

# What's in a Name?

*The Story of a Community Name Change Process  
and what it says about Addressing Racism for Sustainable Community*

Joe Cole  
drjoecole@gmail.com



# Opening Visualization: Arriving and Supported



# Hart's Mill Background

*(put your own community name and location in Chat)*

- ◆ An intentional community project in the design and planning stages, 2012-present
- ◆ Located in Orange County, North Carolina, near Hillsborough
- ◆ **Community Vision:** “We envision a world in which people live in justice and harmony with each other and the land.”
- ◆ Adopted the Hart's Mill Ecovillage name in 2012.
- ◆ Along with its Vision, Mission, and Aims, the community has over thirty Principles and Intentions that outline their values and goals.



# Hart's Mill Background: Racial Equity Work



- ◆ In 2015-2016, a handful of members of the mostly white group completed a weekend-long Racial Equity training.
- ◆ Members began to ask questions about the legacy of racism, increasing the diversity in the group, and deepening its commitment to working on racism and racial equity, both internally and within the broader community.
- ◆ As a result of the conversations, a community member **proposed a new Principle and Intention** for the group that would **address racial justice** concerns.

# Core Values and Principles

Does your group have core values on Diversity?

On Racial Equity or Racial Justice?

*(tell us in the Chat!)*



# Resistance to Racial Equity Principle

- ◆ Some leaders and members argued that **working on racism and racial equity was not central to the mission of creating an ecovillage**, and could become a **distraction** to members with already limited time and energy.
- ◆ Members with the greatest resistance were white, and most had not done much education or training around racism.
- ◆ The conversation evolved over several months, and in late 2016 there was **strong support for a new Principle and Intention on racism and racial equity**. The new principle was adopted in December of 2016.

# HM Principle on Racial Equity

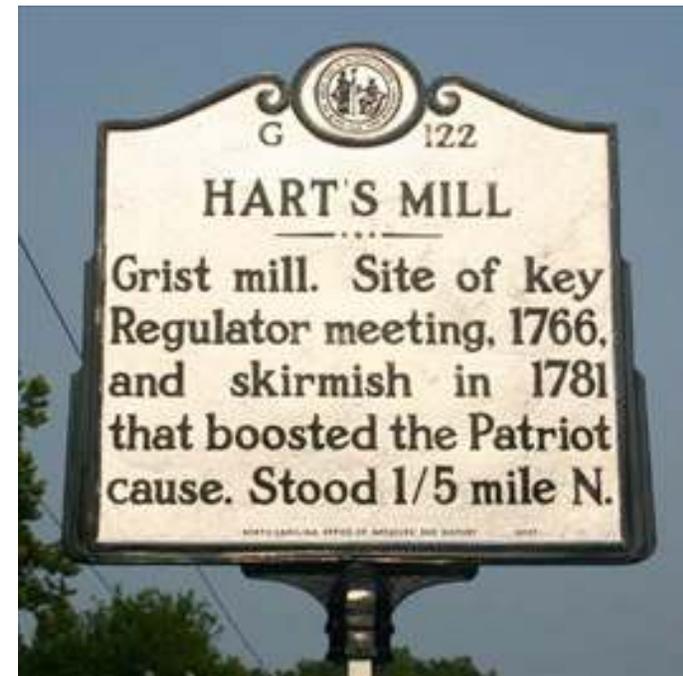
**We are committed to working for racial equity and for social and environmental justice.** We acknowledge racism in ourselves and in our society, and seek to overcome its harmful legacy in our relationships, our country, and on the land. Aspiring to create a racially inclusive community, we recognize that we can only achieve this goal by addressing our own racism and by working for racial justice. Aspiring to create a sustainable community, we recognize that true sustainability requires achieving harmony and justice – making ourselves a “beloved community” – both ecologically and socially.



Photo by Joe Cole

# What's in a Name?

- ◆ Thomas Hart was a colonial-era landowner who owned a grain mill within a mile of the land where the community proposes to build.
- ◆ From 2017-2019, there were repeated efforts to change the community name.
- ◆ Concerns about the name included lack of direct relevance to an ecovillage, plus the privilege/power implications of naming the project after a landowning male of European descent, who likely owned slaves (neither confirmed nor disproven in the research done by community members.)



NC Historical Marker

# What's in a Name?



Photo by Joe Cole, community land, 2016

- ◆ Defenders of the name liked its local historical flavor, and also its double meaning for community and personal growth when read as “heart’s mill.”
- ◆ Critics of the name object to:
  - ◆ Lack of clarity (is the project a grain mill or an ecovillage?)
  - ◆ Wish to better convey ecovillage values
  - ◆ Ethical concerns of honoring a white male landowner and possible slave-owner.
  - ◆ Tension with community values on addressing racism and promoting racial equity.

# Default: Keep the Name

With differing interpretations of the name's meaning and Hart's legacy, the group had difficulty moving beyond personal preferences to decide together whether to keep or change the name.

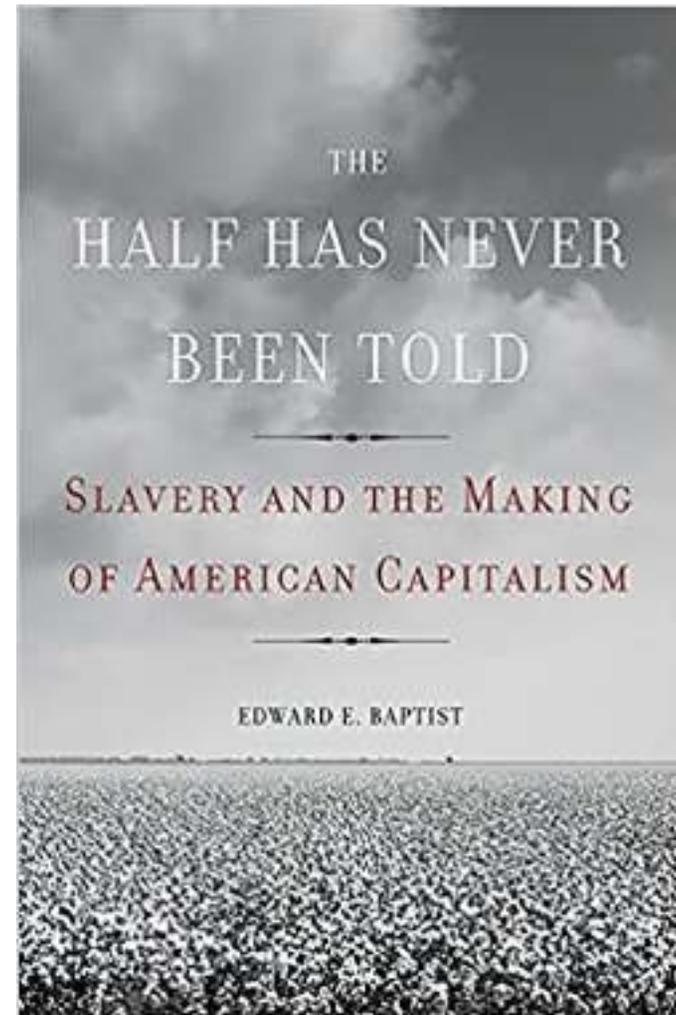
Without a productive way forward, by early 2019 the default result was to keep the name, though several members found this outcome to be extremely distressing.



# Fall 2019: New Info on T. Hart

Fall 2019: a member reads *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, by Edward Baptist (2016), and encounters the following quote:

“[In 1780] **North Carolina enslaver Thomas Hart** wondered whether he should send slaves to clear the land that he claimed in Kentucky: ‘to send a parcel of poor Slaves where I dare not go myself’ seemed a kind of extreme taxation without representation, not in keeping with the ideals of the ongoing Revolution. But Hart changed his mind. He brought enslaved pioneers across the mountain road, even though the toil he planned for them to do in the woods, cutting down the forest and planting clearings with corn and tobacco, left them exposed to danger.” Chapter 1, Page 5. Endnote 8: “Thomas Hart to [N. Hart], August 3, 1780.”



# >>> New Research on T.H.

In addition to owning large estates and plantations in NC and KY, Hart was a founding member and shareholder of the **Transylvania Company**, which claimed ownership of millions of acres of Cherokee and Shawnee lands in KY and TN



## >>> New Research on T. Hart

The Transylvania Company used enslaved people to clear lands for farming in KY/TN, and was met with violent resistance from Native Americans

No definitive records have been found to prove with certainty that Hart himself owned slaves personally, though the Transylvania Company definitely did

Two years after Hart's death, the 1810 Census records show enslaved people in the households of both his widow and his eldest son who lived near him in KY



# Name Change Process

FALL 2019-WINTER 2020

A handful of community members advocated for a name change process, arguing that retaining the name of Hart was counter to community principles and values, and was detrimental to the work of equity, justice, and inclusion



# Resistance to Name Change: Comments from Leadership Circle

- ◆ Like the name-- disheartened about changing
- ◆ No firm evidence that proves TH owned slaves (doesn't trust the historian)
- ◆ We are named after a place not a person. Mill is the important part of the name.
- ◆ Not opposed to changing if we can find a better name that invokes farming
- ◆ Too much time and money to change the name
- ◆ Can't avoid complicity in the history of slavery/colonialism, so changing the name doesn't make a difference



Photo by Joe Cole, community land, 2017

# In Favor of Name Change: Comments from Leadership Circle

We've outgrown the name

TH was involved in and profiting from owning slaves--we must end any association with or celebration of his legacy

TH's company took millions of acres from Native people--shocking and incompatible with our values

Current name causes great pain among members and friends of the community, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



Photo by Joe Cole, community land, 2017

# New Name Change Process



The Dragonfly is a symbol of change.  
Photo by Joe Cole, community land, 2016

- ◆ The leadership circle agreed upon a multi-month process to brainstorm new names and have a community ranking process for names
- ◆ The leadership circle held two selection meetings to decide
- ◆ In April of 2020, the leadership chose the new name:
  - ◆ **Common Ground Ecovillage**

# Summer 2020

## Racial Justice Advocacy

- ◆ Occasional anti-racism trainings and ongoing racial awareness reading group
- ◆ Some members want social justice to be more central in building the community
- ◆ “Building a community that is all white would feel like a failure”
- ◆ A few leaders make group announcements to affirm racial equity work and address expressions of racism in the group

## Ongoing Resistance to RJ

- ◆ Some argue that racial equity is a distraction from building the ecovillage: “social justice concerns are slowing us down—waste of time”
- ◆ “If people of color don’t come, that’s their choice—I’m not racist”
- ◆ Unconscious racism directed towards a leader of color in the group
- ◆ Claims that attempts to address racism have “harmed the community”

# Summer 2020

*Community member email to group:*

- ◆ “I do not feel guilty about being a member of the white middle class; if we are the ones who are interested in forming this community, then I see that as a positive. We welcome and encourage those of other racial backgrounds to join us; if they do not, then that is their choice. I personally have never treated African-American people, nor people of any other racial background any differently, and do not intend to do so. I am tired of workshops that focus on this issue, rather than what we need to do as a community to move things forward.”



Photo by Joe Cole, community land, 2018

# Reflections on this Story

Vision and Mission Tensions

Racial Justice and Intentional Community

Intentional Communities and the Desire for Utopia

Organizational Change

Resilience to Continue the Work



# Different Visions of Community and Sustainability?

Physical  
Sustainability



vs.

Cultural  
Sustainability?



Photo by Vikash Kumar

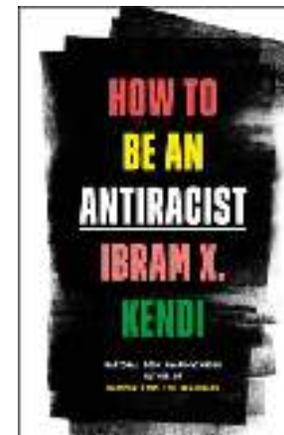
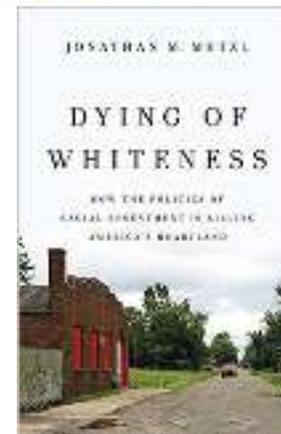
# 4-D Framework

for Integrative Whole Systems Design for Sustainability



# Dying of Whiteness or Transforming into Anti-Racist Org?

**“A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. An antiracist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups. By policy, I mean written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy” (Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, pg. 18).**



# Racial Organizations: All

- ◆ Victor Ray, “A Theory of Racialized Organizations” (2019)
  - ◆ All organizations are racial structures: race is constitutive of organizational foundations, hierarchies, and processes
  - ◆ “Racialized organizations are social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of dominant racial groups” (p. 36)
  - ◆ RO’s legitimate the unequal distribution of resources
  - ◆ Much racial inequality is produced via passive participation in RO’s
  - ◆ Whiteness is a credential providing access to organizational resources, agency, and power

## Dying of Whiteness or Transforming into Anti-Racist Org?

**“Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups” (Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, pg. 18).**



Photo of community land by Joe Cole



## The Eden Project?

In intentional communities, people often seek an idyllic or romantic version of community as complete and perfect harmony—a paradise or utopia.

This dream can be like a drug, and people may cling to it ferociously and refuse to address conflict or examine whether their community is reproducing racist, sexist, and other oppressive dynamics.

# Organizational Culture: From Dominance to Collaboration

Based on “White Supremacy Culture”, by Tema Okun

Dominant (White) Organizational Culture in U.S.	Relational Culture
<b>INTRINSIC VALUES</b>	<b>INTRINSIC VALUES</b>
Object Oriented	Relationship Oriented
Reason	Emotion
Statistics	Stories
Rules	Creativity
Single Issue (Fragmentation)	Analysis (Whole Picture)
Linear	Circular
Technology	Process
Dichotomous	Dialogical
Quick Fix	Long-term Relationships
Professionalism	Grassroots Knowledge
Expertise	Leadership Development
Individualism	Collective
Efficiency	Effectiveness
<i>A culture that values <u>only</u> these qualities may result in:</i>	<i>A culture that <u>includes</u> these values may result in:</i>
<b>HIERARCHY</b>	<b>COMMUNITY</b>
<b>BUREAUCRATIC CONTROL</b>	<b>ACCOUNTABILITY &amp; EMPOWERMENT</b>
<b>WHITE PRIVILEGE</b>	<b>SOCIAL EQUITY</b>

*ANY VALUE CAN BECOME OPPRESSIVE WHEN IT IS SEEN AS THE "BEST" OR "ONLY" VALUE AND IS IMPOSED ON OTHERS BY THE DOMINANT CULTURE.*

Developed by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond - [www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org)  
Use with attribution only.

# Organizational Change

## Three Growth Process of Profound Change:

1. Enhancing **Personal Results**
2. Developing **Networks** of Committed People
3. Improving **Organizational Results**

*The Dance of Change*, Peter Senge et. al.



Cob Hut, community land, photo by Joe Cole

# Challenges to Change Processes

*The Dance of Change*, Peter Senge et. al.

- ◆ “Not Enough Time”
- ◆ “We don’t know what we’re doing” (lack of help or support)
- ◆ Not clearly relevant to organization
- ◆ “Walking the talk” (gap between values and actions in change agents)
- ◆ “Am I safe? Can I trust others?” (fear, vulnerability, and anxiety)
- ◆ “It’s not working” (measurement and assessment)
- ◆ “We’re right!” vs. “They’re a cult!” (true believers and non-believers)
- ◆ Power and Control issues (governance)
- ◆ “Reinventing the wheel” (diffusion of organizational learning)
- ◆ “Where are we going?” (strategy and purpose)

# Strategies for Resilience

Community-building and Anti-Racism work are incredibly challenging. Alongside profound joy, meaning, and connection, this work also brings up tremendous pain, grief, trauma, and uncertainty.

What are some tools and strategies for self-care, wellbeing, and resilience that you practice?

*(add your self-care practices to the Chat)*



# Steps Communities can take to address Racism and work for Equity

- ◆ Be Aware of Pitfalls and Challenges
  - ◆ Avoidance and Denial
  - ◆ Expect Resistance to the conversation
  - ◆ Emotional Fragility and Trauma
  - ◆ Claims of Transcendence: “I don’t see color”, “I’m not racist”
  - ◆ Burdening People of Color to educate and “clean up” after whites



Illustration by Stacye Leanza

# Functions of White Fragility

Maintain white solidarity

Close off self-reflection

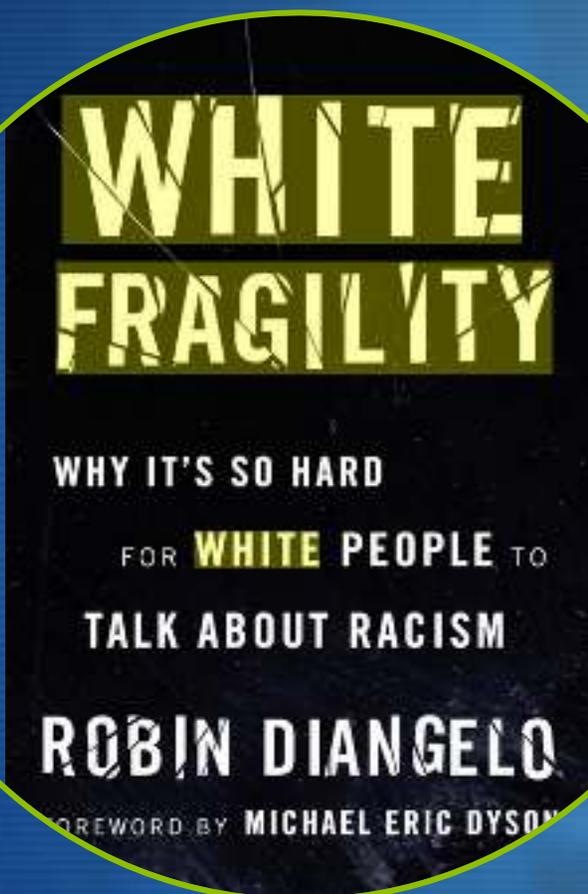
Trivialize the reality of racism

Silence the discussion of racism

Protect a limited worldview

Protect white privilege

Rally more resources to white people

The image shows the front cover of the book 'White Fragility' by Robin DiAngelo. The cover is black with yellow and white text. The title 'WHITE FRAGILITY' is at the top in large, bold, yellow letters. Below it, in smaller white letters, is the subtitle 'WHY IT'S SO HARD FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT RACISM'. The author's name 'ROBIN DIANGELO' is at the bottom in large, bold, white letters. At the very bottom, in smaller white letters, it says 'FOREWORD BY MICHAEL ERIC DYSON'. The book cover is centered within a blue speech bubble graphic that has a yellow circular outline around the book itself.

**WHITE  
FRAGILITY**

WHY IT'S SO HARD

FOR **WHITE** PEOPLE TO

TALK ABOUT RACISM

**ROBIN DIANGELO**

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL ERIC DYSON

# Steps Communities can take to address Racism and work for Equity

- ◆ Expand Resilience to overcome Fragility
- ◆ Listen to BIPOC, Invite Feedback, Repair Damage
- ◆ Create a Collaborative Culture of Care to counter White Supremacy Culture
- ◆ Grieve the Painful Legacy and Ongoing Reality of Racism
- ◆ Responsibility for Self-Education: Cultivate Resources and a Shared Vocabulary
- ◆ Expand Community Values to include Racial Equity and Anti-Racism; Acknowledge Racism and commit to working on it
- ◆ Co-Liberation: Racism harms white people, Racial Justice is healing and liberating for all
- ◆ Build Relationships with Racial Justice organizations

# Steps Communities can take to address Racism and work for Equity



Community circle meeting, photo by Joe Cole

- ◆ Resilience Rounds:
  - ◆ Feelings
  - ◆ Values
  - ◆ Reflective Listening
  - ◆ Clearing the Air
  - ◆ Addressing Power

# Ongoing Story of Change: Communities can Commit to Anti-Racism

- ◆ Racism is a social, economic, and cultural system that divides people on the basis of racial categories and distributes benefits and burdens according to those groupings. (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*)
- ◆ “One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. **There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist’**” (Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, pg. 9).



Community land, photo by Joe Cole

# Questions and Discussion

