



AWARE-LA THEORY OF PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

AWARE-LA recognizes personal transformation as a key component of social change and collective liberation. We believe that when a white community dedicated to personal transformation supports the development of a positive* white anti-racist identity, white people are able to locate their personal stake in anti-racism and collective liberation. This supports engagement in sustained, collective action over time toward societal transformation. We believe personal transformation is a life-long process for white identified people, which includes a life-long commitment to allyship/solidarity with Black people, Indigenous peoples, and People of Color.

Purpose: To grow white anti-racist people's capacity to:

- 1) develop cross-race relationships
- 2) engage in anti-racist practices
- 3) take part in collective action
- 4) recruit more white people into anti-racism

Essential Understandings

- **Social change requires a mass-based movement**, and all white people are invited to participate. We meet people where they are, accepting those who are not yet organizers or activists, connecting them to a collective working for systemic change.
- **Moving from individualism to collective action** involves lovingly inviting white people to sit in the tension between the value of personal development and the need to participate in collective action that changes systems.
- **Action and learning is based in community**, not done alone. We need a community of white anti-racists and ongoing allyship/solidarity with Black people, Indigenous peoples, and People of Color as accountability partners.
- **Transformation is a life-long process of learning and unlearning** which looks different for different people. Growth is not uniform, and does not involve one-directional development. It requires stepping out of our comfort zone, making mistakes, getting feedback, reflecting, and taking action of many kinds.
- **Growth changes the way we live.** Personal transformation is facilitated by reading and research, but it cannot be limited to internal growth. It requires altering our life choices, behaviors, and actions based on new insights into how racism and oppression operate in our lives and society.

***Theoretical basis:** *"The task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her Whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member's 'white pride,' but in the context of a commitment to a just society." Finding "a more positive self-definition" is an essential part of the racial identity process, as "White people must seek new ways of thinking about Whiteness, ways that take them beyond the role of victimizer."*

- Tatum, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations on Race*, 1997, pgs. 94-108.

IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS

Deepening Awareness into:

- The history of racism, oppression, and the construction of whiteness in the U.S. before and after the country's founding, including cultural loss due to immigration and assimilation.
- The history of anti-racism, including the white anti-racists who came before us.
- How white supremacy and capitalism are wedded and inherently tied together, requiring a focus on economic justice, reparations, and a redistribution of wealth.
- The historical and ongoing benefits of white privilege in our lives, and how this contributes to white supremacy culture and the oppressions that it inflicts on others.
- How we enact whiteness and support white supremacy.
- The intersecting nature of systems of oppression and the result that we cannot rid society of one without ridding society of all of them, requiring that anti-racists also need to be anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-classist, anti-ableist, etc.
- White people as multifaceted and having multiple social identities (such as gender, class, and ability), each of which brings different types of privileges or discrimination.

Developing a Sustainable Anti-Racist Identity and Effective Practice that includes:

- Developing a sense of our personal stake in working to liberate ourselves from white supremacy, while recognizing how white supremacy culture harms us as well.
- Reflecting on our experience of whiteness with other white people who want to be anti-racist.
- Acknowledging that even while we strive to be anti-racist we remain embedded in systems of oppressions, and distancing ourselves from other white people does not support the movement for collective liberation.
- Resolving shame about being white and any overwhelming feelings of guilt, towards a more grounded identity.
- Developing a sense of "right-sized" voice and leadership, which involves finding a balance that allows us to avoid either falling into arrogant saviorism or minimizing ourselves to the point of erasure.
- Embracing an attitude of being "perfectly imperfect," accepting that our anti-racist journey includes making mistakes and receiving feedback.
- Being open to critical feedback and sitting with the discomfort this can cause.
- Dedicating ourselves to learning and change, which is expressed through requesting challenging feedback.
- Developing empathy for ourselves and other white people as we unlearn societal conditioning so that we might successfully influence more white people to work against the system of white supremacy.
- Exploring how whiteness lives in our white bodies, emerges viscerally, and requires conscious attention so that we can develop the emotional capacity required to engage in effective anti-racism.
- Working within an anti-racist white community in order to receive support and guidance while developing and implementing our anti-racism practice.
- Striving to understand the value of diverse tactics used by activists and organizers to push for systemic change and be willing to engage in principled dialogue and conflict about them without undermining the broader movement.