



Milwaukee Nonprofits Remove ‘Racial Residue’

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By Amy Rabideau Silvers

Diane De La Santos, executive director of [City on a Hill](#), believes that it’s time to peel the band-aid off racial divisions—perhaps an unfortunately appropriate metaphor given that band-aids are so-called flesh color.

“People may say, ‘I’m color-blind,’ but **we are not color-blind in this society**,” Diane says. “America is a *racialized* society, meaning that race matters. Race matters in America in ways that harm people.”

The result is what she calls “racial residue.”

“This residue gets inside of us. It’s not our fault, it just does,” she says. “But if we want to be part of the solution instead of the problem, we have an obligation to do better.”



Diane and colleagues from organizations in the greater Milwaukee area run workshops together called **Removing Racial Residue**. They speak at high schools, colleges, and other places where people are willing to come together and think about racial matters in a new way.

“The goal of it is to help people, regardless of their ethnicity, recognize what racial residue is in their lives and how it affects them.”

The Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee will host a **special session of Removing Racial Residue from 9 to 11 a.m. on Aug. 4**. **Jeremy Triblett, of the Center for Youth Engagement**, and **Raymond Rivera, of the United Community Center**, will present the workshop with Diane.

The event is being offered as part of NPC’s Boys & Men of Color workshop series, at reduced rates thanks to a grant from the [Greater Milwaukee Foundation](#).

“In America, if you’re white and not intentional about cross-cultural experience, it often doesn’t happen,” Diane says.

Well-meaning white people too often wear what she calls “white blinders.” They don’t see a problem, so they think that none exists.

“I’ve yet to teach this with an African-American man who hasn’t been handcuffed and sat on a curb for



At a Removing Racial Residue workshop, J’Koreyia Lawson, a student at City on a Hill, pours out chocolate milk, leaving behind a residue in the jar to serve as an object lesson.

driving while black,” says Diane. **“If you’re wearing blinders—not intentionally, you just have them—you have an obligation to do something about it.”**

She tells the story of someone speaking to a group of visiting ministers as the protests continued in Ferguson, Missouri.

“Your silence is violence,” the ministers were told.

People of color talk about having their own residue to scrub away.

“Is there anger, mistrust? Do I place blame where it may not belong? Do I have feelings of inferiority? That’s all residue,” she says.

Sometimes racial incidents make the news. That was the case after **Milwaukee Bucks center-forward John Henson** said he was the victim of racial profiling at a Whitefish Bay jewelry store.

“The first letter he got was from 8th graders at St. Monica’s school in Whitefish Bay,” says Diane. In the letter, students expressed dismay and support and apologies for what happened. Because members of the Milwaukee Bucks organization had seen the Removing Racial Residue program, Henson was later part of a presentation at the school.

Workshop participants don’t just talk about the most serious aspects of racial residue. Humor is one way people talk about racial residue.

“I tell people you can hear color,” says Diane. If people don’t believe that, she tells the story of calling someone’s home and asking a child if the mother could come to the phone.

“I heard the child say, ‘Some white lady is on the phone,’” she says, laughing.

“We need to recognize the residue that is in all of us. It’s affecting race relations and the lives of men and women of color and police officers.

“You have it. I have it. But if we can begin to see the residue for what it is and talk about it, gradually this society changes. For everyone’s sake—for the sake of the children—we adults have to address the issue. We have to be intentional about this or it’s not going to change.”

To register for the Removing Racial Residue session at the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee on Aug. 4, [click here](#).



Amy Rabideau Silvers is a writer and communications specialist, who long worked with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. She most loves stories about people and what’s important to them, including people trying to make a difference through NPC.