

Abstract

Challenging the White Supremacist System: Antiracist Organizing and Multiracial Alliance in the United States, is an interdisciplinary, ethnic studies project that traces a historical genealogy of white people and people of color using race to organize and mobilize allied grassroots resistance to the white supremacist system. Unique among projects on social movements, this study examines cases of white people and people of color organizing separately within their respective racial communities as part of a larger, multiracial strategy to end white supremacy. Employing historical, textual, and ethnographic research methods, the project analyzes the theory and practice of what it terms “affiliate-autonomous organizing” through organizational records, news articles, government documents, memoirs, manifestos, letters, films, photographs, and interviews representing the social, political, and historical context of five multiracial alliances against the white supremacist system from 1960 to 2010. At a time when organizing across race succeeded in electing the first black president of the United States, but fails to resolve continuing racial and economic inequalities, this project offers an analysis of the possibilities and limitations of antiracist organizing and multiracial alliance for building mass-based social justice movements.

Contents

“Introduction: Challenging the White Supremacist System” defines the terms of the project: white supremacist system, antiracist organizing, multiracial alliance and reviewed previous notions of how to challenge the white supremacist system. The introduction also explained the need for a deeper analysis of the role of organizing in work against racism, particularly within and through the theory and practice of affiliate-autonomous organizing, and provides an overview of the project.

“Chapter 1: Black Power and the Roles of Whites” analyzes the multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing model emerging from the work of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Conference Education Fund, and the Southern Student Coordinating Committee in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia from 1960-1969. The chapter specifically considers the development of black power within the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, as it relates to the history of antiracist organizing across race and the model of affiliate-autonomous organizing. The chapter serves as a historical origin point for popular articulations of the role of whites in multiracial alliances, and the centrality of antiracist organizing in work against the white supremacist system.

“Chapter 2: Organizing a Rainbow Coalition” engages multiracial alliances and antiracist organizing in Chicago from 1967-1972, which built upon the work of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee—through the development of the original Rainbow Coalition that involved the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords Organization, I Wor Kuen, the American Indian Movement, the Gay Liberation Front, the Students for a Democratic Society and the Young Patriots. This chapter analyzes a “successful” model of radical organizing across race, and elucidates the possibilities for multiracial alliances to exist on the basis of shared social and economic conditions.

“Chapter 3: Revolutionary Union Movement” examines the role of solidarity against capitalism in relation to multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing. This chapter analyzes organizing in Detroit from 1968-1970 by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, in

alliance with the Motor City Labor League. This chapter considers the role of multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing within the sphere of labor, offering a story of the white supremacist system failing to divide workers across race but instead galvanizing them to develop alliances to challenge capitalism.

“Chapter 4: The Politics of Anti-Imperialism” considers the relationship between antiracist and anti-imperialist organizing in the national alliance work from 1971-1976 (echoing until 2006) of the American Indian Movement, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Republic of New Africa, and the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. This chapter, offering some of the longest standing alliances in the project, gives the reader a wide geographic and historic view of how antiracist organizing changes across space and time. Additionally, the chapter shows how local and global antiracist politics connect through transnational alliances and organizing.

“Chapter 5: The Ballot Box and Beyond” analyzes a contemporary model of multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing for racial justice in Los Angeles from 2006-2010, through a historically situated ethnography of the alliance work of the Labor/Strategy Community Center, South Asian Network, Community Coalition, and the Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere – Los Angeles. Reflections on the Obama presidential victory, the white voter, ethnic studies, whiteness studies, and right-wing and white nationalist organizing. This chapter brings the history of multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing from chapters one through four to bear on the current moment, and considers the role of white antiracist organizing in the spheres of academia, electoral politics, and grassroots activism broadly-speaking. In conclusion, this chapter explores the meaning of a history of multiracial alliance and antiracist organizing for future academic and community projects that seek to challenge the white supremacist system, and considers what happens when alliance and organizing is put at the center of such projects.