Doing Our Own Work is an intensive seminar for white people who seek to deepen their commitment to understanding, analyzing, confronting and challenging systemic racism and white privilege where they live, work, study, worship, and volunteer. It is our experience and conviction that those of us who are white need to "do our own work" – educating ourselves, confronting racism, holding each other accountable, and demonstrating good faith as we seek to build genuine and lasting coalitions with people of color.

The Doing Our Own Work seminar is designed as a supplement to, not a substitute for, contexts where people of diverse races and ethnicities discuss and strategize together how racism can be challenged. There are important discoveries that can be made when white people gather with the intention of analyzing systemic racism and white privilege, and there are skills and tools that can be acquired in such a setting especially if the experience and wisdom of people of color are conveyed by means of readings, videos, and other media. However, an all-white context has built-in limitations. Nothing can take the place of face-to-face contact, dialogue, and confrontation between people of different races. Therefore, this seminar should be viewed as a "way station;" the way that leads toward racial justice remains the hard and exhilarating work of building multiracial, multicultural, anti-racist coalitions.

Doing Our Own Work was initiated in 1994 by Eleanor S. Morrison and Melanie Morrison, then founders and co-directors of Leaven – a nonprofit organization in Mid-Michigan dedicated to nurturing the relationship between spirituality and social justice. The seminar has been offered in different parts of the country over the past 24 years. In 2007, Doing Our Own Work became a core program of Allies for Change – an organization founded by Melanie Morrison to nurture connection and collaboration between allies working for social change.

People from communities all across North America have taken part in Doing Our Own Work, experiencing it as a unique opportunity to engaged in deep, soul-stretching, and exhilarating work. Here is what some of those participants say about the experience:

"Doing Our Own Work is life-changing. It has affected my choice of where to live, what do with my life, where my priorities lie, everything."

"After attending Doing Our Own Work, I am much more willing to take risks as a white person when working alongside of, and in solidarity with, people of color."

"Doing Our Own Work gave me a broader and deeper knowledge of anti-racism, white privilege, my people’s history, and the way oppression functions."

**Action and reflection**

Anti-racist action and reflection form the heart of Doing Our Own Work. The seminar provides more than 40 hours of "class time" and has been offered in different formats, depending on the needs of the group. Most often, the seminar consists of two consecutive days held once a month over three months time. Prior to each two-day session, participants are assigned articles and encouraged to keep a daily journal of reflections about what they are observing, learning and
doing with regard to racism and anti-racism. Utilizing input from the leaders, assigned readings, films, group discussion, and structured exercises, participants explore the following topics and issues:

- The four levels of racism and change: personal, interpersonal, institutional, cultural
- Historical roots of white racism in the United States
- Movements for racial justice in the United States
- White privilege and unearned advantage
- Claiming and shaping an anti-racist identity
- Practicing the skills of interrupting racism
- Strategies for institutional change
- How to sustain this lifelong work
- Developing relationships of support and accountability

**Sphere of Influence**

The action/reflection pedagogy at the heart of *Doing Our Own Work* makes this seminar unique in some people's experience. The ultimate goal of this seminar is to equip white people to become agents of structural change where they live, work, study, worship, or volunteer. Participants are invited to identify a sphere of influence in their lives that will serve as the focus of their action and reflection. This sphere of influence could be their work place, neighborhood, worshiping community, or an organization to which they belong. With the help of the group and the resources provided by the seminar, participants do an inventory of their spheres of influence and how they can work with people of color and other white people to effect change.

**Strength for the Long Haul**

Anti-racism work necessitates a commitment for the long haul. To sustain that commitment requires an infusion of spirit and courage. Movements for social justice have been sustained by music, poetry, essays, speeches, and remembering those who have gone before. Their witness can inspire new hope and courage in us. Therefore, participants in *Doing Our Own Work* are exposed to poets, authors, singers, and songwriters who speak from diverse cultural traditions and are committed to the work of dismantling oppression.

*Doing Our Own Work* also provides a context where participants can explore the resources they need to sustain this work. An essential component of the seminar is the opportunity for participants to reflect upon and discuss questions such as these:

**Goals and Objectives of the seminar**

1. **Effecting systemic social change:** As stated above, the primary goal of this seminar is to equip white people to become agents of structural change. *Doing Our Own Work* is, therefore, designed for those who want to acquire the anti-racist analysis, skills, and tools needed to help bring about systemic change in the institutions with which they are affiliated. We emphasize that systemic change requires a commitment to dismantling institutional and cultural racism, as well as personal and interpersonal manifestations of racism.

2. **Nurturing personal and social transformation:** *Doing Our Own Work* provides a context that nurtures both personal and social transformation. It is our conviction that genuine and lasting social change cannot occur without both kinds of transformation. Therefore, one of the goals of the seminar is to provide a context for participants to explore and articulate what most deeply
motivates them to work for racial justice and how they can intentionally seek out communities of accountability that challenge and support them.

3. **Building a community of accountability with people of color.** The central focus of the seminar is to equip white people with the analysis, self-reflection, conceptual tools, and behavioral skills necessary to become better allies with people of color. White people cannot become effective anti-racist allies unless they are in ongoing relationships with people of color. Therefore, we encourage *Doing Our Own Work* participants to become engaged in grassroots anti-racist organizations led by people of color. Listening to people of color, learning about their experience of racism, and respecting the priorities they have developed as strategies for change, is critically important work for white people who want to be allies. By showing up consistently, listening, learning, and acting, white people can develop relationships with people of color to whom they are accountable.

4. **Building a community of accountability among white anti-racist allies:** The commitment to anti-racist activism cannot be short-term or sporadic because dismantling institutional white racism requires constant vigilance and long-term strategies. If white people are to become life-long anti-racist allies, they need to seek out other white people with whom they can commiserate, consult, struggle, vent, be challenged, and find support. *Doing Our Own Work* is one context that provides these vitally important connections between white anti-racist allies.

**Location and Dates of Upcoming Doing Our Own Work Seminars**
For a listing of upcoming seminars, visit the Allies for Change web site: alliesforchange.org.