

## **An Open Letter to White Progressives and Activists**

We write this letter to all those white people concerned with social justice. Who are you? You are social workers and teachers, and artists and organizers. You work in multiracial organizations and non-profits, and you work for queer rights, with incarcerated youth, and with women in domestic violence shelters. You offer medical aid to migrants crossing the border, media arts programs to high school students, and legal counsel to housing rights organizations. You're angry about climate change and environmental devastation – with poor and working class communities the hardest hit. You're frustrated about longstanding educational inequities. More than this, you are passionate about change, hopeful for transformation, and open to personal growth in the work you do. We write you because we feel as white people we have a major opportunity to change our relationship to the diverse social justice movements to which we belong.

Barack Obama's candidacy potentially marks a historic turning point for racial justice in this country. Unprecedented numbers of white voters have been moved by Obama's message of hope, unity, moving past old divisions, and the push for "change" and "progress." This outpouring of support and enthusiasm for doing things differently provides an exciting opportunity for progressives to help shape the public debate on what "change" really means. Not surprisingly, conservatives have reacted with alarm and have moved to squash this multi-racial coalition through the Right's old stand-by tactics of fear, racism and division.

As the Right tries desperately to turn back the clock, momentum is clearly on our side. Our voice is needed to reject the racist attacks from the Right, and to address people who wish to gloss-over systemic racism and white privilege in their desire to embrace Obama as a "post-racial" candidate. We have a strategic opening to advance conversations about racism in all of its subtleties to the next level, and to capture the momentum of this time to help build a multiracial grassroots movement for justice. As progressives and activists, we are committed to creating a more humane and just world free from racism and all forms of oppression. We recognize that we have a stake in achieving fairness and equality for all, and as white people the continued existence of racism and white supremacy puts fear and hatred in the way of our humanity. We know that racism is not removed from the other issues that we care deeply about, such as workers rights, the environment, the war in Iraq, and queer rights, and that racism has been a tool used to divide us. It is in our interest to step-up our anti-racist efforts during the '08 elections and beyond.

AWARE-LA (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere, Los Angeles) believes that a visible anti-racist white presence in social justice movements is key to creating long-term change:

- Many white people in the U.S. are against racial inequity, but in the mainstream and even in our social change work we are not speaking up as anti-racists. An

anti-racist white voice highlights what we can represent – active agents of racial justice.

- Historically, people of color have had to shoulder the burden of speaking out against racism. But we all have a stake in eliminating racism, and it is only fair for us to contribute our share in moving us towards our goal.
- As white folks we know that facing racism can be awkward and scary. But we are ideally situated to talk with other white people about racism and to move our communities to incorporate anti-racist practices into our social change work.

AWARE-LA believes this historical presidential election provides a unique moment for building anti-racism among white folks. As a beginning to this and, AWARE-LA plans to take the following actions:

- Document and speak-out out against the Right's racist attacks and innuendos. There have been exciting examples of progressives speaking out against racism in the '08 elections – most notably ColorOfChange.org and MoveOn.org's campaign against Fox News. We plan to join and broaden these efforts. We have set-up a blog called "Double Take" and we encourage you to use this blog as a place to do a double-take on racism in the '08 Presidential Campaign – and to coordinate actions and responses: [www.doubletakeblog.wordpress.com](http://www.doubletakeblog.wordpress.com)
- We are organizing a multi-racial Community Event in Los Angeles on October 25, 2008 to discuss and expose racism in the '08 elections, and to harness the political energy of the elections toward movement building beyond November. We are calling for other concerned white folks to organize similar anti-racist actions in October in towns across the country! Please visit our blog for more details on our event.

Finally, AWARE-LA hopes other white folks will join us in building a racial justice movement beyond the '08 elections. The elimination of white supremacy and racism in the U.S. will not come about from the election of a single individual. We need multi-racial alliances working for racial, social, economic and environmental justice and sustained commitment from white people towards anti-racist goals and practice.

Throughout the history of the U.S. there are countless examples of white folks standing shoulder to shoulder with people of color to fight for civil and human rights, from white abolitionists to the Freedom Riders. It is important that contemporary white progressives and activists follow the example set by our anti-racist ancestors and join with our brothers and sisters of color in actively creating a more humane world for everyone – which ultimately is the change and progress most of us are hoping for.

In Struggle,  
AWARE-L.A.

**Endorsements:**

**Catalyst Project**, [www.collectiveliberation.org](http://www.collectiveliberation.org), San Francisco CA **Community Coalition**, [www.cocosouthla.org](http://www.cocosouthla.org), Los Angeles CA **Jeff Hitchcock**, white anti-racist activist and author, NJ **Paul Kivel**, educator, activist, writer, Oakland CA **Center for the Study of White American Culture**, Roselle NJ  
**Labor/Community Strategy Center**, [www.thestrategycenter.org](http://www.thestrategycenter.org), Los Angeles CA **Sharon Martin**, Challenging White Supremacy, San Francisco CA  
**White Anti-Racist Community Action Network**, [www.wacan.org](http://www.wacan.org), on-line project  
**Tim Wise**, author and educator, Nashville TN  
**Y-Step: Youth Step Towards Addressing Racism**, [www.ystep.org](http://www.ystep.org), Bay Area CA

AWARE-LA is an alliance of white antiracist people working together to combat racism within ourselves, our communities, and the world. To learn more visit: [www.awarela.org](http://www.awarela.org)

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<http://awarela.org/>

<http://doubletakeblog.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.myspace.com/awarela>