

March 2017

Newsletter of Initiatives of Change

Issue No. 42

Greetings!

Quite a frenetic period since our last newsletter! We're still working out the details of a couple of new opportunities that we'll be sharing more about in the coming weeks.

For now, we're excited and grateful for the many positive people and developments that have filled our schedules thus far in 2017, capped off in March by a visit to the US by the International Council of Initiatives of Change (IC). Drawn from Colombia, Ukraine, Lebanon, Australia, Sri Lanka, Kenya, India and Norway, as well as the USA, our IC visitors brought important global perspectives to our country and our organization. In this issue you will learn a bit more about the visiting group and the productive meetings they had while here. There is also a thoughtful reflection by Mohan Bagwandas, Vice President of IofC International.



This issue describes our ongoing Community Trustbuilding Fellowship - now at the halfway point in our annual program to account for our history, to honestly talk about race and to build relationships, empathy and trust. A number of this year's Fellows share their experiences in this issue. Coverage is also given to our comparable trustbuilding work that continues to engender a conversation and understanding in Troup County, GA - with national media coverage of that community's work appearing in January.

In the meantime, our work to build a coalition of partners to help build an equitable community here in Central Virginia picked up steam during February with a "Journey to Equity" forum we were honored to co-sponsor with the University of Richmond. At the event, Rev. Alvin Herring from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the *Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation* enterprise, challenged and galvanized the Richmond community, while helping set the stage for next steps we must take as a community. We were boosted by his presence and the momentum we're building as we move deeper into the year.

And one more quick thought: please note the information about the Caux Forum this summer and consider taking part!

Sincerely,

Jake Hershman
Executive Director

In this issue

[Closing the racial equity gap](#)

[New perspectives, models and experiences](#)

[Being in the fire](#)

[Truth-telling and an apology for a lynching](#)

[The new American dream](#)

[Journey to equity podcast](#)

[IofC International Council](#)

[Plan on visiting Caux this summer!](#)

[The 2016 Caux Report](#)

[A theology for radicals - Rob's blog](#)

**Please consider
a gift to Initiatives of
Change!**

Sixty percent of our support comes from people just like you! No gift is too large or too small.

DONATE

Become a sustaining donor with a monthly gift!

Journey to Equity

Closing the racial equity gap benefits all

Rob Corcoran

"We in this country are at a cultural and maybe moral crossroads," says Rev. Alvin Herring, director of racial equity and community engagement at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "We must speak truth, hold ourselves accountable, lament, and offer and accept forgiveness."



Herring was speaking to 300 community leaders at a forum titled "Journey to Equity" organized by Hope in the Cities and hosted by the University of Richmond. In welcoming the participants, Dr. Ronald Crutcher, president of the University of Richmond, recognized the challenge. "This is not easy work and we all have a part to play."

Rev. Herring told the audience that the Kellogg Foundation is "launching a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation enterprise and Richmond is one of 10 localities chosen to launch it." While in Richmond, he met with police and faith leaders and with the city's Office of Community Wealth Building (OCWB) which was created to implement the recommendations of the anti-poverty commission. (Photo: Rev. Alvin Herring)

Speaking on behalf of Mayor Levar Stoney, who constructed an unprecedented multiracial coalition to win office, Dr. Thad Williamson, OCWB's first director, told the forum, "The research question I care most about is finding out just how far we can go in making the city of Richmond a model of emerging social justice out of the embers of an often-terrible history." He thanked Hope in the Cities for its work over the decades to "overcome racial polarization and to help make possible this strange moment, when Richmond is being seen as a harbinger of hope in what for many is a terrible and fearful time... Mayor Stoney in the campaign liked to say his goal was that by the end of his tenure Richmond would no longer be referred to as the former capital of the Confederacy. Perhaps we will become known as the capital of racial reconciliation. Or better yet, imagine Richmond being known as the capital of community wealth building with a racial equity lens and unabashed commitment to inclusion of and respect for all people."

Noting that Richmond is in a "process of trustbuilding," Williamson highlighted two key areas of the mayor's objectives: First, to change the conversation on education by creating an Education Compact - "a shared commitment among all local elected official to work together to prioritize and elevate the needs of children and families." Second, to extend the community wealth building paradigm even further and make it the model, not only for one agency, but for genuine systemic change. Beyond expanding programs connecting residents to jobs, it means "looking deeper than we have before at the entire array of human services and building seamless pathways for families across the full spectrum from in crisis to stable to thriving."

Rev. Herring began his remarks by asking everyone to turn to their neighbor and say "Sawubona," a Zulu greeting that means "I see you." He explained, "We have to see each other in a whole new way... When we start seeing people, they start wanting to be seen. They start wanting to tell their stories... People who were invisible to us start showing up to us and their struggles become real to us." He said that racial equity requires that we give each other "a moment of intentional

Trustbuilding Forum

Journey to Equity Closing the racial equity gap benefits all

A Trustbuilding Forum co-hosted by Hope in the Cities and the University of Richmond, February 8, 2017

Listen to a podcast of keynote speaker Rev. Alvin Herring, director of racial equity and community engagement for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.



IofC International Council

Mohan Bhagwandas

is Vice-President of IofC

International. He has worked on conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, Quebec, South East Asia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea. Entering the corporate world, Mohan was senior strategy consultant for the Kanbay Group of Companies, a global IT company. From 2006 to 2013, Mohan was the international coordinator for the "Trust & Integrity in the Global Economy" program in Europe.



Ron Lawler is the IC Treasurer. He retired from serving as the manager for planning and community



respect...That is the real work."

Speaking of the Kellogg Foundation's commitment to overcome the fallacy of a human hierarchy based on race, Herring said, "We have to bring all of our resources to bear to jettison this false notion." He continued, "We at the Kellogg Foundation believe healing is necessary to dismantle racism. No matter how fierce you are in your action, at the end of the day this still needs to happen. There is no running from this. Why not make this day now?"

Responding to Herring's talk, Kelly Chopus of the Robins Foundation said, "Grant makers are talking and learning together about equity issues. The public sector has started conversations and learning as well. In the region, the five superintendents who represent the largest schools districts regularly meet to discuss these issues and how the issues impact kids and families. The Richmond school board has committed to use an equity lens as they make school policy. Nonprofit organizations are doing the same, hosting community conversations on important and challenging topics such as equity. Others are changing the narrative for kids and families by asking, 'what has happened to our kids?' rather than 'what's wrong with our kids?'"

Herring acknowledged that sometimes when you are in the midst of such a challenging process, progress is "hard to see." But he assured the audience, "Richmond is on the rise! We at the W.K. Foundation will walk with you."

International Council visits the US

New perspectives, models and experiences

Susan Corcoran

"We need a democracy coalition worldwide," said US Senator Tim Kaine in a meeting at his Richmond, VA, office with the International Council of Initiatives of Change who recently spent two weeks in this country. Kaine added, "Democracies are being hurt from the inside as well as from the outside." The members of the IC emphasized the impact the current political climate in the US has on their countries. Olena Kashkarova from Ukraine said, "With your elections, I don't know if my country will continue to exist." Wadiaa Khoury from Lebanon shared with Senator Kaine how her colleagues in Lebanon are engaged in courageous dialogue across political, ethnic and religious divides. She said, "We always try to connect the people of good will in the country."



International Council meet with US Senator Tim Kaine

The International Council (IC) provides leadership to Initiatives of Change and exists to inject a measure of innovation and cohesion to

services with the New South Wales State Government in Australia, based in the regional center of Wagga Wagga. Previously he worked for the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission in support of the elected Aboriginal Council. He has spent time working with the IofC team in Indonesia.

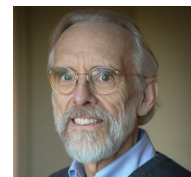
Kiran Gandhi, a member of the Board of Trustees of IofC India, has worked as the head of human



resources at three global Indian companies and as the head of training at Tata Motors, Jamshedpur. He has been an independent human resource consultant and taught at several Indian business schools. Kiran is a regular facilitator at the IofC center in India and has designed and delivered training programs on ethical leadership.

Barry Hart, PhD

is professor of Identity, Trauma and Conflict Studies in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, VA. He has been a peacebuilding practitioner for 30 years in over 20 countries. He has also taught courses in restorative justice and human rights and dignity. In 1991 Barry helped plan the Caux Scholars program (CSP) and served as academic director from 1997 to 2010.



Olena

Kashkarova is Ukrainian with a Russian background. In 2001 she became involved in IofC's "Foundations for Freedom" program in Eastern Europe. Since then she has traveled in Europe, South-East Asia, Latin America and USA with IofC. She started the "'Healing the Past'" project in Ukraine to explore the different understandings of history



the global network of partners. The current members are drawn from Colombia, Ukraine, Lebanon, Australia, Sri Lanka, Kenya, India, Norway, and the USA. Their visit to the US began in Washington, DC, followed by a week in Richmond, VA, seeking new perspectives, models and experiences to help inform their work. (See bios in the right column)



On arrival in Washington they were given a VIP tour of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture by John W. Franklin, Director of Partnerships and International Programs. This exposure to a new telling of history made an enormous impact on the

group and helped informed them of the complexities of America, a country that the world often thinks it knows. In light of the current Islamophobia and fears of terrorism Franklin said, "We like to celebrate history but not all history can be celebrated. This country invented terrorism, homegrown terrorism. On 9-11 people say terrorism and I say my people have been experiencing that from the time they came." In conversation afterwards Stephen Kimaru from Kenya expressed what an emotional and powerful experience the museum was for him.

The group met with Imam Magid and others at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS), one of the largest Muslim congregations the United States. Imam Magid is the Chairman of International Interfaith Peace Corps (IIPC). He shared with the group: "When you show love to people, you become a better person. The elevation happens to you... Until we build relationships we do not know how best to treat the other. It means going beyond treating others as we would like to be treated to the point where we treat others as they would like to be treated."

While in Washington the Council members met with the leadership of the Peace and Collaborative Development Network (PCDN), the Alliance for Peacebuilding, Partners Global, and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP). Beyond engaging with these dynamic people, the meetings were conceived to expose the Council to other organizations from whom IofC might draw lessons about building sustainable, impactful organizations that are rooted in foundational values. Jake Hershman, Executive Director of IofC USA said, "It was helpful for those of us engaged with IofC to hear about these innovative networks and the investments they are making in important peacebuilding fields of spirituality, neuroscience, and partnerships."

There were two lively evening discussions with alumni of IofC training programs: the Caux Scholars Program in Washington and later in Richmond with Community Trustbuilding Fellows. The exchanges focused on how these two groups are applying what they learned in these programs where they work and live. It was also an opportunity to explore how IofC could better serve and support them and how they could engage in more intentional ways with IofC's outreach.

Tee Turner, IofC's director of reconciliation programs, led the Council on a walk along the Richmond Slave Trail and explained the importance of healing history's wounds and the power of a shared narrative for the community. The conversation continued with Rev. Ben Campbell, a Richmond visionary and community activist, Dr. Risha Berry, project management analyst at the City of Richmond's Office of Community Wealth Building, and Jonathan Zur, CEO of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, to discuss how the legacy of this painful racial history - especially concentrated poverty - is being addressed and the system changes that are being affected.

that are the root cause of the present conflict. During the Maidan revolution in 2013-14 she initiated dialogues with all sides and worked for the UN Program for Development as a Specialist on Reconciliation.

Wadiaa Khoury, a lecturer and researcher on educational policy in three universities in



Lebanon, she has also engaged with the Ministry of Education and the Center of Educational Research and Development to establish a national community service program and in the civics curriculum development. Her doctoral studies focus on educational policy and the inclusion of the ethical and civic skills components in teacher training as a way to combat extremism. In 2001 she joined the IofC program "Action for Life" in India and East Asia and has continued her work with IofC in Africa and Europe.

Stephen Kimaru

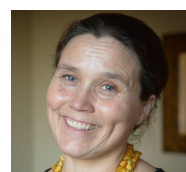
serves as treasurer and secretary of the IofC board in



Kenya and is also a member of the African Coordination Group. As an IofC volunteer for the last 9 years he has been involved in the Clean Elections Campaign, Eastern Africa Youth Program, Workshop for Africa and A Journey of Healing for national reconciliation in South Sudan. Currently he's heavily involved in the De-Radicalization program through interfaith dialogues and also in the Land, Lives and Peace initiative in Baringo County, Kenya.

Camilla Wilhelmsen

Nelson is a high school teacher in media and communication in Drammen, Norway. After receiving her MA in Visual Communication at the National Academy of Art and



IofC USA Board member Bill Hamilton, who co-chaired the IC/USA visit planning group with fellow board member Anjum Ali, expressed appreciation to the IC for spending time to learn about the American experience and the challenges of fulfilling the guarantees of individual rights and freedoms in our democracy. Hamilton also joined IofC USA Board Chair Alex Wise in his optimism that, while both the IC and IofC USA are undertaking transitions, "the collaboration embodied in the trip served to strengthen the potential for a trustbuilding partnership between the two organizations on behalf of the worldwide IofC community."

Community Trustbuilding Fellowship

Being in the fire

Rob Corcoran

"This experience has been truly one of a kind," says Franklin Jennings who works with youth development. "What I find most impactful is that although tons of people in the world want to see good change happen, not many are equipping themselves to do anything about it." Franklin is one of 26 community leaders from Richmond, VA, and six other states who have just completed the third of five residential weekend modules in the Community Trustbuilding Fellowship. He says, "This program is helping me to be able to not only ask the tough questions, but to ask those questions to the right people while establishing real respect that will help us to come up with an answer together."



"What makes this fellowship distinctive to me is the opportunity and expectation for application," says Kelly Merrill, a professor of human communication studies, with interests in leadership, social justice, and dialogue. "The quality of the instruction is challenging and enriching, with expert facilitation and instruction." She highlights guest faculty member, Dr. Hugh O'Doherty, who teaches leadership at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He has worked with groups in Bosnia, Croatia and Cyprus, as well as with Israelis and Palestinians, Armenians and Turks, and Kashmiris. In a weekend devoted to the skills of dialogue facilitation, O'Doherty stressed that facilitation is not a technique but a life discipline. Merrill recalls his insight that "you are what you meditate." The goal as a facilitator is to hold fast to your purpose (a word derived from the Greek word for fire). The key is "how to develop a tolerance for being in the fire. The limit of the dialogue will be the limit of what you can tolerate." You need to observe and interpret what is going on in the room and be "a mirror to reflect back to the group what it can't see."

Other program modules explore the connection between personal and social change and the power of history and its legacy. Guest faculty Hannibal Johnson, an author and historian from Tulsa, OK, described the 1921 "race riot" when over 1,200 homes as well as business, schools and churches in the black community were destroyed by white mobs in what been called the worst act of domestic terrorism in US history. Johnson is part of an interracial coalition working to uncover the story which had been largely "buried" until 1971. The Tulsa riot was part of a national pattern of assault on black communities when lynching was a regular occurrence. "White people brought their little dressed-up children as if to a carnival to watch people being hanged, burned and castrated." But he added that today white people are often

Design in Oslo, Norway, she worked freelance as a graphic designer and illustrator before starting her work as a teacher. For the last 8 years she has volunteered one day a week at the IofC center in Oslo. For the last 30 years she has been an organizer of the IofC New Year gatherings in Norway, and more recently the intergenerational conferences in Caux, Switzerland.

Camilo Villa,

from Colombia, creates learning experiences combining knowledge, methods and tools from social sciences to entrepreneurship, internet tools and Native American wisdom. His journey has been complex with great success but also years of great loss. His return to Colombia after time abroad was more than relocation, it was an important grounding experience. His level of engagement with the Colombian IofC team has been increasing. With his wife he promotes reconciliation and forgiveness circles.



Imad Karam is the Executive Director and head of the management team. His

responsibilities include leading the executive activities of the IofC International as well as the development and implementation of the IofC Framework for Common Action, IofC International Strategic Plan and annual operational plans. Imad is Palestinian now living in the UK with his wife and son.



angry that they don't know their own history; they feel they have been cheated, short-changed. "Whites may not know it but we are all victims [of racism] today and the sooner we act on making amends, the better off we will be."



The module on history provoked deep emotions, vigorous debate and some conflict, including within racial groups. One participant remarked, "White liberals in America are not having conversations with those who feel differently."

Melody Porter reflects:

"Debriefing our walk on the Trail of Enslaved People I was face to face with my privilege and responsibility, the stories I know about my family, and what it means for me as a white person to work for racial healing and justice today." Porter, who directs the Office of Community Engagement at the College of William and Mary, continues: "At one point during the weekend, a side comment came up that made me think hard about one question in particular: Am I proud to be a white woman? My response at that time is still true a couple of weeks later: 'Well, that's a longer conversation.' It is. And as I prepare for our next modules together, and my daily work of justice in these areas, it is a conversation I will continue to have in my own heart and with others whom I trust to hold it, with challenge and grace."

Osita Iroegbu is a first-generation Nigerian-American. She is a community advocate and communications specialist focused on the intersection of media, race, health and social justice. "We are all challenged to dig deeper and think more critically as we work to construct a narrative of truth, inclusivity and healing. The possibility that this process involves considering not only the narratives of the oppressed, but also that of the oppressor can be an uncomfortable act, because who really wants to evaluate and attempt to understand evil and oppression? But there is an unveiling that occurs when we peel back both historical and contemporary layers that can lead us to more nuanced discussions about how to identify the root causes of racism and bigotry, dismantle systems of oppression and reconstruct structures and spaces of justice, where the stories, experiences, truths and lives of the historically marginalized and oppressed are not only included, but are centered and elevated."

Demetrius Summerville is a licensed mental health counselor who serves as the director of community relations at a community center in a distressed neighborhood in Orlando, FL. He also works with a local foundation committed to reconciliation. He says, "What makes CTF distinctive is its emphasis on the importance of listening to the sacred stories of the 'other.' In the listening, empathy can grow within each individual to help build the bridge across whatever barrier that divides. The faculty laid the groundwork for community trustbuilding when Rob Corcoran stated, 'Failure to root your social justice efforts on the bedrock of a strong inner life and lived out values can endanger the most idealistic efforts.'"

"What has been rewarding for me so far has been, in a sense, the most painful. It is ironic that I am a mental health counselor trained to listen with empathy, not judgement. However, as it relates to divisive social issues I have neglected this principal and sought to listen to prove I am right, resulting in a loss of relationship with the 'other.' I am grateful for the gift of being reminded to listen with empathy, not judgement."

In an exercise to understand ways to acknowledge and heal history, working groups discussed five case studies: Prince Edward County, VA, where public schools were closed for five years to avoid integration; American Indian residential schools; Japanese Internment during World

2017 Caux Forum

Plan on visiting Caux this summer!



June 30, 2017

Official Opening

June 29-July 2, 2017

Ethical Leadership in Business

July 4-9, 2017

Just Governance for Human Security

July 11-15, 2017

Caux Dialogue on Land and Security

July 17-21, 2017

Addressing Europe's Unfinished Business

July 23-26, 2017

Towards an inclusive peace

July 29-August 4, 2017

Children as Actors for Transforming Society

[More information](#)

2016 Caux Report



Exploring the Human Factor in Global Change



The 2016 Caux Report is now published online. Hard copies will be available from our office.

War II; the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York when the gay community took part in violent demonstrations against police raids; and the lynching of Italians in New Orleans in 1891 - the largest single lynching in US history. Each group worked on scenarios to fully acknowledge the event, as well suggestions on which people or institutions might be included and what questions might lead to constructive dialogue.

Alesia Clement, a retired social worker from Tulsa and docent coordinator at the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, says, "The experience has brought enlightenment to my life and the work of reconciliation. The program is one of great importance to all who have a desire to contribute to our healing history. The materials and workshops are great lessons on how we can move America to a better place." Kelly Merrill adds, "My peers elevate the experience with their diversity and authenticity. I expected to find a community of new colleagues, but I am certain that I have found life-long friends."

Troup County, GA

Truth-telling and an apology for a lynching

By Susan Corcoran

The New York Times and other media outlets recently carried the story of an historic apology made in Troup County, GA. On January 26, 2017, LaGrange's police chief, Louis M. Dekmar, who is white, issued a rare apology for a Southern lynching. Seventy-seven years earlier Austin Callaway, a young African American, was snatched from a jail cell by a band of masked white men, then shot and left for dead. Many in the community had never heard of this atrocity but on Thursday evening, wrote the New York Times, "the fatal cruelties inflicted upon Mr. Callaway - long obscured by time, fear, professional malfeasance and a reluctance to investigate the sins of the past - were acknowledged in this city of 31,000 people."



Photo: Dustin Chambers for *The New York Times*

Chief Dekmar addressed a crowd at a traditionally African American church, "I sincerely regret and denounce the role our Police Department played in Austin's lynching, both through our action and our inaction. And for that, I'm profoundly sorry. It should never have happened."

Over the past two years city and county residents, including Chief Dekmar, have been engaged in a program of racial reconciliation and trustbuilding facilitated by Hope in the Cities. Ricky Wolfe, a white former county commission chairman, is an organizer of the program. His partner is former state Rep. Carl Von Epps, who is black. When speaking to county commissioners Wolf said, "People have said, 'This is a big problem, Ricky, but you shouldn't be talking about it because it's going to make it worse.'"

The aim of the program is simple: to bridge racial divides in Troup County through trustbuilding, research, community collaboration and

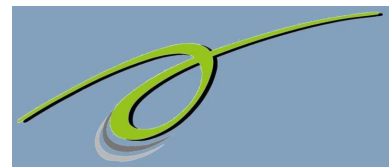
Trustbuilding now in paperback



Trustbuilding
by Rob Corcoran



Read Rob Corcoran's latest blog
[A theology for radicals](#)



Initiatives of Change, USA
is part of a diverse global network with an 80-year track record of peacebuilding, conflict transformation and forging partnerships across divides of race, class, religion and politics.

Our vision
We inspire a vision of community where a commitment to reconciliation and justice transcends competing identities and interests.

Our mission

action in order to remove barriers that prevent full access to opportunities for all.

These two community leaders have been unwavering in their commitment. The three city governments of LaGrange, Hogansville and West Point that make up Troup County collectively pledged funds and LaGrange College, which Wolfe said would act as the "hub" of the program, also pledged funds and the use of its facilities.

The LaGrange Daily News quoted Von Epps: "Truth be told, we have a problem. Not only is it a racial divide, it's an economic divide and a cultural divide. Truth be told, there's a spiritual division here... Our hope is to bring people together - it's a trustbuilding effort."

Hope in the Cities facilitators Tee Turner and Cricket White have made numerous visits to Georgia to provide training and facilitation. Participants in the Troup County Racial Trustbuilding Initiative have included the three city mayors, law enforcement officers, pastors and nonprofit leaders who have met for two-day sessions at LaGrange College. Over a two-year period more than 150 community leaders have been through the program and another 150 are signed up to take part in a second round starting this month. In addition, four from the local group have traveled to take part in Hope in the Cities' Community Trustbuilding Fellowship in Richmond, VA, for further training.

It was in the course of the program that the hidden history of the 1940 lynching first came to light. It had not been forgotten by many in the black community but was a surprise to most of the white participants. Tee Turner points out that the police chief's apology for the lynching was only one action taken as part of the process of change. Other steps included the NAACP becoming a member of the Chamber of Commerce and the community celebration of Martin Luther King Holiday as "our" day not just "their" day. The whole community rallied around the NAACP March on Washington.

In 2015 Von Epps and Ricky Wolfe were given the Troup NAACP's Leadership Award for their work in creating a race reconciliation initiative in Troup County. This award is given to those who have a clear vision for social change and carry out that vision through action. In accepting the award Von Epps said, "This initiative of change - this trustbuilding exercise - is part of an initiative of the three city mayors, Troup County and LaGrange College. It's long past due. There are many people who say we do not have a racial discord in our community, but all of us gathered here together know that there is, so we thank God for those individuals who support this cause. All we're doing is building trust in our community."

The LaGrange Daily News reported on the two-day visit of Dr. John W. Franklin, senior manager of external affairs at the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, last month. In addressing a breakfast meeting of more than 200 community leaders he said, "It makes us richer to know the stories of our families."

Dr. Franklin also spoke to the members of the Racial Trustbuilding Initiative. Ricky Wolfe told him that going through the initiative's training was eye-opening for him. "I went to learn about black people, and I learned a lot about Ricky Wolfe," he said. "I was so naïve, I never thought about the majority of black people I know being the descendants of slaves." The initiative was formed, in part, because every issue he tried to tackle as a commissioner came back to race. He added, "In the South, we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings... A lot of feelings have already been hurt. The collective sum of our attitudes is our culture. I'm asking you to open up your heart."

This story was drawn from articles in *The New York Times* and *The LaGrange Daily News*.

We equip leaders to build trust in diverse communities through a process of personal change, inclusive dialogue, healing historical conflict and teambuilding

Our focus

We connect core values with personal and public action with a focus on racial reconciliation, economic inclusion and interfaith understanding.

For more information
<http://us.iofc.org>

Follow-up Links

[Initiatives of Change](#)

[Hope in the Cities \(HIC\)](#)

[Caux Scholars Program](#)

[IofC on Facebook](#)

[Trustbuilding on Facebook](#)

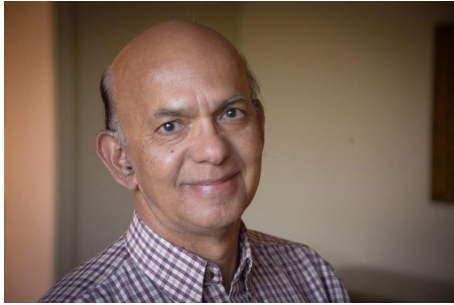
[HIC on Facebook](#)

[IofC on YouTube](#)

[IofC Vimeo film archives](#)

The new American dream

Mohan Bhagwandas, Vice President of IofC International, was recently in the US for two weeks with members of the International Council. He writes his reflections on their visit:



Ten of us from eight countries and five continents had braced ourselves for challenges at the US customs and border control as we entered the country. On the contrary none of us had issues and we were pleasantly surprised. Border control officers even welcomed us warmly and it was one of

the fastest entries into a country I have ever had!

There is a vibrant energy in America that impacts you. In America, it is OK to stand out, it is OK to raise your head above the crowd, it is OK to succeed and shine. There seems to be an enthusiasm, passion and belief that things can and will always get better. The world needs this "spirit of America."

The day after we arrived in Washington, DC, we were given a special tour of the newly established National Museum of African American art and Culture. Through a brilliant combination of multi-media, photography and script, you walk through the eras of slavery, civil war and civil rights, that have shaped modern America.

You cannot walk through the museum and come out the same person. The greatness of a nation is often signaled by its capacity to find redemption by telling its own story as it really happened. The museum does this.

Invariably, most conversations turn towards the new president, Donald Trump. Many theories are given as to how someone completely from the outside of mainstream politics, secured the top job in the United States. I have a theory. It is to do with capitalism itself, the system that gave birth to the American Dream.

My mind went back to the African American museum where I saw capitalism manifest in its most brutal form. Wealth was generated in that phase of economic development on the backs of enslaved Africans. It was cheap labor, low cost of production, servicing a massive export market for sugar and cotton. America became rich under this obscene form of capitalism. It was the injustice of this that fueled the civil war, which eventually ended slavery.

I write this in Richmond, Virginia, which was one of the hubs of the slave trade in the US. The International Council had the profound experience of walking the "Slave Trail" used by the shackled and chained human cargo, who were bought and sold at downtown markets along the James River.

Initiatives of Change has played a leading role over the past 30 years in acknowledging this history and creating space for honest conversation. We learned how its Hope in the Cities program has been at the forefront of this initiative.

There has been an unprecedented growth of capitalism in America and the world over 70 years since the end of WWII. What we are seeing now is the plateauing of an economic system that has delivered wealth and wellbeing to many but which has also resulted in a growing gap

between rich and poor.

Today many white Americans feel disempowered and disenfranchised. This sense of loss, this sense of fear of the future in people, linked to the view that "the problem is immigration" became the "hidden" constituency that Donald Trump spoke to in his election campaign.

We should not forget that it is this same sense of fear and loss that is driving global migration. There are billions of people across the world, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arab world who live permanently "outside the system" and who are disempowered and disenfranchised. It is these people who are trying to come to America and Europe, looking for a better life.

In my view, the old systems need to be refreshed and renewed. The real "American Dream" should be to initiate the transformation of the world economy and to improve the wellbeing of all of humanity. Spending millions trying to keep people out is futile.

America transformed Europe with the Marshall Plan after WWII and secured the peace and stability of Europe. America is perhaps the only country now that can initiate an investment of massive proportions to uplift the conditions of the human family. It has the vibrant energy, the passion and enthusiasm to give leadership to such a global initiative.

It will secure America's peace and wellbeing for the long term. This should be "the new American dream."

Initiatives of Change, 2201 W. Broad Street, Suite 200, Richmond, VA 23220

[SafeUnsubscribe™ {recipient's email}](#)

[Update Profile](#) | [About our service provider](#)

Sent by info.us@iofc.org in collaboration with

Constant Contact 

Try it free today