The Grassroots Institute **Building Community in an Era of Alienation**

by Carrie Durkee & Jim Tarbell

System change requires a strong community to support it. Now, however, the pandemic inhibits our intermingling with friends, associates and neighbors, while broadening our distrust of everyone. In the process, our sense of community dwindles. Set inside a social system based on race and class, an economic system that promotes selfserving individualism, a political system where almost half the eligible voters fail to participate in elections, and a traditional cultural narrative entitling us to dominate nature to satisfy our selfish needs, personal alienation is rampant and our need for community is huge.

In the middle of the last decade, we joined together with other Northern California Coastal compatriots to form the Grassroots Institute (GRI) to envision a path for our future centered on community, reclaiming our commons and creating solutions for the common good. GRI bases its actions on building relationships and connections. In these times, we need to find ways to heal collectively by seeing and feeling the pain of the oppressed to rectify our culture and create justice and equality. We have to work towards healing all of the wounds: the deaths from racism, the disfigurement of sexism and the scars of homophobia. We also have to change our relationship to nature to understand that we are all part of nature, and that when we destroy nature we destroy part of our families, our communities and ourselves.

We highlight the intersectionality of these issues to understand how one influences the other. We have to think about the results for individuals and the broader culture and what needs to change. We have to look at where we need to leverage our power, how that can be accomplished and create the first step. In these times, we can see and feel the pain of black people more clearly than ever before. Now, more people are seeing, thinking, acting, talking, looking for change, making changes, having conversations, and learning to trust each other.

This is a huge opening to spread creative ideas, listen, think, allow change, reach further, and make other connections to different people in other circles of interest. We need to take time to understand the intersectionality of the injustices that are felt by people because of a combination of their unique identities. The potential for a deep and lasting change in

consciousness has arrived. Now is our time to act, to create new practices. Let's get

into the river and start paddling. The future is in our hands more clearly than ever.

Early on in our Grassroots Institute work, we realized the importance of creating community where people learn to respect each other and cooperate in teamwork to achieve designated goals. The most thrilling part of our gatherings is the lively social interchanges that bubble throughout all of these experiences. With GRI workshops held across our region, geographic and social divisions recede and a new community grows. Our approach heals the alienation that is so endemic to our economic and political systems, and so evident in our relationship with nature and each other.

GRI values that tie us all together include:

- Cooperation, not competition;
- Being are one with nature;
- Partnership relationships, not hierarchical relationships;
- Equality and equity for all;
- People powered democracy;
- Peaceful, non-violent coexistence;
- Public policies driven by human needs, not market forces:
- Decentralized, local control:
- Healthy Planet, healthy people.

This year we are engaging in a series of workshops entitled Elections 2020: Creating Our Future. Our goal is to elect policy-making officials who create public policies supporting our values and goals of instituting systemic change for a sustainable and vibrant future for both people and the planet. We need strong communities to make this happen. See our website at Grassroots-Institute.org



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graphic: Ġeri Morisky