

Crossroads Anti-Racism Training
Organizing for Institutional and Community Change
By Crossroads Staff

Crossroads was founded in 1986 as an effort to develop new directions in understanding and combating the root causes of institutional racism in the United States. Now, following ten years of research and experimentation, a variety of new approaches, programs and resources are being implemented.

The work of Crossroads is to train teams within institutions, helping them to analyze racism and to develop and implement strategies to dismantle racism within their structures. Crossroads training begins with the ability to analyze systemic racism. Then, provided with a comprehensive understanding of racism, an intensive training process equips teams with strategic skills to lead their institutions toward long term and permanent transformation.

The specific skills which teams develop are: Analysis of Systemic Racism - building and sharing a common understanding of racism; Researching and Evaluating - the ability to identify and analyze racism in a specific context, as well as to evaluate and assess change; Teaching - the ability to educate about racism and provide local leaders with strategies and tools for its elimination; Organizing - the ability to develop and implement strategies for change.

During the past decade, Crossroads has provided consultation and training services for more than 100 institutions and organizations, facilitating the development of more than 50 internal transformation teams.

Crossroads also designs programs, resources and networks that provide teams with the necessary skills and tools that are needed to bring about systemic change, and lead toward the elimination of systemic racism within their institutions and organizations.

There is a great need for new approaches to understand and dismantle racism. This can be seen in the intensification of the crisis in race relations that has emerged in recent years throughout the United States. Social conditions that result from racism- including poverty, inadequate education and housing, unemployment and underemployment - have not significantly decreased.

As a result of the civil rights era and civil rights legislation, significant progress was made in removing the legal basis for intentional racial discrimination. Additionally, the public image of almost every institution became one of openness and change. However, the new expectations of equality, opportunity and advancement have not been sufficiently met. Despite many good intentions and superficial changes, most institutions remain fundamentally unchanged at deeper levels that determine their functioning according to historical designs and structures that were created decades and centuries ago.

Thirty years after the civil rights era, the result of limited change is increasing polarization, with deepening frustration within communities of color, and a popular conviction in the white society that the issues of racism were resolved in the 1960's, and are no longer of major concern in the United States.

These opposing convictions undermine efforts to address the root causes of racism in our society and in our institutions. Manning Marable states: "The central characteristic of race relations in the 1990's has been interactions without understanding. The face of racism has changed; the systemic and pervasive character of racism in the United States has not."

Author Andrew Billingsley purported: "The challenge is to make the society more responsive to and supportive of all its members." Billingsley goes on to say that ending racism in America will require "vigorous, organized and persistent advocacy on the part of the collective community."

Despite these serious concerns, there is still a basis for hope. Great opportunities exist for social systems and institutions to contribute to efforts to deal with racism and racial injustice. However, they need to be equipped to accomplish this task. New efforts for institutional change must go beyond levels of personnel, policies and programs. Change must take place in an institution's mission, purpose, direction and means of control. This includes looking at decision-making and power structures within organizations and making necessary changes to bring about an anti-racist structure.

A new way of thinking and acting is required if racism is to be dismantled. Crossroads provides a process to assist institutions in the development of specific action plans that help dismantle personal, cultural and institutional racism. Crossroads facilitates an intensive process to develop a new anti-racism training model aimed toward institutional transformation. The model was developed through an action and reflection process that included development of experimental projects in seven settings in Chicago and throughout the United States. Now, along with a variety of other approaches, programs and resources, this model is being implemented locally and nationally to help institutions recognize their enormous potential to dismantle systemic racism and to build a new racial justice agenda in the United States.

Crossroads understands racism as more than personal prejudice and bigotry, and it cannot be eliminated simply through programs of prejudice reduction and multicultural diversity. Racism is defined as the systemic enforcement of radical prejudice. Racism is a systemic issue with individual, institutional and cultural manifestations. Each of these manifestations needs to be examined, and strategies for their elimination need to be developed in the context of a specific institution or community. In addition to a social and institutional analysis of racism, Crossroads also explores racism's underlying cultural and spiritual roots. Operating from an interfaith, non-sectarian perspective, new cultural and spiritual directions are explored for building anti-racist institutions and communities.