

A report to members...

White antiracist convention

Why a white antiracist convention?

If we are to make significant change in the racial structure of the United States within our lifetimes, then clearly white people must become actively engaged in the process in a visible and significant way. Yet the predominantly white mainstream remains largely disassociated from antiracist activities, and the activity of those white people who do pursue antiracist ends is generally unseen and unheard by the larger public.

A recent example can be found in the reaction to an article by Tim Wise, a white antiracist activist who wrote a critique of white culture and the media in relation to school shootings. The article became an Internet phenomenon, and Wise received over 5,000 emails. Many people doubted he was white. Clearly they held an implicit model of antiracists that said such work is only done by people of color, and just as clearly their model assumed that white people do not work toward antiracist goals. Wise even went so far as to post his picture on his web site.

We find a situation in today's society in which:

- White people and their antiracist efforts are invisible.
- White people rarely engage in collective action.
- Those white people who do engage in collective action often do so to advance a program of white supremacy.
- Models still reinforce racism as a problem that people of color must solve alone.

- There continues to be a basic belief that whites have no stake in changing a racist society, and in fact will lose power, position and privilege if they do.

Undoing racial privilege and oppression and dismantling the racial structure of our country are goals that cannot be accomplished by one group alone, whether it be people of color or white people. So long as the efforts of white antiracists remain unseen, the predominantly white mainstream will not feel compelled to take the visible efforts of people of color seriously. Rather, they are free to assume such efforts are marginal threats to a cohesive, self-satisfied, and predominantly white center. We need to disrupt that assumption, and the complacency it fosters.

How are we going to do that?

We propose to bring about a white antiracist convention. History tells us conventions have sometimes been significant means to shape public opinion and introduce radical notions of reform to a broad public. The Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights of 1848 led to numerous local conventions around the country, several subsequent national conventions, and set an agenda we still look to today. Nineteenth century abolitionists staged several conventions, both national and international. The Niagara Convention of 1905, called by W.E.B. DuBois, gave direction to the African American struggle of the time. More recently the 1965 UN-sponsored International

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Six years and counting

April 30 marked the completion of our sixth year of operation, and on or about that date we passed another milestone. For the first time in our history, we have more than 100 members—101 to be precise.

The Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc. was set up with a sort of “in your face” philosophy. Not that we valued confrontation for its own sake. Our concern and frustration was that people—more accurately, white people—were simply not talking about whiteness. We chose to be an organization that challenged that, and we chose a name that made that challenge inescapable for us, and for those who came to know our work. The mid-1990s were exciting times. Following on work in the academic sector, there was a rising awareness of the need to discuss whiteness and white privilege.

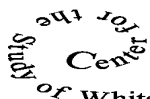
As we move on into the new century, things have quieted down somewhat. Curiously, this comes in the face of growing resistance to global capitalism, and a dismaying persistence of the uglier side of racism—growing economic disparities, police brutality, the complete abandonment of Affirmative Action.

Simply pointing to whiteness, white culture, and white privilege no longer has the impact it once did. That’s good in a way. People have heard the terms and know there is something there to be contested, even if they deny the impact it has on their lives. The topic has entered the mainstream, and even though disparaged and ridiculed often times, the discussion of whiteness is no longer totally ignored.

Oddly enough, we have not been able to settle back and reap the financial and institutional benefits of our work. Having played a significant role in bringing the examination of whiteness and white culture into the mainstream, we now see it everywhere (compared to 1995), yet we still struggle to make do.

Maybe that’s the way it’s supposed to be. We began on the cutting edge. As events move forward, it may be time to go there once again.

Jeff Hitchcock
Executive Director
Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc.



White American Culture, Inc.

The *Membership Newsletter* is a publication of the Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc. sent exclusively to its members 4 times per year. The Center for the Study of White American Culture is a multiracial organization whose mission is to define and examine white United States culture and to address its role in, and impact on, the greater American culture.

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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination set in motion events still unfolding today. And of course the Constitutional Convention of 1787 resulted in the political structure of the United States.

Conventions are a tried and proven way to bring new movements to light. They often result in statements and the formation of ongoing structures and organizations to carry out the purposes they designate as crucial to their concerns. Although we are in the early stages of planning, and hence are not ready to specify any final result, we take as our beginning purpose the following:

- To raise, connect and enhance the leadership of antiracist white people and their allies of color.
- To heighten the visibility of antiracist white people and their allies of color and underscore the importance of the work they are doing.
- To foster a community of antiracist white people and their allies of color.
- To model a multiracial process, and the role of antiracist white people and their allies of color who are both accountable to this process and working to achieve their ends within it.

Why the Center? Why us?

As a multiracial organization committed to addressing white American culture and racism, the Center, in our six years of operation, has earned a reputation for integrity and leadership. Although the world of white awareness and antiracism is a small one, within that world we are broadly known among activists and academics alike. We have also had success reaching out to a wider public and gaining favorable coverage in the media. Because of this, we are probably within one or two personal contacts of every person with a significant involvement in white antiracist activism. We have our history as founder of the National Conference on Whiteness series, which has included four successful conferences. In 1999 we also held a White Leadership Roundtable that included a dozen white antiracist leaders from across the country.

We have sought to apply our principles of change by sharing power and control of the collective processes we originate. People and organizations know they can work with us and not have to walk a narrow ideological line. Our pattern has been to share power and control in return for broader participation and contributions of resources from other groups. This has proven successful in encouraging other organizations to join with us.

Creating a broad and inclusive process

We are in a good position to begin the process. But, since we hope the convention will draw upon the full scope of white antiracism and speak for the many people and organizations doing this work, it is equally clear to us the convention must have a greater base than our organization. We hope to be a catalyst, but at some point the process must take responsibility for itself. As a catalyst, we envision a structure that will take on a life of its own, resulting in an organization whose sole purpose is to stage the Convention itself.

Expectation of multiracial participation

It is our hope, intention, and expectation that the Convention and the events leading up to it include significant participation by people of color and white people who support the practice of white antiracism, and that furthermore this representation be empowered to affect policy and planning. In our vision, both white activists and activists of color are accountable to one another in creating a multiracial process. Staging the White Antiracist Convention is a means to that end. Consequently, we intend that people of color continue to be present in the planning from the earliest moment and be included in key preparatory meetings, events, and ad hoc organizations. We anticipate that as our plans develop, people will come to us with the intention of joining the effort as representatives of various localities, regions or organizations. We welcome this, but add the provision that we expect each group who might contact us to have in place a means whereby they are accountable to a multiracial and antiracist process in some tangible and significant way.

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Development of preparatory meetings, events, and ad hoc organizations

We hope the Convention draws a large number of people. But the planning will take time. Word needs to go out and discussions need to be held. Organizing must take place at local, regional and national levels in order to create the opportunity and achieve the potential we seek. Much of the preliminary review of ideas, approaches, language and goals should already have been accomplished by the time the final event unfolds. Indeed, much of the value of the event lies in the networking it will foster, and the likelihood of success depends greatly on the degree of common understanding and shared purpose we can develop before the event begins.

What's the time frame, and what are some key steps?

Plans are tentative and subject to change. Right now we envision approximately a two-year time frame. Our plans include the following:

2001

Formation of an **Advisory Council** - a multiracial group consisting of seasoned activists with a history of supporting white antiracist practice.

Formation of a **Conference Planning Group** - the administrative core of the planning process, including representatives from past sponsors of the National Conference on Whiteness series.

Formation of **Student Associations** - a network of student campus groups who support the white antiracist efforts and the goals of the Convention.

2002

White Antiracist Leadership Conference - a pre-Convention event drawing together a small group of representatives from the Advisory group, the Planning group, and Student groups to establish an independent organization, process and guidelines to manage the Convention process.

The **Convention** and associated events

Our next steps

- Clarify the roles and requirements for the various groups we are forming.
- Raise financial resources to sponsor this effort.
- Begin a low level, word of mouth campaign to inform potential supporters and representatives.

What can members do?

- Send donations, payable to Center for Study and earmarked for the "white antiracist convention." We have established a fund to support planning. The greatest need will be to cover travel costs to develop discussions in various parts of the country.
- Share our plan with potential supporters and representatives. People do not have to be members of the Center to participate. Right now we are looking to quietly alert people to our plans.
- Advise us of people whom we should contact regarding our plan. Though we know many people who support white antiracist efforts, there are others who have not come to our attention. Tell us whom you know who might be interested.
- Think of how local organizing efforts might develop ad hoc organizations or events that can tie into the Convention process. As plans progress, we hope to organize local and regional committees. When the Convention takes place, we hope to see events held locally across the country in support of our purpose.

We look forward to hearing your responses to this idea. Please let us know how you will be supporting us in the effort to move this concept forward. We need each of you to make this vision a reality. We **MUST** stand up, let our voices be heard, and take actions that speak to the power we collectively have to change.