

NATIONAL COALITION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
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PROSPECTUS ON RACE

The National Coalition for Social Change is staffed by a group of people dedicated to deepening the sensitivity of Americans to the results of their society — racism, exploitation, oppression, poverty. This sensitivity can, and often does, lead to increased awareness of personal and institutional alternatives, often brought about by actions in support of people's struggles for justice - struggles wrought by those we call poor, minority, or Third World.

Growing out of three years experience in working with white middle-class groups, on issues ranging from United Farmworkers to the struggle against apartheid in southern Africa, from welfare rights to criminal justice, we have decided to focus our energy on a recurrent theme underlying all of these - racism and racial consciousness. It has become increasingly clear, especially to the Black, Chicano and Puerto Rican groups involved with the Coalition, that meaningful dialogue - that which leads to effective change - can only come when and if interested groups have access to a process whereby anxieties, fears, hopes, stereotypes and experiences can be explored, tested, shared, discarded. This process requires a structure open to individual differences - between people and between groups - yet directed at healing wounds and bridging gaps.

Our experience further tells us that there are numerous groups, organizations and associations of people who are ready to engage in such a process. We have found that working together with members of those groups in the planning stages helps ensure the effort's success; we combine that with a structure flexible enough that a constant flow of feedback during the process helps set the pace and the direction. Thus, participants - individually and corporately - are the determiners of their own learning and changing, and make up a great part of the resources of the sessions.

Our role is to bring into focus those issues, and those areas within each issue, relating to race, which seem to be the most problematic for the people involved. We work in multi-racial or mono-racial teams (depending on the needs of the groups), facilitating, resourcing, encouraging, stimulating and catalyzing. We provide material resources such as films, slide-shows, speakers, posters, pamphlets and bibliographies; and we provide the skills in bringing people together around common concerns which they identify.

Although there is nothing magic or unique about this approach, it is the product of three years of trial and error, and has reached a point where we feel able to offer it to others. Our desire is not to "corner a market" on seminars dealing with issues of race and racial conflict, but rather to build on and complement those other efforts - local, regional and national - which are already beginning to focus on this area as a key element in the struggle to humanize relationships and institutions.

Since the Coalition consists both of middle-class, predominantly white, community-based groups, as well as local, community-based struggles for self-determination and justice of people of color, we have access to a nearly infinite number of combinations of resource people (as well as topics and materials). And, because these groups are spread across much of the country, we are able (and willing) to work with groups virtually without geographic discrimination. In addition to the four volunteer staff members, some of these people are located in the following areas:

Toledo, Ohio
Oberlin, Ohio
New York City
Milwaukee, Wisc.
Nashville, Tenn.
Knoxville, Tenn.
Indianapolis, Ind.

Philadelphia, Pa.
Atlanta, Ga.
Washington, D.C.
Seattle, Wash.
Portland, Ore.
San Francisco, Cal.

We are accustomed to working in many situations and under many conditions. We will organize seminars, workshops, or discussion groups, give presentations and plan conferences. We have extensive experience in helping groups get started, and are able to provide continuous follow-up until the group gains enough momentum to become independent. We work with existing organizations such as church groups (youth and adult), student governments, special interest groups, youth groups, community associations, college classes and organizations, and political groups.

In the process of developing programs through which people can explore their own and their institutions' roles in society, they learn the ability to question oft-unspoken assumptions and experience new responses. Out of this process comes change - personal growth which leads to people taking control of their institutions by redirecting their energies into more positive, humanizing and liberating areas. We believe this to be a tremendously important process, and are willing to play an energetic role in forwarding it.