

# Radical Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity: Illuman's Evolution

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**By Glenn Siegel, Wisdom Elder**

In October 2018, Illuman conducted its first Men's Rites of Passage for Español-speaking men (UMBRALES), a needed expansion of services for Latino brothers. In the fall of 2019, the first course on US systemic racism was offered by Illuman brothers Bill Clark and Byron McMillan, to begin a re-education process of US history through a broader lens than what most of us were ever taught, and address the enduring racial pain and injustice in this country. Liberty and Justice for All is now in its second iteration with more than 80 men involved. On June 10, 2020, catalyzed by the mass-witnessed murder of George Floyd, Illuman circulated its newly created Statement on Racism throughout the organization's leadership, both nationally and internationally. In the final paragraph of that document, there is an acknowledgement that

*racism and white supremacy have been present from the very foundation of our nation [USA] and continue to cause suffering and alienation. They thrive in an atmosphere which denies that our wealth and our privilege derive in large part from the genocide and enslavement of peoples. We Illuman brothers commit ourselves and our community to the work of witnessing, acknowledging, and healing the trauma caused by these injustices.*

As a next step in Illuman's self-examination and action, beyond simply making a statement, the Council for Radical Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity was formed, with our first meeting occurring on February 2, 2021. This group contains a relatively racially and ethnically diverse group of Illuman brothers, given the overwhelmingly white demographic of Illuman itself. The timing of the commencement of this group happens to coincide with Illuman's engagement of We Are Open Circle, a consulting group that is guiding Illuman leadership in a "reweaving" of Illuman itself, reviewing structures, power, decision-making, tensions, conflicts, and organizational evolution. Given this co-occurrence of self-examination processes, the leadership of Illuman has an opportunity to radically address the implementation of its mission of "men transforming men" and weave anti-racism into this renovative process.

Central to the transformative work of Illuman is the contemplative work each individual must commit to in order to face core wounds related to abandonment, neglect, abuse, grief, loss, and other traumas, as fodder for the movement from victimization into wholeness and capacity for service. No spiritual awakening and expansion can occur without courageous attention to this challenging and often painfully disruptive journey.

Our national history is no different. The culture of this country is diseased, with blatant core wounds of horrifying trauma, including genocide and slavery that have

not been fully faced and felt, let alone metabolized. With such a fractured, deeply flawed foundation, there is no possibility of enduring and functional structures being built with true integrity unless we courageously attend to these brittle cultural roots with the same commitment we hold in facing our own inner wounds. Radical change is necessary from the foundation up. Superficial and compartmentalized “solutions” are inadequate and only serve to perpetuate suffering and postpone healing. In fact, although slavery ended on paper with the Emancipation Proclamation issued in 1863, the disease of racism has never been eradicated and has continued to metamorphosize through gruesome eras that include thousands of lynchings, terrorism, massacres (Wilmington, NC in 1898 and Tulsa, OK in 1921, to name just two), Jim Crow segregation, and, most recently, mass incarceration of disproportionately large numbers of black and brown people (including adolescents) in for-profit prisons.

This ongoing cultural trauma requires recognition, at the very least, before the work of healing can be realized. As is offered in the Liberty and Justice for All course, attention to our body-held generational trauma, both in non-whites and whites, is crucial for our national healing. European whites arrived on these shores with several hundred years of their own trauma—including the devastating bubonic plague and periods of brutal despotism—before eventually seeking a “promised land” in the Americas. The trauma that many European whites brought to this country has not been adequately faced and metabolized.

As men of Illuman know, without transforming our pain, we will most certainly transmit it. In the words of Resmaa Menakem, author of *My Grandmother's Hands*, that transmission is enacted by “blowing it through” the bodies of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. And, as the Twelve Steps of AA so sagely advise, we must make a “searching and moral inventory of ourselves” before true recovery and healing can progress. Most of us would not even have been able to participate in Illuman offerings were it not for our intergenerational inheritance, amassed on the backs of exploited people.

Since Illuman is primarily comprised of white men who have inherited the legacy and privilege of this diseased White Supremacist racist system, and our mission is “men transforming men,” in my opinion, the work of anti-racism should be held in our consciousness as any significant decisions are made within Illuman. For us white folks in Illuman, it is comfortable and easy to lapse back into the luxury of blindness, since we can escape racism whenever we choose, unlike those who feel it daily. However, an element of this blindness is also the lack of awareness of the insidious and perpetual damage that racism inflicts on whites too: a soul-numbing separation and disconnection from conscience. This damage, hidden in privilege, is part of our inner work to address, both in Illuman and in our larger circles of living.

Over the coming months, the Council on Radical Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity will be developing tools to assess Illuman’s racial makeup, introduce means of anti-racism accountability into the enactment of Illuman’s mission, and propose specific actions to address and dismantle any complicity (conscious or unconscious) that is identified within the organization. Any suggestions for furthering our work are appreciated. Please share them by emailing [tsymensbucher@gmail.com](mailto:tsymensbucher@gmail.com).