

## Book review

Lois H. Siemens

*Set Free: A Journey toward Solidarity against Racism*, by Iris de León–Hartshorn, Tobin Miller Shearer, and Regina Shands Stoltzfus. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001.

**I**nevitably, within forty-eight hours of arriving in Manitoba to visit my family, I am happily shivering in an arena, watching a nephew play hockey. This year, for the first time, I took notice of the team's logo—a profile of a native Indian with full headdress. A month earlier, it would have seemed inconsequential, but after reading *Set Free: A Journey toward Solidarity against Racism*, I no longer dismissed it. How we name ourselves and each other has power to promote or dismantle racism.

**Set Free calls us to work in solidarity to find the courage to relearn our communal values, reclaim our heritage, rename racism as one of the principalities and powers, and resist the pressure to keep the status quo.**

*Set Free* takes a balanced, honest look at racism through the lens of the word of God. Its approach to dismantling racism is unique in its condensation of a complex, polarizing issue into a manageable conversation. That conversation relies on critical analysis, per-

sonal stories of courage, and willingness to learn from failure. Pastors, other leaders, and individuals will find much here to help begin, sustain, and strengthen conversations over the long haul.

We can define and analyze racism without ever looking at our own role in promoting it. *Set Free* pushes us into that new and difficult territory. It calls us all to work in solidarity to find the courage to relearn our communal values, reclaim our heritage, rename racism as one of the principalities and powers, and resist the pressure to keep the status quo. These goals are in keeping with the reign of God and will free our communities and nations to be who God intended us to be.

The authors of *Set Free* are involved with dismantling racism through the Damascus Road antiracism process, Mennonite Central Committee's peace and justice work, and day-to-day encounters. They offer different cultural perspectives: Iris de León-Hartshorn is Mexi-Amerindian, Tobin Miller Shearer is a white male, and Regina Shands Stoltzfus is African-American. Writing collaboratively out of this diversity has given them opportunities to learn and model healthy cross-cultural relationships. Their collaboration gives the book integrity.

The aim of *Set Free* is to focus on racism's identity-shaping power. The most helpful parts of this concise book are its examination of the underwater dimensions of the racism iceberg, its practical suggestions that encourage awareness and action, its reflection on personal events, and its brief historical sketch of the process through which the white race came to be "white" and privileged. The preface contains foundational information on racism and should be read carefully. I appreciated the vulnerable language of reconciliation, grace, and restorative justice.

The last chapters respond to the question, so what? Chapter headings ask intriguing questions that promote building relationships: How do we respond? What do people of color need from white allies? What do white people need from people of color in solidarity relationships?

So what can I do about an identifying logo for a dominant hockey team? At the game, I turned to my sister and asked, "Why Mohawks? That doesn't describe the character of this team. What about Mitchell Mennonites?" Someday I might add, "The fact remains that the white institution gets to decide what the representation of Native Americans shall be, gets to decide the meaning of the representation, and gets the economic benefits from selling merchandise the representation appears on" (46).

*Set Free* offers an honest picture of racism from privileged and unprivileged points of view. It will challenge churches to reconsider their view of God's created world and God's intentions for community.

### **About the reviewer**

One of *Set Free*'s suggested exercises is to use race-specific language to describe yourself. Lois Siemens is a white Canadian student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN).