazar, a Los Angeles Times reporter whose articles had criticized the police, was shot to death as he sat inside a bar after the attack.

As these stories reveal, standing against war is not new or alien to communities of color. We have our heroes and martyrs; we can be inspired by them.

That heritage should be made known, especially to youth of color, some of whom have been very active in anti-war work. Education about the war, demonstrating against the cutbacks in spending on schools while more prisons are built, and opposition to military recruitment are three major issues for youth organizers.

There’s A War At Home, Too

The racist practices described here are symptomatic of stubbornly held ideas that include, first, denying there is a war at home along with today’s wars abroad, and the two are intimately connected. Second, denying that both are racist wars (as well as apparently forgetting that U.S. foreign policy is fundamentally rooted in racism).

Angela Davis once noted that the black community did not join the anti-Vietnam war movement in great numbers (even though blacks have been largely anti-war, one could add). One reason, she said, was that it did not see white peace activists energetically defending the Black Panthers, who were fighting a war for survival at the time.

In the same spirit, David Graham Du Bois, stepson of the revered scholar, recently wrote in an “Open Letter to the U.S. Peace Movement” that, confronted by the Iraq war, Black Americans “are generally silent largely because there has been so little evidence that those who call us into the streets to demonstrate for peace understand how color racism and white supremacy are used in the United States against the interests of peace, justice and the pursuit of happiness for all peoples. It is not enough to call up the peace legacy of Martin Luther King, in speeches and slogans... You must organize to end racism with the same enthusiasm and determination as you organize to stop the war.”

Similarly, Earl Ofari Hutchinson wrote in 1991 soon after the Rodney King beating in L.A., “How is it that thousands of white activists can wage passionate campaigns against oppression and human rights abuses in Chile, El Salvador, South Africa...but not in the ghettos and barrios of their own cities?”

As these African Americans affirm, peace activists have often failed to recognize that there is a “war at home” along with the wars abroad, and that the war at home includes an unending struggle with racism as shown in the criminalization of youth, the expanding prison industrial complex, ongoing inequality in social institutions like schools and housing, and a constant stream of actions to take back the gains of the 1960’s like affirmative action and bilingual education.

Today the war at home has intensified. People of color suffer severely from its effects, as seen in massive new attacks in the name of Homeland Security. Under the Special Registration program, over 13,000 Arab, Muslim, South Asian, and North African males who complied with the program face deportation, almost all for minor immigration violations. This represents a huge increase in racial profiling and criminalizing immigrants, especially those of color. Another direct connection between the wars abroad and at home can be seen in the deadly cuts in funding education, health care, child care, and low-cost housing for the sake of gigantic military spending.

These and other realities carry a stark message: the same capitalist, empire-building forces that impose the wars abroad also impose the war at home. The main victims of both are peoples of color. Both are racist wars. We cannot oppose one and not the other.

Although white anti-war activists may recognize that communities of color are engaged in longstanding struggles against white supremacy and for self-determination, most do not see (or want to see) the linkage between those struggles and building the anti-war movement. That blindness underlies many of the problems we have seen in building anti-war unity across color lines. One

simple example: lack of respect for leadership by people of color, in many situations.

The drive for self-determination is also ignored in the way many white activists look at Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation and fail to see its relationship to the whole U.S. empire-building project. Instead of solidarity, Arab American activists have noted, some whites say those who support Palestine's struggle are anti-Semitic; some fear alienating Jews if they do support Palestine; some dismiss that struggle out of total ignorance about Israeli, Arab, and Islamic history, or they think Islam oppresses women across the board so too bad for Palestine.

War Resisters League Resists What?

A major example of resistance to defining the anti-war struggle as anti-racist can be found in the War Resisters League, which has been almost entirely white for 80 years. Last February David McReynolds of its Executive Committee, widely admired for his work against the Vietnam war, resigned from all posts.

The immediate cause named by McReynolds was the vote by the WRL's National Committee to retain a project called ROOTS (originally Youth Peace), which had been created several years earlier to increase the League's young membership. ROOTS is staffed by people of color. In explaining his resignation, McReynolds wrote that by voting to retain ROOTS, the majority had set the League "on a course which... [could] result in the end of the organization. That course was to shift our primary focus from being a peace and disarmament organization... to a 'broader focus' in which the League would be not only an 'antiwar' organization, but also an 'anti-racist' organization."

McReynolds commented that the causes of war "sometimes—though not as often as the 'politically correct caucus' thinks—[include] racism... I have seen Clergy and Laity Concerned, once a voice for peace and social change, vanish after it capitulated to its own 'politically correct' group which insisted that if CALC was serious about racism it had to turn over a majority of its board to members of color. It did so..." McReynolds also stated very briefly and without examples that "almost none" of ROOTS' material (primarily a youth-oriented newsletter) is pacifist, contrary to WRL basic principles.

Some WRL members have questioned why being officially anti-racist is so controversial when the WRL had no great problem agreeing to declare itself anti-sexist. Today upheaval continues within the WRL, with hopes of positive change. ROOTS continues and WRL remains in the United for Peace and Justice (UPJ) coalition.

The Open Letter About Racism

With many problems of racism in the movement surfacing during 2002-2003, the position taken by McReynolds and others in the WRL became "the straw that broke the back of silence concerning those problems," as a national UPJ leader told me. The result: an "Open Letter About Racism in the Movement" circulated among thousands of activists shortly after the February 15/16, 2003 rallies. Issued by a multi-racial group in New York City, the Open Letter discussed white supremacy as experienced by its authors over a one-year period. It listed many of the problems already mentioned in this article.

profit sector, which can make funding the priority.
Lack of capacity and resources.

In the case of Black Americans, Bill Fletcher of TransAfrica Forum has said that, as a society, they are economically and psychologically depressed today. "Worn down by all the deprivation and attacks of recent years, they are a battered people. Such a state of being leads many to think struggle is not worthwhile."

Overcoming The Obstacles

Many individuals of color are opposed to the wars and empire-building even if they don't participate in demonstrations or join anti-war organizations. What might overcome the obstacles and make them more ready to get involved?

Anti-war organizers of color will say: education is key. That process must include drawing out the connections between people's immediate concerns—the bread-and-butter issues—and the war. An obvious example is the brutal cutbacks in education, health care, child care, and other social services to finance the biggest military budget seen in years. Another is the vast increase in racial profiling and criminalizing immigrants of color by such means as the "Special Registration" program.

People of color have sometimes become active against the war in places where organizations already exist that have won respect for their work on an issue important to local residents. In New York and Chicago, for example, organized Latino opposition to U.S. militarism against Vieques, Puerto Rico made it natural to take on Bush's wars and empire-building. The result has been one of the strongest pockets of Latino organizing in the U.S. Also in New York, anti-war activism has been launched by people of color already organized around such issues as welfare rights, reparations, and immigrant rights, like CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities. A group in Los Angeles, Centro (CSO), had a Latino base for years that enabled it to help Latinos Against the War win support.

In these cases, the existence of trust together with education about how the foreign and domestic wars are connected helped pave the way for involvement. Monami Maulik, director of Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) in New York has pointed out that the current war on terrorism criminalizes immigrant communities much as the "war on drugs" criminalized African American and Latino communities for years. That kind of historical comparison helps advance the educational process.

Immediate connections also exist. Korean Americans constantly hear U.S. threats to attack their homeland because of its nuclear weapons. To them, the war abroad and the war at home are inseparable; recently they have energetically organized educational events and protests in the U.S. Filipinos have similar connections. Even before the war, many were engaged, directly or indirectly, in opposing U.S. militarism and its puppets in the Philippines. Their anti-war organizing has been intensified by the firing of over 1,000 baggage screeners at airports in the Bay Area, the vast majority Filipino, for being non-citizens.

A subtle linkage between U.S. wars abroad and the war at home can be found in the way African American activists often say they will join a struggle

- The U.S. mass media with their lies, distortions and omissions of reality. Unlike white society, few people of color have access to alternative media (especially not in Chinese or other Asian languages). A Pew poll last April found that support for the Iraq war was far lower from immigrant Latinos—who often came from countries with direct knowledge of U.S. imperialism—than from Latinos born here, who had been barraged by mainstream media all their lives.
- The feeling that there are no leaders and ordinary people cannot take the action needed without strong leaders (failing to think of themselves as leaders).
- Among Blacks and Latinos, the contradiction of anger at U.S. racism existing alongside a desire for respect from the white-dominated society, and especially the opportunity to win that respect in wartime. Black poet Brian Gilmore, in the Progressive, quoted W.E.B. DuBois referring to these feelings as that tragic state of “double consciousness.”
- Identification with the U.S. as a nation, especially in relation to other countries: not nationalism, but nation-ism.
- Fear of attending anti-war demonstrations because of repression by police, who target people of color.
- A general dread of any contact with the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), especially since 9/11. Thousands of Arab, Islamic people and South Asians in particular have suffered mass roundups, indefinite imprisonment without cause under brutal conditions, and deportation. The recent expulsion of many Cambodians, and the threatened expulsion of hundreds more, has intensified that dread. Earlier, under “Operation Tarmac,” came the raids and subsequent firing of Latino immigrant airport workers, first in Salt Lake City in December 2001 and then Seattle in April, 2002, none on criminal charges.
- For Latinos as for Asians, difficulty in unifying all their different nationalities against the war, given the diversity of class, language, politics, religion, attitudes about gender and sexuality, and others.
- Dislike of working within the white-dominated anti-war movement, given its racist tendencies. A single meeting can turn you off.
- Fear of conflict with pro-war family or friends.

Hany Kahlil, of the United for Peace and Justice staff based in New York, has added several other very concrete problems, summarized as:

When you haven't experienced your own power to keep a health clinic open or get a stop-sign on a street, for example, you have difficulty imagining you can take on something huge like a war, so why try?

It's hard to sustain energy and hope if we don't have measurable benchmarks for progress. For example, we need to see where our campaigns fall far short of stopping a war but are steps that strengthen our base and win allies.

Many groups have shied away from taking on the war in part because they are afraid of dividing their organization's membership. We need to be prepared to struggle with our own people if necessary. That fear overlaps with the problem that much of our work is concentrated in the non-

That Open Letter was an encouraging move, especially when compared to other events. For example, in April, 2003, in the Boston area, the popular white anti-racist speaker Tim Wise was scheduled to speak on the topic “Racism and White Privilege in the Peace Movement.” Somehow his title was changed to “Race and the Peace Movement.”

White Efforts To Combat Racism

As that Open Letter confirmed, anti-war white activists have been critical of racism in the movement. On a minimal level, they often express regret that their meetings include too few people of color. This regret can lead to no concrete action or tokenism. Alternately, they will agree, “Yes, we must get more people of color involved,” but as Tonto might have said to the Lone Ranger, “Who is ‘we,’ white man?” In other words, they aim to “diversify” what continues to be their movement in their eyes, rather than seeking to build alliances between equals.

More serious efforts by white anti-war activists to combat racist tendencies can be dated back decades. Anne Braden, the longtime, white southern anti-racist leader, wrote a groundbreaking article in 1987, “Undoing Racism: Lessons for the Peace Movement,” offering analysis and concrete recommendations that work for today.

An unusual example of whites collaborating to solve such problems with people of color as equals developed in September 2001 in the Albany, New York area. The Stand for Peace Anti-Racism Committee (SPARC) was formed “to build an anti-racist, multi-racial movement for justice and peace.” SPARC organized a forum held last August 13 for people of color “to discuss our involvement and leadership in working for peace and justice” and strategies for “how we can make connections” in combating the wars at home and around the globe.

The forum drew a diverse group of 30 or more people, about one-third of whom had not been politically active in the past. Thus “it turned out to be more of a speakout than an in-depth discussion of strategic questions,” said African American scholar/activist Barbara Smith. But the spirit of the meeting was enthusiastic and participants expressed strong interest in continuing the dialogue at a follow-up meeting that same month.

In November 2001, New York City (70 percent people of color) saw a group of 10 young(ish) white organizers and activists put out a powerful letter called “An Anti-Racist Coalition? We have a long way to go.” They included members of mostly local groups working for the rights of welfare recipients, workers (UNITE), gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people (FIERCE) and others who had attended meetings to plan for an October 7 march. Their letter sharply criticized those meetings for marginalizing people of color as well as youth and working-class participants. It also presented many practical suggestions for improvement.

Other ideas and actions have come from white anti-racist groups like Active Solidarity and Heads Up in the Bay Area, and AWARE in Philadelphia. Direct Action to Stop War, also of the Bay Area, which shut down San Francisco's financial district the day after war was declared, saw positive efforts in anti-racist organizing.

San Francisco's Chris Crass, of the Challenging White Supremacy (CWS) Workshops, has put together an informal "toolbox" for whites. It begins with a broad political recommendation: develop an analysis of war that connects U.S. empire-building abroad to the war at home. Understand that demands for peace without justice ring hollow in communities that face structural violence every day, whether the U.S. is dropping bombs elsewhere or not.

The list includes what Sharon Martinas, creator of CWS programs, has called "anti-racist toilet training," for whites. For example:

Attend an anti-racist training and encourage other white activists to do so.

Recognize how white privilege consistently socializes white activists to think of themselves as superior.

Instead of that eurocentric "come join us" approach, check in with organizations of color working against war at home and abroad.

Respect the leadership of people of color. Be accountable; do what you say you will do.

Prioritize reading books by radical people of color, especially feminists.

Learn more about the struggles of communities of color.

Set concrete goals for yourself that can be measured, such as: in one month, will talk with two white anti-racist activists in my community and two of color.

Remember that it is not your intentions or motives that count but the impact of your actions as a white person in a white supremacist society.

The Black civil rights movement of the 1960's shows it is possible for vast numbers of white people in this land to say a loud "no" to actions and policies that exclude, demean, or marginalize people of color. Everyone should remember William Moore, Mickey Schwerner, Andy Goodman, Jonathan Daniels, Viola Liuzzo, and other white activists killed in the southern freedom struggle. Their lives were not worth more than any black life lost in that movement, but their commitment set an inspiring contemporary example for anti-racist whites.

The time is more than ripe to show that commitment again. Whites should not only say "no" to racism but also carry out energetic campaigns of "yes" to any action that advances genuine collaboration. This is no simple or easy task, but what could be more worthwhile?

A young white friend wrote last year, "Wouldn't it be beautiful if we could get thousands of white organizers all over the country to reject those old racist habits? To stop thinking of their work as the center of everything and educate other white folks too? To see why they have to fight racism along with militarism so the solidarity we talk about is real? Then we could truly say: another world is possible."

Part II: Anti-War Organizing Among People of Color

An Emergency Summit Conference of Asian, Black, Brown, Puerto Rican, and Red people against the war was held in Gary, Indiana on June 3-4, the first such meeting ever held in the United States...over 300 delegates attended the historic conference," said the article in the newspaper *El Grito del Norte*.

The year was 1971. The war was in Vietnam. Today people of color do not yet have the collective strength of those years and there are major obstacles to anti-war organizing in our communities. We cannot just blame racism from whites for blocking our participation if we are not doing everything possible to build effectively among ourselves. People of color need to be so strong, so numerous, and so effective that they cannot be ignored.

The obstacles start with class issues. A widespread feeling exists in communities of color that anti-war activism can't be a priority when folks are struggling with daily problems of survival—paying the rent, doctors' bills, bad schools, drugs in the 'hood—as well as direct racist attacks. Along with job and family, where's the time? Poor and working-class African Americans may say, "We can't be protesting the war, we've got to be defending ourselves...anti-war stuff is for white middle-class kids."

Immigrants, especially the undocumented, often keep quiet for fear of losing their livelihood or being deported if they speak out or sound "un-American." Older immigrants may say they feel gratitude or debt to the U.S. for their improved economic condition and their children's. Low-income youth of color may be attracted to the military as the only road to college, a good job, and U.S. citizenship.

Middle-class activists of color (as well as whites) sometimes say that grassroots people just don't grasp foreign policy or don't want to be bothered. Actually those activists may really be blaming "the masses" for a supposed lack of intelligence as a way of hiding their own unwillingness to struggle with complex international issues. When a brother says with well-founded cynicism, "This war stuff is the same old crap"—does that really mean he would never understand or care about the stakes?

Anti-war organizing can be impeded by middle-class, conservative, often intensely anti-Communist organizations of color. They may oppose going against the war because it could undermine their work on what they call "more important issues," not to mention their financial support. Among Latinos, we find the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) not wanting Mexicano anti-war activists in this year's Cinco de Mayo parade in Houston, Texas. Blacks have similar organizations as do South Vietnamese people in northern California.

For African Americans, seeing Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice at the top adds a complicating perspective. If they had opposed the wars, their rare success as Blacks making it into the halls of power would have been impossible.

These examples leave us asking not just where is the color in the anti-war movement but also "where is the working class?"—a question for white activists also. Other obstacles to our anti-war organizing include: