



Of Special Interest

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We are asking all of you to send us your email addresses so we can cut down on mailing costs as well as cut down on time! Please send your addresses to us at cfhr1@juno.com and/or cfhr1@yahoo.com.

The first issue of *Dialogue* 2011 is dedicated to Catherine M. Hoekstra, a beautiful young University of Houston Clear Lake student who died in her sleep on Sept. 15, 2010, the same morning she was to start her internship with the Center. To continue the work of the Center, her mom Andrea asks all to make donations to the Center in honor of her daughter.

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Central

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Co-Directors' Column

Is the conversation on race still necessary?

By Lucy McLaughlin
and Cherry Steinwender

Are we really done with talking about race? Have we really internalized oneness and know that we are one human race and not separate races colorized historically here in the U.S.? Do we all see each others' skin color and know that we are different in that way but alike in so many other ways? Have we really "shrugged off the baggage of history?"

I attended the preview – "The Whole World is Watching" - at the Menil Collection. What a

wonderfully diverse audience attended as Reverend Bill Lawson spoke of his experience during the Civil Rights Movement.

Stephen Kleinberg tells us that the whole world is watching Houston, as we are the most diverse city in the U.S. How will we embrace our increasing diversity?

Cherry and I attended the neighborhood town hall meeting at the Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church regarding the brutal beating of Chad Holley by the Houston police. Most attendees were

African American and one could feel the anger and pain and frustration of people who have had enough discrimination from the police department here. When the assistant D.A. referred to the audience as "you people," you could feel the frustration.

It was one of those "gotcha moments" that happens because people of European American background do not spend enough time examining their mental and emotional habits. Everything he said after that was suspect, even

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Internalize Oneness

Self Discovery: Reflections of an Intern

By Jeny Sorto

I have to admit that when signing up for an internship at The Center for the Healing of Racism, I didn't expect to enjoy my time there as much as I did. I thought I had learned all there was to know about racism and intolerance in my history classes at school. I also thought: 'I'm not racist, I even look multi-ethnic, I get along with everyone...how hard can any of this really hit me?'

Upon arrival, I was amazed at the variety and amount of information the Center holds in the form of books, videos, DVDs, magazines, handouts, pamphlets, newsletters, photos... I was delighted to be allowed access to this collection and I regularly borrowed audio-visual and reading material to reflect on.

At the Center, I connected the most with Co-Director Cherry Steinwender, one of the original founders. I have never met anyone so passionate about what they do, so devoted to educating everyone she comes in contact with. Speaking with Ms. Steinwender, I was able to bring to surface emotions that I usually push to the back burner because they are too difficult to face, or because they are difficult to recognize as harmful or detrimental. I realized how influential it is to learn from a

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MISSION STATEMENT

To serve as a catalyst for the healing of racism through the education and empowerment of individuals.

Have you gotten around to filling out your membership for 2011?

If not, please take the time to do so.

The work must go on!

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Has your address changed?

If so, please notify the Center so your newsletter can be timely delivered!

Or, send us your e-mail address and choose to receive your newsletter in your email in-box.

Co-Directors' Column

Is the conversation on race still necessary?

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though he tried to apologize.

When Gabrielle Giffords was shot in Tucson and six others were killed and another 12 people wounded, immediately the media took the conversation to the hate language rampant in the far-right circles of politics.

It took some patience to wait and see what was also behind the rampage of a young European-American male. It turns out that he has severe mental problems that were not being addressed effectively.

Certainly being exposed to the hate language (which has increased since President Obama starting running for the presidency) did not help his dilemma. But it points out that always simmering under the surface is the issue of discrimination. It comes to our attention during a crisis such as this one, and we sort of readdress our racial conditioning.

The rewriting of history textbooks by the Texas School Board, again, brought out our difficulties with being honest about talking about race. There are many examples but to leave out such words as "slavery" from our history textbooks just leaves many of us shaking our heads!!! Why can't we talk about the whole truth of our history and take out the stinging denial? It is important to know that "it is not over until it is over for the one who was/is oppressed." They are the most forgiving when they see the remorse and we cannot skip the remorse!

There still are an inordinate number of persons of color in jail, in gangs, suffering from health disparities, not graduating from high school, and

lacking adequate educational facilities and job opportunities. The economic turmoil is only exacerbating that problem.

The people of European American background are still benefiting from the blinding world of white privilege and denial, of which, generations before them were able to take advantage. Aren't they?

Barbara Hacker told us in her 2009 newsletter article: "The disease we call racism has been around longer than our country has existed, has worldwide variations and layers of ways in which it manifests itself. It is not likely to have disappeared yet...The focus of the work must shift in some degree to meet the new realities. The scene is complex...We must make some shifts, recognizing where there has been progress and keep our eyes wide open to new ways racism is being manifest."

Maybe we need a new awareness and language in dialoguing with our younger

generation about this topic?

The scars of our past can tell us where we were but they don't have to dictate where we are going. There is a silence about racism – we still don't seem to know how to talk about it comfortably. There is a lot of power in silence. It can quiet the heart and soul and bring strength of body and spirit.

But it can also symbolize a festering wound that just won't heal, that surfaces with each new crisis. Consciousness and resolution are needed for healing.

Maybe when we really see our humanity is tied up with one another, we can commit once again, with the fervor of the Civil Rights Movement, to not just continuing the conversation about race, but actually empowering ourselves and transforming our communities. Leonard Pitts tells us: "If good people do not lead this discussion, the bad ones happily will."

Self Discovery:

Reflections of an Intern at the Center

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survivor; someone who teaches from experience, who has suffered what those she reaches out to have suffered.

Although I had the opportunity to help prepare for the various workshops, I was eager to see Ms. Steinwender and other Center members in action as they delivered valuable information, shared life-changing experiences, and made everyone present understand the severity of the issues we face as a diverse nation. I wanted to see what was said and done to make attendees open up about issues rarely discussed. Some of the topics included bullying, the use of racial slurs and name calling, stereotyping, interracial relationships, the effects of slavery, institutionalized racism and inter-ethnic racism, among others.

I was the most affected by Dialogue: Racism, an intensive two-

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The Center would like to offer our special thanks to the United Way. The agency's Community Building Grant aided the Center in publishing the book, *Bread is a Simple Food*.

Racism Against Indians

Questions abound about motivation for bias in Australia

By Sonia Kotecha
Member, Center for the Healing of Racism

The Center recently received a letter from a student in Europe of South Asian descent, who was focusing on the subject, "Racism Against Indians." She posed a number of questions to the Center including why does racism exist? What motivates racism towards Indians in Australia specifically? How does the Center address racism? And, does the Center believe that peace one day will ever happen in Australia and in the world? Cherry approached me as a Center member to answer some of these questions, and upon reading my response, felt it was a story to share with others.

I am a Center member and have been affiliated with the Center for many years. I am also of Indian heritage, and I was born and raised in the United States. My parents came to the states in the early 1970s as immigrants. My parents are what

many would call, "twice migrants." While India was under British colonial rule, my grandparents were courted to East Africa to help build the economy. Uganda is where my parents were born and raised and called home until Idi Amin, the Ugandan dictator at the time, expunged all the Asian Indians from Uganda, claiming that the country belonged to Black Africans. My parents, along with all of my extended family, migrated to England as refugees. As I attempt to address questions about racism, I think it is important to know a little bit of my history so that one has a context as to where I come from and why the issue of racism is something that I have been so strongly drawn towards understanding.

There are a number of definitions of racism out there; however, the Center likes to define it as "prejudice plus power." I look at racism as a system of oppression that institutionalizes certain preconceived belief systems that have been constructed about groups of people based on skin color. These beliefs are deeply rooted in stereotypes that can lead to harmful discriminatory practices. Each one of us can discriminate against others based on prejudices, but it becomes more life- or livelihood-threatening when people in power act on these prejudices, and as a result, groups of people are denied access to opportunities including education, health care, housing, etc. Over time, these practices can lead to distrust, a sense of superiority or inferiority and social distancing of people. As we work towards undoing it, we

Self Discovery: Reflections of an Intern

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day workshop that demonstrates how our historical failures have propagated racism, stereotypes, and xenophobia. I was amazed, and a bit outraged at the amount of historic information I discovered during Dialogue that my history courses at school had failed to provide. For example, I never knew that Native American children were placed in residential boarding schools run by churches, where the ultimate goal was to eradicate any traces of their culture. Children were abused, demeaned, and taught to be ashamed of their heritage. Girls were sterilized because it was believed that by eradicating a people, the "Indian problem" would be solved. At Dialogue I was also able to internalize the fact that racism is not just a struggle for people of color. At some point or another in history, every ethnic group that ever set foot in America struggled, suffered and faced death because of discrimination.

Above all, interning at the Center encouraged me to embark on a journey of intense self-examination. I have learned to recognize instances when I behave like a prejudiced person. Like when I grip my purse tighter when certain people come wait for the bus at the same stop I do, or when I take a different walking route because certain people are standing at a corner. As a Latin American, I have learned to recognize internalized racism as well, when I feel that I am not as valuable as the next person, maybe because of my skin color or social status. I feel this sense of low self-worth when I move out of the way of certain people walking towards me in the street because on some level I have the false idea that people like me have no business walking near such a fancy building where only a certain type of people tend to be.

What would I say to prospective Center interns? I would tell them that if they are only interning in hopes of obtaining degree credits, they can expect to walk away with a lot more than that. They should be prepared to feel a barrage of intense emotions that they weren't prepared for, because there will be tears, rage, guilt, perplexity, and even shame. There will be times when they feel speechless, helpless, and powerless as they come to terms with the deterioration of the human condition. They should be prepared to let the walls come down, to come out from behind that hard shell they put on before they walk out into the world every day. I learned that it is necessary to face what I fear in order to make way for hope, understanding, and healing. Our wounds have to be examined carefully if we intend to heal them properly, and the Center for the Healing of Racism is making great strides in helping all of us who are willing to listen.

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Racism Against Indians

Questions abound about motivation for bias in Australia

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find that everyone is hurt by it—those who benefited and those who did not. It keeps us fearful of each other and protective of our “own.” It becomes uncomfortable to talk about, especially in mixed company. We personalize it, we deny it or we cast a cloud over it. The Center for the Healing of Racism’s approach is to start with the emotional healing, to help members in the community understand the issue of racism is bigger than themselves by understanding the history of race in America, and then to create a safe environment to process the hurt, sadness, and loss that has resulted from years and years of false belief systems and separation.

Why is it such an issue?

You ask about why the issue of racism is such an issue in Australia against Indian students. Unfortunately, I’m not familiar with the history race has played in Australia. I think the first step for you is to learn the history of the people of Australia, specifically the history of all people of color in Australia. This is the education that I took on as a brown person born and raised in the U.S. In my early years, I learned rather quickly that there was something that set me apart from the rest. I grew up in a community where there were very few Indians. In the small town where we resided, anyone of South Asian descent was quickly befriended by my

parents and taken in as family. My parents’ interaction with the mainstream culture occurred during work hours. Our home life was filled with everything Indian from the food to friends. The only diversity I saw around my kitchen table was of those various cultures whose heritage derived from South Asia. My parents inadvertently sent me messages that we only trust those who look like us and everything on the outside, everything “American” is a different lifestyle and not to be taken in fully.

Wanted to be like others

In my primary years, I struggled with wanting to be like everyone else. I wished for blond hair and blue eyes and wanted to cast my differences aside. My parents protected me from a lot that they probably experienced when they came to the U.S., so I felt confused as to why Indians were treated like foreigners, why there were often attacks of hate on us, why the kids in school knew nothing about India, and why they were calling us “dot heads” and “monkey worshipers.” As my school became racially integrated, there were still less Indians, and more African Americans. I began to observe a clear line between Black Americans and White Americans both socially and economically. The kids from the low-income neighborhoods were more diverse in skin tone than those from the more affluent neighborhoods. The kids tracked in the advance

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Am I not an
American, too?
Thus, my curiosity
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in America.***

standing classes came from the more affluent neighborhoods, and were thus provided more educational enrichments.

As I progressed through high school, I became more reflective about issues around race and ethnicity. I was still very uncomfortable to share my Indian heritage with my non-Indian peers.

Finally, pride in heritage

It was not until I attended University that I took pride in my culture, mostly because there was a significant Indian student population and all of a sudden being ethnic was cool.

In college I was asked a lot of questions about where I came from. My response to the commonly asked question “where are you from?” would often be met with confusion.

When I would answer with my hometown, “Manassas, Virginia,” the inquirer would further ask, “No, where are you

really from? What country?”

I would be taken aback. I was born here. Am I not an American, too? Thus, my curiosity deepened and I took it upon myself to understand race in America.

Race-related classes

I started to take a number of classes that related to race and ethnicity and ended up pursuing a dual major in Sociology and African-American studies.

My parents would wonder why African American Studies, and why not South Asian Studies.

The influx of Asian immigration to the U.S. did not really begin until after the 1960s when the legal barring of Asians to the U.S. was lifted.

In order for me to understand why people perceived me, and anyone that looked like me as a foreigner, I needed to understand the racialization of the label “American” and when it all began.

The classes in South Asian studies focused on South Asia, not about being South Asian in America. I felt American, and invested in its future, yet for some reason, I did not look the part and that troubled me.

In order to make sense of this paradox, I had first to understand the relationship between Black and White Americans in this country that

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Racism Against Indians

Questions about motivation for racism against Indians in Australia

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predated South Asian migration.

Through my studies I learned that there is a lot of information that gets left out of the American history textbooks in order to save face or to romanticize the country instead of challenging and engaging in an honest dialogue about our haunted past and its present implications. It is then I begin to understand why people have a difficult time talking about and confronting the issue when they are only presented with one version of the story. I was then faced with the questions, "Can the past be overcome? Will the next generation of South Asians born and raised in the U.S. feel more a part of the American identity? Or will they still be treated and looked upon as foreigners?"

Martin Luther King, Jr, an American civil rights leader who

followed in Gandhi's footsteps, said, "Men hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated." This analysis of racism takes me back to the story of my parents' migration. I mentioned earlier that Uganda was their home. That was all they knew. Although my parents were in Africa, they had very limited interaction with the Black Africans. When the English were ruling the country, the system was set up to keep the Blacks and Indians divided and pitted against one another in order for the English to reign successfully. Otherwise,

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**"Bread is a Simple Food,
Teaching Children About Culture"
Book Release & Signing Reception**

The Center for The Healing Of Racism


Cordially invites you to
the book release & signing reception for

"Bread Is a Simple Food: Teaching Children About Culture"
By Author & CFHR Co-Executive Director
Cherry Steinwender

A demonstration of "Opening the Breadbasket", based on the book
will also be presented

April 29, 2011 at 6:30 P.M.
Houston Community College Central
Learning Hub/Science Building—Room 100
1300 Holman Street, Houston, TX 77004

Refreshments will be served.
Please click the link to RSVP by April 26, 2011



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at: www.centerhealingracism.org_events_0.aspx

**Books will be available for
purchase at the reception.**

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***Book royalties will be
donated to the Center**

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DIALOGUE: RACISM SERIES
The Dialogue: Racism series is held in a supportive and honest setting. Information is provided at each session, followed by an opportunity for voluntary sharing. Facilitators say participants leave with a new understanding of racism, what they can do about it, and a sense of community with others of different backgrounds and life experiences.

Racism Against Indians

Continued from page 5

these two oppressed groups could recognize their power as one whole. Once India and Uganda gained independence respectively, both countries became vulnerable.

Unfortunately, Uganda was led by a ruthless dictator, Idi Amin. Amin capitalized on the fear that the Indians and Black Africans had of one another. Because of fear, because of lack of communication due to separation, my parents suffered a tremendous loss—their home.

The Center for the Healing of Racism's approach is to create a safe place for people of diverse backgrounds to communicate with one another and heal from

the pain of separation. I, along with the Center, am hopeful that peace will one day be achieved. We see glimpses of it in the Center's activities each time we bring diverse groups together in dialogue. We see change, we see new friendships form, and we see a difference being made in various social, economic, and political systems as those in power come to the table. The Center has also started to go into the schools and engage young people in confronting racism and discrimination in all its forms.

I know that I have written a great deal but I hope it validates some of the frustrations you and others might be feeling and gives you some direction in

how to get started in processing it all.

Here are some tangible things you can do:

- 1) Read up on the history of the people in the country in which you are studying.
- 2) Find allies and organizations that are already doing work around overcoming discrimination and addressing racism.
- 3) Coordinate a dialogue on the questions you have posed to us. Assign a facilitator who can create a safe environment for people to discuss their concerns openly and honestly, and invite a diverse segment of the community to attend.

**CENTER FOR
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