



growing food & justice for all initiative

NEWSLETTER

March 2009

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Voices from the Gathering 2008

Mural as Mirror

Andrea Godshalk



It seemed like a miracle the way we painted the mural in four days. Nine panels four by twelve feet, the mural bloomed with a magnificence no one artist could have achieved. The dedicated folks at the gathering came together dancing in a potent moment held up by countless hours of coordination and planning, visioning. The first Growing Food and Justice for All gathering was a huge success and that is visible in the lasting artifact that was created in the mural.

The mural and the gathering are mirrors of each other. Both moved through brave declarations, making plain oppression and the way racism tears wounds in this country which are never able to heal in the open air. On



both the wooden panels and in workshop rooms ground work for visions was laid. People who work with soil and compost, the people who work where things grow, came together to share the seeds of what works. That is what the mural shows and that is what the gathering was; an abundant coming together, a training, a nourishing reprise from the hard and steady work of recreating the world.

For the mural we started with a blank slate. Erika Allen, who works at Growing Power Chicago, sketched out a frame work. The images move through time, laying out the history of African people enslaved, through movements of resistance. Images honor the civil rights movement, the United Farm Workers and the Campesinos who are now fighting for fair wages in a globalized economy. Then the mural moves into images of communities with children, bikes, and food growing where we live. Large worms dance in the soil and the statement, “down below the grassroots” shows us where things really start.

The last panels show the present and visions of the future. The work we are currently doing fully ripened and harvested. Conversations with people of many races, experiences and perspectives grow into an abundance of food, music, and expression. The mural like the gathering could never have been as dynamically bright had it been just one person’s vision. In the painting there were all different brush strokes, rhythms and approaches. Many visions made one image. Just as many visions make one movement, the movement to dismantle racism starting with the food system. The movement to create abundance. Abundance of food, jobs and celebrations. To create the kind of societies where life is pleasure and not unnecessary struggle.

There is no where to start but right now. Many people were hesitant to paint, to add their vision. With a little encouragement they did paint and afterwards beamed at their contribution. The mural and the movement is all the stronger for it. Maureen Kelly, who works at WHY in New York, after painting a carrot and peaches was thrilled with herself, though she had started doubtful and afraid. Which is also how she felt when she identified the need to dialogue about racism at her work place. Though shaky and unsure, she trusted the quiet and solid voice in her that urged her on. So she reached out to Jim Hanna. Jim has been doing antiracism work for many years though has never facilitated a dismantling racism workshop. When Maureen stepped beyond her comfort zone and asked Jim for support in addressing these issues, Jim was able to step beyond his comfort zone and facilitate an anti-racism workshop. We help each other grow and be more effective no matter where we are located in the movement by reaching out and pushing ourselves beyond where we are comfortable, out where change happens.

To paint a mural we must paint our visions. To make a movement we must create our visions. As with community art and movement building, there are layers of histories and energies of those who have come before us, people whose struggles made room for the work we are now doing. To bring justice into the world we sink our feet deep into the earth where our roots always give us guiding strength and we lift our hearts to the sky of possibility and open wide as our visions transform us as we transform the world.

The mural that was painted at the first Growing Food and Justice For All Gathering is installed at Growing Power at 55th and Silverspring in Milwaukee WI. The mural we painted is the third layer, the third manifestation of a mural that has brightened that space for years.



Buttermilk Biscuits

Reflection and Action from the Intensive Leadership Training

Tahz Walker & Francesca Hyatt



We have had a lot of growing and stretching to do in the last few weeks. It has been hard to break open our insides to discover that we are not alone or crazy. At times it seems easier not to stir the pot of Racism, or it's easier to let our fears keep us silent, even considering our feelings crazy and devalued. The invisibility of Racism and Class create such a vacuum where nothing exists except what has been internalized. At times everyone is perceived

to be an enemy, and even allies are suspect. We have taken some small, but huge baby steps in our hearts, and I think have asked for the courage to go deeper. By opening up a little bit, and sharing stories we find that there is much more needed to be spoken, acknowledged, and listened to.

Leaving Milwaukee full of inspiration and new connections, I'm sure that many of us wondered how we could bring these delicate and important topics back to our communities and places of work. After having been guided by experienced facilitators into tender and transformative conversations, it was hard to imagine synthesizing all the richness into a short presentation. We decided to think about our session as the beginning of a process, and we wanted to share with you the outline we came up with for the two-hour session we facilitated at our organization.

Our session consisted of six main parts. 1.) *Intro*- We set the stage by telling about how we heard from organizations similar to ours at the GFJI gathering, and that we could relate to some of the challenges that they were experiencing. The goal we set out this meeting was to have a deeper discussion about race and class oppression in our organization. 2.) *Safe Space*- We listed safe space guidelines that were taken from the GFJI facilitator training, and staff added to these. 3.) *Story Telling*- We divided staff into pairs and ask them to share a story about race or class oppression that they experienced or witnessed. 4.) *Definitions*- All the staff contributed to creating definitions for racism, internalized oppression, food justice, and privilege. 5.) *Sharing concerns*- Staff listed ways that race and class oppression show up in our work place. 6.) *Next Steps*- We planned to ask staff to list ways we could address these issues in our organization. Due to time constraints we decided to reschedule this piece for the following meeting.

Overall, the session was well received. We discovered that everyone has different comfort levels around Race discussions, and some of the staff did not feel that a safe space for these discussions had been solidified. Partly in response to this we decided to seek outside facilitation for our next discussion. Also, our executive director felt moved to strengthen her knowledge about Racism and to find ways to become an ally in our organization by attending a weekend long dismantling racism training led by d*R works.

<http://www.dismantlingracism.org>

As a staff we have not created any tangible goals at this time. We are still in the process of creating safe space to talk about these issues and we will be bringing in an outside facilitator to help us. Some of our tangible goals that we as facilitators see for the near future will be bringing these trainings to our community garden's board of directors, finding ways to create safe space between staff and board in discussing these topics, and creating a clear way to have on-going self-critique and dialogue about how these issues affect our community garden internally and externally. Please keep us in your hearts as we continue in this journey.

And if you have anything to share, please don't hesitate to contact us:

tahzwalker@gmail.com, francesca@seedsnc.org.



Reflections

Jeff Heehs

Although it was organized along the recognizable conventions of a non-profit "conference," the Gathering unfolded for me as a fluid, sometimes unsettling series of learnings and interactions with significance that spilled way over the programmed content. Less planned and structured moments were perhaps the most fertile: informal talk; shared meals; information tables; a celebration evening of music, dancing, and mural art; people speaking spontaneously from the heart in breakout and plenary sessions -- all combined to make the event emotionally draining and spiritually engaging for me and, it seemed to me, for others too. It was both unnerving and energizing to consider head on how much healing we all need around issues of race and class inequity, particularly in places like New York City. I was inspired to see widely dispersed programs springing up from similar impulses in urban and rural settings around the continent, and to hear stories of bold steps taken by people of color and whites to assert their humanity through food security and sustainability programs.

White

Maggie Wright



In the days leading up to the GFJI gathering, I was really excited, even hungry, to come. I didn't even think about why. I just felt great relief and growing anticipation. As the conference approached I began to notice that I had a hard time describing GFJI to other people. Whenever somebody asked me, So what is this conference about? I would pause.

I live in Denver now, but I was born in Grosse Pointe and grew up in Brighton, about 45 minutes west of Detroit. Just from this information, someone from Michigan, or someone familiar with Michigan's racial history, could probably guess that I'm white. Michigan is one of the most racially segregated states in the nation. When out-of-state people ask me where I'm from, I used to say "Detroit," "the Detroit area" or "metro-Detroit." When I worked at an urban farm in east Detroit last year, I found myself relieved to finally be able to technically be "from" Detroit.

When I got to GFJI, I introduced myself as Maggie from Denver and Detroit. Michelle joked, "Hey, don't claim us!" I'm not sure whether she intended it, but I felt it: Oof. Caught in the act. I felt it, but I still didn't completely understand what was going on with me.

I had a lot of great experiences those first two days of the conference. The skillfulness, courage, and heart that we shared strengthened me. Talking openly about spirituality was refreshing. And just seeing, listening, talking, being together, I began to relax.

There were a lot of great workshops on Sunday morning. It was hard to choose, and when I saw the sign "What Does It Mean to Be White?" I thought, "Hm. Interesting. I'd really rather go see Asantewaa's workshop, or Vicki and Ben's. But I guess since it's right here." So I winked at the people I was with. "I guess I'm going to go find out what it means to be white!"

Fifteen minutes later I woke up on the floor with my nose running and all the lamps broken, wondering where I was, who I was, and how I got here.

Not quite that dramatic, but close. My awareness of White as the inseparable partner of Color, and Privilege as the inseparable partner of Prejudice, has surfaced and been submerged again several times since I first went to a multicultural high school where racial dynamics were actually visible, if not always discussed. This time though it really sank in -- sitting in a circle with a compassionate facilitator, with about 15 other white people to actually talk about what it means to be white, I finally got what was going on with me leading up to



GFJI, and why the word “racism” stuck in my throat: I had been wanting to dismantle racism without admitting ⁵ that I was white, and without admitting my own oppressive attitudes and behaviors! And my nose did run everywhere as I cried when I realized the intense aggression that I often feel toward other white people, in an attempt to disown my whiteness. After the workshop I saw on another participant's evaluation sheet, "It felt great to come out as both a white person and an anti-racist. I didn't die!" And this is from two of us who voluntarily took part in the founding gathering of a multicultural initiative defined as anti-racist. Denial is deep stuff, people.

In the following weeks I have really started to pay attention to the fear, confusion, and aggression that modern racism and unspoken privilege create in my daily life. For a person conditioned by privilege like me, the flip side of feeling entitled is feeling afraid and self-critical. Outside approval and "fitting in" often come without much opportunity to develop the kind of resilient self-love and self-reliance that comes from confronting challenges, setbacks, and frustrations head-on. And being trained to overlook privilege results in ignorance, and breeds doubt and insecurity, whereas openness and clear-seeing create flexibility and strength.

I am beginning to see how I can't make change alone, and I can't "fix" racism from the perspective of dominance, selfishness, and entitlement created by it. So in the months following GFJI, I have decided first just to be a white person. I'll be me, and white, and observant. And then I can start to relate to the situation with some dignity rather than running away from whiteness all the time.

I was born in Grosse Pointe and grew up in Brighton, about 45 minutes west of Detroit. I want to own my place in history and the communities that formed me, including the messed-up parts. I need to really love myself and other white people, and be willing to address the particular insanities that we may share about race and privilege, in a creative, compassionate way.

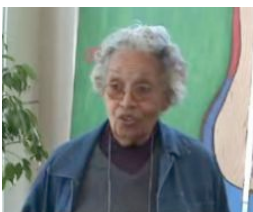
I like the way bell hooks put it: "to unlearn the logic of domination and dominator culture." To practice really listening, and to seek out some streams to swim in and support rather than continuing to flip around and gasp like a big fish in a bone-dry pond. And to know I will still mess up and that's ok – my own process isn't the center of attention all the time.

The community that came together at the first Growing Food and Justice for All Gathering gave me the inspiration and the courage to commit to discovering and addressing my white privilege in my everyday life and work. To speak and act publicly to dismantle white privilege, going beyond the logic and behaviors of oppression, is clumsy, scary, and completely necessary for me to be a whole person. I am grateful to the excellent facilitators and brave and talented farmers, teachers, artists, fundraisers, business owners, organizers, storytellers, and friends who kicked off a long-term effort together at this gathering founded in the inseparable need for both honesty and love. It was a very good place to truly acknowledge my whiteness.

Article Review:

Food Is Political

Ida Cohen



For those of you who say you aren't into politics, when you advocate for organic farming, or food security you are into politics, even if indirectly. Reforming our food system leads directly into three of the fundamental political issues being discussed at this time. The issues: What to do about the Health Care Crisis, Climate Change and Energy Independence.

I've been trying to tell my friends about a movement that is on the horizon, that involves community gardeners, vegetarians, tree huggers, issue advocates etc. While we tend to be concerned about food security, while we emphasize the importance of organic methods of food production, we realize that it is essential that we network with others. We are just beginning, I believe, to recognize this



and the necessity of broadening our outlook as we coalesce with others in the hopes of making life saving changes globally.

Food, that is, THE FEAR OF FAMINE, was one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse from the beginning of time. This was solved, we thought, in the twentieth century. But it has come back and may haunt us by the end of this century if this nascent movement fails.

Michael Pollan's, Farmer in Chief, an article in the magazine section of the Sunday, October 11th NY Times explains it better than I can. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12policy-t.html>

In it he explains, "(corn, soybeans, wheat and rice) from which most of our supermarket foods are derived have succeeded impressively in keeping prices low and food more or less off the national political agenda. However, this abundance of food appears to be drawing to a close."

He advocates for the reform of the entire food system in order to progress on the health care crisis, energy independence or climate change. While we currently debate these larger issues, I believe, as does Pollan, that a part of the debate must include the way we currently grow, process and eat food in America. The issue of food production goes to the heart of all three problems and will have to change if we hope to solve them and save our way of life.

Specifically, how this occurs is more fully discussed by Pollan. While you may not agree with the writer in all of his particulars, his article promotes the movement and may be useful if you find it difficult, as I have, to explain it to the neophyte.

Erika Allen on GFJI



Erika Allen, project leader for Growing Power's Grant Park community garden project in Chicago, is a young woman with old school passion for the beloved community. She was one of the founders of the Growing Food Justice Initiative (GFJI), which grew out of the Community Food Security Coalition's committee work on race.

Allen, who is the daughter of Will Allen, the founder of Growing Power in Milwaukee and a 2008 MacArthur Fellow, spent much of her youth being around all aspects of farming including managing farmer's markets. In partnership with the Chicago Park District and Moore Landscapes, Allen's Growing Power site (one of three in Chicago) created a 20,000 square foot urban farm on Chicago's lakefront adjacent to Buckingham Fountain and Lincoln Memorial in Grant Park. Allen says they grow over 150 varieties of heirloom vegetables, herbs, and edible flowers at the urban farm in the heart of downtown Chicago. In addition to regular farm activities, farm interns experience marketing produce and value-added products at small community farmers' market, building customer service and entrepreneurial skills needed by both farmers and area artists.

"Food is the next frontier of the civil rights movement," Allen says. "As a child of that movement, I think about it a lot."

Moving to form a new organization that would put its primary focus on dismantling racism in all aspects of the food system wasn't a resurrection, according to Allen. "It was an epiphany," she says. Breathing life into a new organization helped to remove some of the institutional roadblocks to doing the work, Allen says.

The GFJI vision of tearing down the walls of racism reached a new level of reality in Milwaukee in September 2008, with the first Growing Food Justice Initiative conference. Allen sees the conference as a space for real dialogue. "September set the tone for how things move forward," she says. The event was designed to bring people together to network and forge new partnerships around issues of social justice and racial equality.

"This is an experiment. It offers a space and an initiative to move forward," Allen says. "And it also offers an opportunity to accept and work with people where they are."



It is also about shifting and sharing power and self-determination around the food system. “Look at who is most often at the table making decisions for low income people. They are usually academics,” Allen says. The GFJI efforts are designed to level the field and give everyone a voice.

The same principles that guide Allen’s Growing Power work in the community gardens of Chicago, also keep her focused on the larger structural issues that make the work of GFJI so important to the food equity and security movement. “Everybody eats,” Allen says, “so why don’t people have access? And why haven’t farmers of color been able to tap into the resources they need to grow good and fair food?”

Making a move from being a committee in a larger organization, to being an umbrella and catalyst for a new movement would have given some groups pause. “It wasn’t a destructive process at all. I think we are all proud of how we all got there,” she says.

Her hopes for GFJI and the conference are clear. “We want people to take the information and trainings home and heal. In the longer term, Allen would like to see people get empowered and challenged to help do the work of removing the obstacles of racism and the other “isms” that stand between all people and a fair and equitable food system.

For more information on the Growing Food Justice Initiative’s first conference, go to www.growingfoodandjustice.org.

Help name the next Newsletter

In the winter of 2008 the GFJI Communications Committee solicited ideas from members to name future Newsletters. We have compiled your suggestions. [Vote here](#) to choose the name! If that link doesn’t work, paste

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=oEvBgmr4uOrbR0ZhkyhCyQ_3d_3d

into your web browser and it should take you to the survey.

Thanks!



Newsletter Mission and Submission Info:

GFJI Newsletter

This newsletter serves the GFJI Mission and Vision by:

- Establishing a voice and presence in the formation of policies that support justice, economic opportunity and equity reflecting the goals of GFJI
- Serving as a tool and nourishment for all people interested in dismantling racism (and other related "isms") in a sustainable and socially just food system, etc.
- Providing resources for dismantling racism in local food systems by developing and reviewing teaching tools, including books, videos, training programs and organizations.
- Utilizing people's own experiences with racism in the food system as teaching tools to share, support and cultivate creative transformative responses.
- Fostering the leadership development and capacity building of GFJI members.

We're eager for stories of working in the field, uncovering and transforming racism as we encounter it in our work. Perceptive, creative, intelligent voices; and voices which haven't found space in other environments are encouraged. Pieces can be local, national, or international in focus, but should be connected with dismantling racism in the food movement.

The GFJI newsletter welcomes and supports marginalized voices and perspectives of youth, people of color, working class and poor people and women in the service of dismantling racism in the food system.

We publish original articles, narratives, poetry, profiles of racial justice food organizations, accounts of an initiative or conference, visionary stories, press releases, photographs... as long as it is in the service of dismantling racism in the food system and empowering communities. We accept queries and submissions for the following types of articles:

- features (1,000-1,500 words): investigative journalism, breaking news, profiles, interviews,
- opinion (800-1,200 words): fresh, original perspectives.

Submissions and queries should be sent to: [agodshalk \(at\) gmail \(dot\) com](mailto:agodshalk@gmail.com).

Please give us at least three weeks to respond.

If you aren't a writer but would like us to check something out, let us know at [agodshalk \(at\) gmail \(dot\) com](mailto:agodshalk@gmail.com).



GFJI Mission

The Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI), hosted by Growing Power, Inc. is a comprehensive network that views dismantling racism as a core principal that brings together social change agents from diverse sectors working to bring about new, healthy and sustainable food systems and supporting and building multicultural leadership in impoverished communities throughout the world.

The vision of this initiative is to establish a powerful network of individuals, organizations and community based entities all working toward a food secure and just world.

Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative seeks to dismantle racism via network building, shared leadership, capacity building, economic growth, and community food systems. GFJI reflects the need for innovative leadership in the development of a sustainable, community-based food systems movement. GFJI supports and furthers the local work that is already underway throughout North America, employing a from-the-ground-up strategy to build power for broad food systems change across the world.

GFJI Vision

To work together with a shared vision of dismantling racism via network building, shared leadership, economic growth and community food systems:

- Every neighborhood in low-income communities and communities of color has full access to fresh, healthy, local, affordable, culturally appropriate food every day through a variety of retail channels ranging from farmer's markets to locally-owned small corner stores and supermarkets
- In every neighborhood in low-income communities and communities of color the residents of the neighborhood own and operate the small businesses that produce, distribute and sell the fresh, healthy food consumed in the neighborhood
- Through ownership and operation of the local food system, every neighborhood in low-income communities and communities of color provides opportunity for its children to develop business skills and leadership capacity offering hope that each child, every family and the community itself can achieve its self-determined destiny.

GFJI Committees

Please be aware that committees give reports at EVERY telephone conference meeting, so that all can participate in informed decision making with regard to the initiative.

- **Steering Committee:** The working group that facilitates the day to day operation of GFJI. Anyone willing to work on this committee is welcome to join. The committee meets monthly, usually on the first Tuesday of the month.
- **Fundraising:** Listing potential sources of funds, planning which funders to approach, grant writing, etc.
- **Membership/Partnership/Outreach:** Developing a membership/partnership policy, setting fees for membership, making sure that our efforts can reach all people interested in dismantling racism (and other related "isms") in a sustainable and socially just food system, etc.
- **Communications:** Develop website, do surveys, work closely with other committees (particularly Education) to have relevant and up-to-date materials available for the purpose of dismantling racism in a sustainable and socially just food system, etc.
- **Conference/dismantling racism/training of trainers (TOT):** Developing conference scenario and logistics, developing dismantling racism trainings at all levels, developing a training of trainers program so that the initiative has well qualified trainers in all geographical areas that might require them, etc.
- **Education:** Developing and making easily accessible any material that relates to the mission and vision of the initiative, working closely with the Communications committee, etc.

NOTE: Please keep in mind that the initiative is a work in progress and that your input is necessary and relevant. We all have the opportunity to work together to have our voices heard! Looking forward to your active participation!

To sign on to a committee, please contact:
Diane Dodge
listserv administrator
Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative
email: [dianefaydodge \(at\) hotmail \(dot\) com](mailto:dianefaydodge@hot.com)
cell: (651)278-6748

