

Let exhibit spark dialogue on the roots of bigotry  
By Travis McAdam - 10/17/2008

"Our Natural Enemies. And who are his [white man] natural enemies? Number one on the list is the International Jew, the whole Jewish network, the Jew as an individual. Number two is the mass of colored races, whom we shall designate simply as the mud races." — Ben Klassen in "The White Man's Bible." This is but one of many racist and anti-Semitic passages written by Ben Klassen. In more than a dozen books, he outlined the nasty ideology that inspired The Creativity Movement to become one of the most notorious white supremacist groups of the 1990s.

The Montana Human Rights Network was well acquainted with the hate group, as it had a state chapter and activists in western Montana. Throughout the 1990s, Network staff worked with citizens in Superior and Missoula to organize rallies and other public events to show that The Creativity Movement did not represent Montana values. It was this on-the-ground presence confronting the so-called "Creators" that led a defector to call the Human Rights Network in December 2003. The phone call began a five-year project culminating in the "Speaking Volumes" art exhibit that is now showing at Anaconda's Copper Village Museum.

When he called the Network in 2003, the defector, J.R., said he was done with The Creativity Movement. He said he was the steward of a storage locker in Superior, which contained boxes of the group's books and some internal correspondence. For a small amount of gas money, he offered to sell the contents of the storage unit to the Network.

Network staff met with J.R. in Missoula. As is often the case with white supremacists, all of J.R.'s friends were part of the group. If he left, he felt he needed to get out of Montana for his own personal safety. Network staff had J.R. sign a bill of sale for the books and gave him some gas money. Acquiring the books not only removed them from circulation. It also eliminated the one source of income the Montana hate group had, as they sold the books to support their activities.

After making arrangements with the police to meet at the storage locker, Network staff headed to Superior with two pickups and a U-Haul to take possession of the materials.

When the storage unit was emptied, the Network had approximately 4,100 books. Network staff sent boxed sets to allied organizations, academic institutions, Holocaust museums and law enforcement.

This still left the Network with thousands of the white supremacist books. It decided to use the books as the basis of an art exhibit to stimulate public discussion about the dangers of bigotry, anti-Semitism and intolerance. It pitched the idea to Helena's Holter Museum of Art, which agreed to develop the project. "Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate" opened in January 2008 with more than 60 pieces contributed by artists from around the country.

Today, The Creativity Movement is largely dead. Unfortunately, we can't declare victory and go home. The underlying themes of the hate group live on. Since 1990

when the Network formed, we have seen many organized hate groups come and go in the state. The Aryan Nations chapters folded and Klan units formed. The Klan disappeared and The Creativity Movement gained a hold. The National Alliance and American Nazi Party rose to prominence with the demise of the Creators.

Overall victory is elusive, because these groups amplify and prey upon the racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia and class inequity that already exist in our communities. Examples of this can be seen in sentencing disparities between white people and people of color in our criminal justice system for the same crimes. It can be seen in the wage disparity between women and men doing the same jobs. It can be seen in the fact that poor children go without healthcare and attend under-funded schools simply because they were born poor.

Standing up and opposing hate groups is necessary and very important work. However, communities also need to address the underlying systemic problems. We hope the dialogue inspired by "Speaking Volumes" will promote discussions of the problems that communities face. Only when the roots of bigotry and intolerance are dealt with can we declare victory and view the "Speaking Volumes" exhibit as representative of our collective past.

Please take the time to visit the exhibit while it is in Anaconda. The transformation of white supremacist books into art promoting justice and equality is truly compelling. To learn more about the project, please attend our presentation, "It started with 4,000 copies of 'The White Man's Bible,'" on Monday, Oct. 20, at 7 p.m. at the Copper Village Museum, 401 E. Commercial St. in Anaconda. Information is also available on our Web site at [http://mhrn.org/events\\_speakingvolumes.html](http://mhrn.org/events_speakingvolumes.html).

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