

We should stop calling ourselves

"EGALITARIAN"

(because we're not)

Things will be better then.

Trout 10/20

What is Egalitarian?

Well, according to us at Twin Oaks, if you take a big mirror and reflect everything that we are, and everything we share with our fellow WHITE communities in the FEC, you will have captured the image of Egalitarian perfection.

In short, EGALITARIAN is what WE are at Twin Oaks. WE exhibit ourselves as a matter of IDENTITY, that WE exemplify an ideal state of EQUALITY among people, and that we are therefore, "RELEVANT to the world at large."

Increasingly, it seems, we are not. In this presentation, I will demonstrate how our behavior as a community has lost us the privilege of calling ourselves EGALITARIAN. We will see how Egalitarian identity, like the land beneath our feet, was stolen from Native Americans. We will see how we aren't fooling anyone, and our mis-representation is hurting, more than helping us.

X-member Janel was at a random party somewhere in California before visiting in June (2022) and was talking to some RANDOM guy for a few minutes, and the conversation went on:

JANEL: The next place I'm going is this place called Twin Oaks.

RANDOM
GUY
AT

RANDOM
PARTY: Oh, you mean the RACIST COMMUNITY?

Now some of you might be thinking "What do random guys at random Cali parties know about Twin Oaks?"

How about a less random example, a visitor who never came and was shocked at our behavior as a community:

1

Good morning!

I hope this email finds you well and taken care of. I wanted to talk about the newsletter that was recently posted, I had a little bit of concern.

I'm not familiar with how racial issues are handled in the community, but after reading the addition in the most recent newsletter I was feeling a little uncomfortable and unsure of my visit. I obviously do not have full context of the situation in this note so I cannot say I fully understand how this person felt. As a POC who has had the impact of others' actions reduced by those who do not experience it (i.e. 'This didn't happen to me so it doesn't at all' kind of thinking), it is a little jarring to find that in the newsletter before coming to the community and I have a few questions.

(5⁶ good questions)

I work within other alternate lifestyle communities for radical change and racial acceptance, so I'm not unfamiliar with the challenges this sort of change or acknowledgement can bring about. I also am feeling a great deal of racial anxiety considering what the world outside the gates of Twin Oaks is looking, and I want to make sure that at the very least things are slightly or moderately better at being acknowledged without stone throwing. The letter brought me anxiety as well, and I just want to clarify what the situation is before I walk into it.

I hope to hear from you soon and have a great day!

If you're wondering why we are at famously low population, that this here is how an entire generation feels about Twin Oaks. People don't want to be/continue association with a community which makes outsiders feel this way. This is how we make people feel. We live in a world where those feelings are communicated in a great web. And that is how random guys at random parties in California come to know Twin Oaks as the "Racist Community".

Let us now consider how the basic tenants of EGALITARIANISM are STOLEN (that is, taken without asking or compensation) from

Native Americans. By conservative estimates, the ancestors of the Monacan Indian Tribe lived here as early as 25,000 years ago. They would have lived among giant sloths and woolly mammoths and Lions. And then 200 years ago these ancient cultures were systematically liquidated from every corner of this continent, including the land beneath our feet. Twin Oaks bought the land cheap in the 60's. The land was cheap because it was stolen. Anyone who left this beautiful land was either ENSLAVED, MURDERED or RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES..

Here are some other things we stole from Native Americans:

Egalitarian #1--Participatory Government

An ideal form of self-government where the people inform and direct the leaders/decision makers. This type of government has been in place at Twin Oaks since Polar Bears, Sabre-tooth Tigers, and Giant Beavers roamed our Ice Age ancestral landscape. No, kidding! Then when Native Americans were exterminated from this area, that system ended. Now, 2-300 years later, we here at Twin Oaks as well as we here in America, enjoy our government systems as if they were a product of our own cultural ingenuity.

They were, in fact, stolen, wholesale, from Native Americans.

Egalitarian #2--Gender Equality

When Columbus first sailed, Women who lived here had legal and political rights, owned farms, and had social status. Women of Colonial America, by in large had none of these things. Being Trans would have been criminal. In indigenous society Trans people had legal and political rights, owned property and had social status.

We owe our identity, our equality, to those who died for it. Trans/Queer-phobia was an instrument used in the destruction of the indigenous world. Until we are giving credit, we should stop thanking ourselves for this.

Egalitarian #3--Access to Health Care

It is said that among Native people were doctors who cure any ailment, such was their skill. Also there were large numbers of people in the Medecine biz, much like today when 12% of the population is working in Health Care. Back then, everybody would have access to Health Care. People who could not pay lived in a society where caring for the poor was looked on favorably. In places, a doctor would return a patient's

payment if the patient died within a year. Can you imagine that sort of courtesy?

We did not invent equal access to health care? The idea goes way back and it too was stolen from Native Americans. There are some tribes in America now that have some of the worst access to medical care in the Western Hemisphere, because of the Genocide. What do we have to say about that?

Egalitarian #4--Non-violence

Non-violence in Native culture begins with the respect for all living things. The kind of wanton violence these cultures were exposed to during colonization would have been unimaginable before that. They practiced limited warfare, often with only clubs as weapons. Feats of non-violence were plenty, like instead of killing your enemy, you sneak into his house and cut off his braid while he is sleeping. They would substitute sporting tournaments for wars. Violence in these societies was highly scrutinized and managed.

We now live in a world of near-unlimited violence, and eastern Ukraine is being razed to the ground. If you ask me, fighting with clubs is an advancement over fighting with nukes. It is hard for the White Person to imagine traditional warfare as a means for greater peace, and a technological adaptation to keep the world from looking like, well, this. Try it.

We aspire to the non-coercive, non-violent and peaceful existence that was basically here when colonization began. We are escaping the cultural violence which is rooted in colonization. We live in the footprint of one of the most violent acts of human history. Our non-violence needs an asterix(*).

Egalitarian #5--Sharing stuff

The land, vehicles, labor, food...all the things we share as a community that makes Egalitarian, has been shared since Virginia was in Arctic Tundra. I mean, a herd of Mastodons bathing in the river. That is how long people have been sharing their lives together at Twin Oaks.

That's like 10, 20, 30,000 years, or more. If we gave Native Americans credit for our cooperative model, maybe we could say something constructive on the subject of sharing, but it just looks like we stole this idea instead.

We don't need to go over ALL of the ways our EGALITARIAN identity is STOLEN from INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, I just wanted to

point out very briefly that all of our most basic core principles are STOLEN.

SO WHAT???

It is like this.

White People sharing things is not an example for anything anymore.. When we present ourselves as EGALITARIAN, we are saying, in a very real sense, that WHITE PEOPLE sharing things is an IDEAL STATE OF EQUALITY.

That makes TWIN OAKS a RACIST COMMUNITY..

HOWEVER, if we are just a WHITE community, a cooperative, an eco-village, whatever, we are a whole lot less RACIST than being a pillar of equality.

We are a known entity for being POC un-friendly. Besides the newsletter (which frankly I find to be very inline for Twin Oaks thinking), what other ways have we demonstrated contempt for the most important civil rights organization of our time, and the BIPOC community in general?

1. We didn't set a RACIAL QUOTA.

Scarry words for a lot of people. Well, you are beginning to see what Twin Oaks looks without a RACIAL QUOTA. Chronic net membership loss. You don't have to be BIPOC to see our obvious red flags. People looking for community do not want to come to a white community in a mixed part of the country without a believable plan, in a community with basically no credibility on the subject.

A Racial Quota has been so often suggested, you would think we lived in a community of people who were unable to follow simple instructions. All those Twin Oaks-ish spin-offs from this fundamental point were just a way to please and distract ourselves, and landed us rightly where we are right now.

We are in a profoundly worse position as a community now than we were 2 1/2 years ago when we watched George Floyd begging for his life, over a \$20 bill. The #1 reason for that is that we don't have a RACIAL QUOTA. It is the only useful medicine for us at this point.

2. We didn't pass a RACIAL AGGRESSION POLICY.

Again, it's in the installation manual. A community that will not pass a RACIAL AGGRESSION POLICY might just be the kind of community that publishes racially aggressive material.

I mean, who wants to go live in a place like that?

3. No RACISM OREQ.

Racism isn't important enough for us to devote a 1-2 hour oreq for. That is a demonstration of contempt as people walk in the door. Altering this is not that complicated. This will pretty much need to be a have-to if we want to succeed as a community.

4. Failed to produce a substantial amount to be considered INVESTMENT IN DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITY.

(sigh)

Some of the things we have spent money on here, I am stunned at the grip with which our generosity is measured. On this count too, we are all represented. Obviously this would need to change if Twin Oaks chose the direction of EQUALITY, as it is known outside our own reflection.

We should be moving forward at this point, with the presence of mind, that these things I have mentioned here, and so many more, are what preclude us in the larger world.

That the "Gates of Twin Oaks" as I have so many times heard, is a community of WHITE PEOPLE living in an ideal state of equality.

It's not the WHITE PEOPLE living together in a community that is the problem. When we call it EGALITARIAN, then the people, well informed, people who want community, will think we're RACIST, and they won't come, like the Vizzie that poured their heart out like that. I find it hurts me to read their e-mail, because that is not who I am, but it kind of is.

I really want us to move away from the hypocrisy of our self-designation, because for the most part, only people living here actually believe it.

Very simply, we sound a little less RACIST if we stop calling this EQUALITY. We are still a handful of uncomplicated policy shifts and a substantial INDIGENOUS AFFIRMATION away, but this is how we earn our name, EGALITARIAN.

And then Twin Oaks will once again be EGALITARIAN, like it was when Columbus landed on America? like it was when Camels and Horses grazed the Arctic Tundra of Ice Age Virginia?

No. Not exactly. Exactly not. But we can honor the ancient traditions by honoring their incredible demise in the American Genocide, here as elsewhere. We can acknowledge that our highest principles

I was excited to see that there was a paper up about egalitarianism, which is something I've been talking about with folks in small group settings and one on one for awhile.

Since this paper contains a lot of different ideas to think about, I have a lot of thoughts. It's hard to condense but I'll try.

On egalitarianism: the reason I think it's important to have more talks about this is that I think we are not very clear on the parameters of this value. Egalitarianism, meaning we all have an equal share of resources, or equal access to those resources? Or egalitarianism, meaning we all have equal access to knowledge of our governing structures, and an equal chance to become someone in who is the role of decision maker? Egalitarianism, as in, we can equally reach into the workings of policy and try to make changes when we feel like something needs changing? Egalitarianism, as in equal access to money? To spaces to use to our advantage with full autonomy? All of the above?

On that track of thinking, it is very quickly apparent that we are *not* egalitarian with regard to a number of those categories. Someone who has extreme allergies to pet dander would not be able to live in some SLGs that allow indoor pets. Someone who does not have full and academic command of the English language would have a harder time reaching into policy workings to figure out how to take steps to make changes here. Someone with more access to outside wealth can travel more.

There is another aspect of this that is worth mentioning, which is what our lives have looked like up to the point when we join. Someone who came from a childhood where there was heavy military recruitment in their area might have decided to join the military for awhile, then in coming here, might experience more of a gap between their previous lived experience and Twin Oaks life, than someone who is coming here from a different intentional community. Etc. etc.: college educated, independently wealthy, Latinx, first-generation immigrant, and on and on.

Egalitarian has, to me, a feel of erasing the lived experiences of whoever might want to benefit from community living. It is like saying, "whatever was true for you out there, in here, we are all the same." The aspirational part of this is warm and fuzzy, but in reality, we are *not* all the same in here, because some may come here with significantly higher generational disadvantage than others, and nearly everyone who has ever come through here has internalized and largely unexamined attachments to the power structures inherent in our greater capitalist-run society.

If egalitarian is making sure everyone has the same size of tofu boots, and equitable is making sure everyone has *their own* size of tofu boots, maybe we are being short-sighted to hold egalitarianism in such high regard here.

On the issue of our having stolen the concept of egalitarianism from native cultures: yes, I agree. Basically everything we benefit from here where we live at Twin Oaks can be traced back to an origin of theft and violence and then hiding that reality from the eyes of history. After reading (most of) the book *The Dawn of Everything*, though, I see a little red flag pop up whenever I read anything attributing something to a "Native Culture" without any citation or more information. The authors of that book go into detail about how in-depth archaeological study reveals the existence of thousands and thousands of experiments of different paths toward organizing human societies over the millennia. They caution against looking at a "Native" past as though there were a monolithic way of doing things on the planet, chapter one of human history, until, in chapter two, humans figured out how to farm and we went about destroying all of the characters from chapter one. Chapter One, they argue, is actually an entire and mostly unread library of different social experiments that we conveniently lump together into one pile labeled "prehistory."

Comment
by
Summer

So, probably, some tribes did experiment with egalitarianism, and, almost certainly, white people who bothered to check out those tribes before they obliterated them, and liked what they saw, grabbed up the concept for themselves and never thought once about crediting its origins. You're right. We could do better to look at our community lineage here, to name and credit what we find.

On the topic of a racial quota, which I think is referring to the stalled-out racial balance proposals, I've been in lots of conversations about this in the past two years, and I can definitely see at least two sides of this. We have been told, over and over, we need to have more not white people living here if we are going to change our culture. And yet we have ALSO been told that this majority-white space, where many people are just at the beginning of learning about their own racism and what white supremacy even is, has left a traumatic mark on many not white people.

There is a way in which it would be irresponsible for us to recruit "for diversity" here without making all of our history, including our present, fully transparent to prospective members. To try to sell the idea of moving to Twin Oaks to Black people in an attempt to up the numbers here and better surround ourselves with "diversity" feels problematic. Like we are luring people into a situation where we tacitly want "them" to save "us," and not adequately giving warning that we are in a stage in our community where we are very likely to be making things weird at best.

I do still want to hold on to a vision of a Twin Oaks that is not necessarily majority white, and in any case, one that has a much more vibrant makeup of skin tones, backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives. I think that measuring our antiracism efforts by how many people of color currently live here is missing something crucial about our efforts themselves. The deepest and most life-changing learning is the slowest. We are working on undoing an entire community history of being the way we have been. Fifty-five years in a broader surrounding of 400+ years of the way things have been. This is a slow undoing.

I think we need different goals and different measurements than just the total amount of melanin in the community. How we hold our own practices, how white people have learned to speak about racism with white friends when we used to feel that was someone else's role, how we show up for these conversations when they are community-wide: those are things that *are* noticeably different here in the past few years than when I first moved here.

We won't solve racism in our lifetime. We may not even go very far in solving Twin Oaks's racism in our lifetime, but we have a better chance at it if we quit villainizing ourselves and look for the spaces where we can pull each other in to the discussions with compassion and respect for the magnitude of the undertaking.

On the topic of the racial aggression response policy: a couple months ago I started writing a piece about this, "Why I Think There Is Still No Racial Aggression Response Policy," that I intended to three-hole punch and stick in the policy binder in the absence of an actual policy, but it's not done yet.

It's worth noting that several other people worked on this policy over the period of about two years. When we left the most recent, one-page version, up for comments from BIPOC members of the community, there were few critical comments, but the ones we did receive were significant. Moreover, those critical comments lined up with my own opinions by that point. I think it is accurate to say that a different policy team might have passed what we had drafted by that point; I think I shoulder a fair bit, if not most of the responsibility for the fact that we did not go in that direction.

My separate piece explaining this is long and I'm not sure I can summarize it well, but here goes. In a nutshell, from when I first sat down as part of the original team working on this policy to now, my

thinking about harm, aggression, violence, and justice, has undergone a full overhaul and become richly nuanced; these topics have become the focal point of my ongoing self-education on liberation from oppression. Writing this into a policy on a par with our other policies, now seems insufficient and undesirable, at least until our community feeling on harm and violence generally has undergone a sea change.

At the start of the journey, I had some dim ideas about trying to help people who had committed microaggressions, bringing them into the necessary learning so that they would understand what they had done wrong and could be sent back into the world reformed and improved. Most would commit small harms, but some would be egregious wrong-doers, hurling racist epithets, and that we would not tolerate, and those people would be swiftly escorted off the property.

Many problematic versions of the policy (too long, too punitive, too confusing) led to more and more thinking, conversations, and new drafts.

Perhaps one of the biggest shifts in my own thinking about justice and harm came when I read *Until We Reckon*, by Danielle Sered, who writes, “no one enters violence for the first time by committing it.” In other words, as many people have heard, “hurt people hurt people.”

But I also had to expand my definition of harm and violence. We say that we are a nonviolent community. (And I agree, there must certainly have been some tribes practicing nonviolence, and white people almost certainly usurped those tribes and stole the ideas of nonviolence without even dreaming of giving credit to their origins.)

Nonviolence, too, is aspirational, of course. But here I think that we at Twin Oaks have more of a feeling of having “arrived,” that we *are* nonviolent here, because no one throws punches, and anyone who did would be banished.

We don't tend to think about the concept of expulsion as a form of violence, about the human need for connection, interdependence, and support, and of the weight of the threat of being banished, disproportionate for those with fewer resources on the outside. When we here are harmed, we want to remove ourselves from the experience of harm, and to make it go “away.” On an individual level, this is largely a survival mechanism, but we have not looked at how those of us in the community who are not personally involved in a conflict can act to exacerbate, or to quell, feelings of righteous anger.

Another difficulty with the Racial Aggression Response Policy is the impossibility of writing down a set of guidelines for how to proceed, since every single case is going to be different.

I also learned about the importance of centering those who have been harmed, but that this takes great care, because one who is set on a revenge fantasy may need some time to feel safe and to cool off before they can engage in logical thinking again, and they may not be able to do that for awhile.

Ultimately, if we have a cookie cutter policy on how to address racial harm, how can we possibly address all the various messy ways in which violence always shows up? Violence and harm are snaky, sneaky. The “person harmed” is never a perfect model of how we wish they would be, and the “aggressor” always has harm in their past; maybe we, their fellow communards, have unintentionally compounded that harm.

The task of looking at the ways that we perpetuate harm and violence, as individuals and as a community, is so crucial, and so fundamental to this conversation, that it can't possibly be overstated. How do we perform the mentality that we can separate our community from racism by erecting a wall

between those who are the most outright abusers, and our liberal, “good” selves? How does that act itself relinquish us from a feeling of personal responsibility for endeavoring to uproot our own racist thoughts and actions, to be accountable when we have made a misstep, and to be driven by goals of solidarity and learning, rather than goals based on fear of how we will be judged or threats of losing our home and our social supports?

Probably one of the most damaging outcomes of the criminal legal system, the carceral mindset we all carry to some degree, is the binary notion that there is punishment, or there is nothing. There is policy, or there is apathy. I believe that it is possible that we can address racial harms here without a policy stating the manner in which we intend to punish someone who has done harm. Moreover, I currently believe that any policy we could write up would have the backbone of the same kind of perpetuation of harm we won't be able to undo until we can view our motives and actions more honestly.

I think it would be great if we could have something written down somewhere that states our intention to think about each situation critically, to make sure that everyone involved feels safe and cared for, and to move as slowly as we can, so all feel heard and none wind up steamrolled, but there are so, so, SO many questions: about safety, about trauma, about the role of the community. About confidentiality, transparency, and patriarchy. About timelines and willingness for accountability, about nonlinear growth, about metrics for calling a process “done.”

We were naïve to think we could pop a policy into being that somehow answered all those questions, or even eloquently made mention of the questions themselves. We – I – had no understanding of the work that had already been done, and is continuing to be done to this day, on this front, in the lineage of people forced to work outside the carceral system for their own protection: sex workers, immigrants, all the people on the margins.¹

Additionally, the Racial Aggression Response Policy, even with any reference to expulsion omitted, still requires that *some* (read: evolved, woke) white people take on the task of educating *other* (read: overtly racist) white people about racism. One reason I find this problematic now is that it implies we should reserve education for use as a recourse when harm has occurred. The task of self- and co-education must be proactive and never ending. And it is false that some white people here will reach a final state of “fully educated,” where they will be impervious to stepping in it.

We need to be teaching ourselves and each other how to see everyday harms, how to prevent and interrupt them, how to look for our own internal red flags of disunity with our values, and how to go back and make repairs and take responsibility for our actions with a minimum of unproductive self-flagellation. ALL OF US. ALL THE TIME. Not as a matter of correcting aberrant behavior, but as a matter of what we just *do*.

So yeah, while I am just one person on the team that worked on this task, and this is just my own personal opinion, I don't think it is by any negligence that there is no Racial Aggression Response Policy on the books. I believe that it is un-policy-able, in the traditional sense.

On the general: you mentioned to me that Twin Oaks has failed. I want to leave room for empathy for the despair I hear in that sentiment. And I want to push back a bit, gently. For one, I am reminded of one

¹ Now I have some understanding, and I want to lift up and credit some of the thinkers whose works have hugely been shaping my thoughts on all this. Michelle Alexander led me to Angela Davis led me to Ruth Wilson Gilmore led me to Foucault (yes, I actually read Foucault), led me to Derecka Purnell led me to Mariame Kaba led me to Andrea Ritchie led me to Kai Cheng Thom led me to Resmaa Menakem led me to generative somatics and adrienne maree brown, Mia Mingus, Mimi Kim, Shira Hasaan and Rachel Herzing.

of the principles of Emergent Strategy: "never a failure, always a lesson." What if it were actually impossible for us to "fail," as long as we were constantly learning from what wasn't serving our goals as well? And further, I think examining our metrics for "success," or even the idea that antiracism is something anyone can "succeed" at, is important.

Those are some thoughts. Thank you very much for putting out this paper and starting what I hope are lots of interesting conversations around the community. These comments were written with love and compassion, and may they be read with the same.

— Summer

My response to summer is:


Yes speaking up for Native traditions is
Thin ice w/o ^{citations} ~~traditions~~. But I will say
when you open your ears to the Elders, and
They are on Youtube, you hear of a world
That is completely contradictory to our
history, which is all lies. There are just
so many amazing truths, they just bubble
out of me.

I want to say that the knowledge that
we "do not except white members now"
is its own recruiting tool. It is
cultural insurance, IMO. And mostly.

With respect to racial Aggression Policy,
I believe we can produce a policy That
is not long.

I appreciate your comments
-Trant

I think it could have made for a more
interesting discussion if you'd not edited out the
non-visitor five questions. I'm also curious how
the rest of Janel-ex's conversation with Random
Guy went. Finish 4 less random conversations

Regarding the Racial Aggression Response Policy, the issue
isn't just that it's long/complicated but that BIPOC members
felt that it wouldn't work unless there was substantial other
change in TO conflict resolution that would make BIPOC feel
safe bring issues forward. So on one hand, BIPOC members asked
for this policy, on the other hand, BIPOC members disagree w/
the policy. A main issue I (and probably many others) ^{are struggling with} is that we
want to listen to BIPOC + make changes to support them, but (like
any group), they don't all agree on the best path forward. So what do we do? 

Nyxiz thoughts about Trout's original words,

- two things are equal when no differentiation can be made between them
- we are all different people, therefore we are not equal
- equity is the process by which inequalities are balanced
- there is no such thing as equality

Flinch,

If I may paraphrase the 5 questions:

"Who will be watching ~~me~~ out for me at T.O.?"

Stephan,

Reasons why we don't have these things do not alter the effect that without them, we are not egalitarian. Whiteness is the biggest issue we need to deal with here. If we approach issues from a perspective of managing whiteness, I think we may experience differing results. -Trout

Trout, I don't want to try to consider the non-visitors' possible thoughts & feelings thru someone else's (your) words. I have to wonder why you don't publicly state their questions, the entirety of their letter, in their own words, what are you hiding?

The words you do quote from this letter sound very much like the ones Jules read to me at the council appeal of 'Not a TO POC.' TO recruitment would also not let me know more about it or allow me to converse directly with that person. If the letter you quote is the same one, then it says it all that TO recruitment would share it with you but not with me.

As for Janel's conversation, yeah...

... I want to know how Jamel answered, what if anything more was said. By itself the gouted sound byte doesn't mean much. It seems intended to shock people into reacting to try to be more virtuous or something as if to try to prove wrong someone who I don't know anything about. What does Random Guy consider racist; why does he say TD is racist?

These are the kind of conversations that self-proclaimed so-called anti-racists here at TD have not wanted to have. The meeting discussions are kept mild enough to be essentially meaningless. The essence of the RARPs was also to stifle more public discourse, even if that may not have been the original intent. -Flinch, discouraging with intent