

Culture in the classroom



**Are white teachers
competent? Page 8**

INSIDE

Conference plans	2
Letters to the Editor	3
<i>We hope to hear more from you in the future.</i>	
Clipart Cartoon	3
<i>A pictorial parody.</i>	

White Habits	4
<i>Three vignettes describing white culture, by Jeff Hitchcock</i>	
Acting white	6
<i>Another view on white culture</i>	
Caring, sharing, daring	7
<i>Reflections on a white awareness workshop, by Charley Flint</i>	
White teacher, rainbow classroom	8
<i>Managing the cultural kaleidoscope, by Paul Gorski.</i>	

White students on campus	10
<i>What are the issues?</i>	
Oppositional Trickeration:	12
<i>Europe invents itself, by Bill Benzon</i>	
Does racism affect whites?	13
<i>A new book discusses the issue.</i>	
Why subscribe?	15
Video review	16

Self-discovery? Who needs it.

Is this going to work? We began the Center on the premise that white Americans can work toward better race relations by learning something of their (our) own culture. We did not originate this idea. Several trainers, educators and researchers have arrived at the same conclusion in the past. Today that number is growing.

Haven't heard about it? Our country needs a translator, a popularizer and an advocate for the work of others who have pioneered in the territory of white American culture. We wish to take the work of a few—people who have dedicated their lives to the study of these issues—and make it available to the many.

This has been an act of faith. Underlying our commitment is the belief that white Americans, if given the chance to look at themselves in a new way, will act upon that perspective. We believe that many white Americans are willing to undertake the potentially hazardous journey of cultural self-discovery if the rewards are there.

We felt we had to prove ourselves. The goal may be worthy, the journey worthwhile, but why should people follow our lead? We felt we needed to demonstrate our commitment in a tangible way.

So when we began, we placed our emphasis on developing a quality publication, this newsletter. We focused on writing, on layout, on production, on the nuts and bolts of our commitment. We offered our newsletter to readers on a trial basis. All this cost money. The time would come, we felt, when our readers would see our worth and support us.

That time is here. We need subscribers. Our publication has been described as "powerful," "admirable," and "brave." We have a small number of subscribers already, bless them. But we need to grow if we are to survive. Many readers will find their free trial subscriptions ending with this issue.

We have stories to tell, events to chronicle, experiences to describe, enough to fill several more issues. People have expressed interest in writing for us. Our production goals are being met. We need only one thing to make this project work. No bones about it, it's you.

Conference planned for Oct. 18-19

Mark your calendar. Plans are underway for the first annual conference on white American culture. Sponsored by the Center for the Study of White American Culture, the conference will be held on Friday, October 18 and Saturday, October 19 at a yet to be announced site in northern New Jersey.

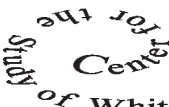
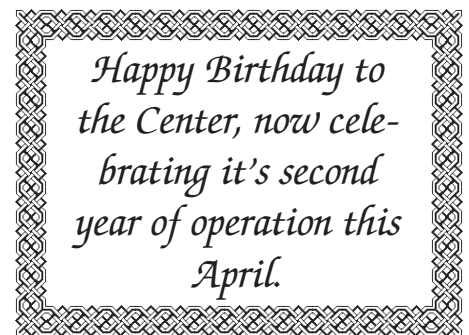
Details will be forthcoming in the next issue of our newsletter. We anticipate offering typical conference activities, including papers, talks, and workshops.

At this time we are unable to gauge the potential turnout at the conference, and our financial resources are very limited. However, we are committed to the conference taking place. Since we intend this to be an annual event, we are content to begin with a small, intimate gathering.

Not that we would not welcome a

large turnout. We intend to be modest, and to scale our plans up if interest is greater than we now anticipate.

We foresee a modest conference fee, in line with our cost-conscious approach. The Center will provide information on hotels close to the conference site for persons looking for overnight lodging. For people planning to travel by air, Newark International Airport offers the closest destination to the planned lodging and conference sites.



White American Culture, Inc.

A multiracial organization

**QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER**

VOL. 2, NO. 2

SPRING 1996

Editor: Jeff Hitchcock

Contributors:

Bill Benson, Charley Flint, Paul Gorski, Jeff Hitchcock

The *Quarterly Newsletter* (ISSN 1086-489X) is published by the Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc., a New Jersey nonprofit corporation, established April 1995 and incorporated July 1995.

Board of Trustees

Charley Flint, Ph.D.
Donna Gerhardt, M.A.
Michael Gerhardt, M.P.A.
Jeff Hitchcock, M.S., M.B.A.
Susanna Tardi, Ph.D.

The *Quarterly Newsletter* is dedicated to the Center's mission of exploring the role of white American culture in the context of the larger American culture.

Copyright © Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc., 1996. All rights reserved.

The *Quarterly Newsletter* is distributed on a subscription basis four times a year. Rates for 4-issue subscription: corporate and university, \$35.00; individual, \$25.00; student, \$15.00. A limited number of copies of each issue are distributed without charge for publicity purposes.

The Center welcomes comments and contributions to the newsletter. We will consider unsolicited submissions. Persons interested in guidelines for writing an article for the newsletter may call the Center or write the Center's office and request a copy.

Phone: (908) 241-5439 (9-5 M-F)

Write:

Center for Study
245 West 4th Avenue
Roselle, NJ 07203

Email:

J.HITCHCOCK@GENIE.COM

Letters to the Editor

We've been in touch with several readers who have referred us, in turn, to more people. There is interest out there and we sense it picking up. But nobody wrote the editor.

CLIPART CARTOON

A Gallery of Americans



Asian Americans



Native Americans



African Americans



Just plain Americans

We have to wonder why? It doesn't seem to fit with the feedback we're getting from our workshops, our outside professional involvements, our friends and our readers.

Whiteness is an area in which focus is sometimes hard to find. Still, while most of us have plenty of other things to do besides think about whiteness, it is important, and worth some thought from time to time.

So, how can one approach thinking about whiteness. Well, outsiders have expressed thoughts about white culture throughout history. Several good examples are available. White Americans, though, need to be a little more vocal and literate about exploring their racial and cultural experiences as whites. Some things to think about:

1 Realize white culture exists. On a day to day basis, many Americans of color accept there is such a thing as white culture, and they discuss its ramifications for their own racial group. Realize white Americans share a common cultural involvement that is not shared with other racial groups. We all share in a greater American culture, which remains heavily influenced by white, middle class values and sensitivities.

2 Get through racism. Racism is part of our history, part of our present, and our moral responsibility to clean up. Yet, it's often hard for white Americans to figure out what racism is. An example is a white American who does something not intending to be racist, only to find at some later point that yes, indeed, it was racist. Getting through racism (not *over* it, or *around* it) means realizing racism exists, and deciding to do what you can to oppose it.

3 Think reciprocally. Much thinking on race by white Americans focuses on racial others, the blacks, the Indians, as if whiteness itself is not an issue. But in our history whiteness, blackness and redness arose simultaneously in the mid-17th century in the United States. There were no white people before that, only Christians and heathens. White culture has arisen and evolved side by side with other racial cultures in America, sometimes driving change in those cultures, and sometimes reacting and changing through their influence.

4 Look at power and dominance. Like the weather, power and dominance give race relations an everchanging atmosphere from brutal storms to hazy, partly

sunny days. And like the weather, it is always there, sometimes as foreground, sometimes as background.

5 Look at humanity. Some whites find issues of racism and inequality so painful and disturbing that they can see whiteness only as power and domination. Keeping the pervasive nature of racism in mind, there are still elements of white culture, of its style, its values, images and activities that are worthwhile. Try to find out what some are, and test your ideas against a view of power and dominance.

6 Prepare to Be an Outsider. Minority writers have spoken of the 'outsider within' view of white culture available to people of color. White people (thinking reciprocally) can become 'insiders without.' After all, ignorance of white culture is part of the experience of being white. When you reflect on it, you step outside the culture a little bit.

7 Prepare to Find New Avenues. If you are looking for multicultural contact and a greater degree of comfort in multiracial settings, then understanding white culture will help you bridge differences across race.

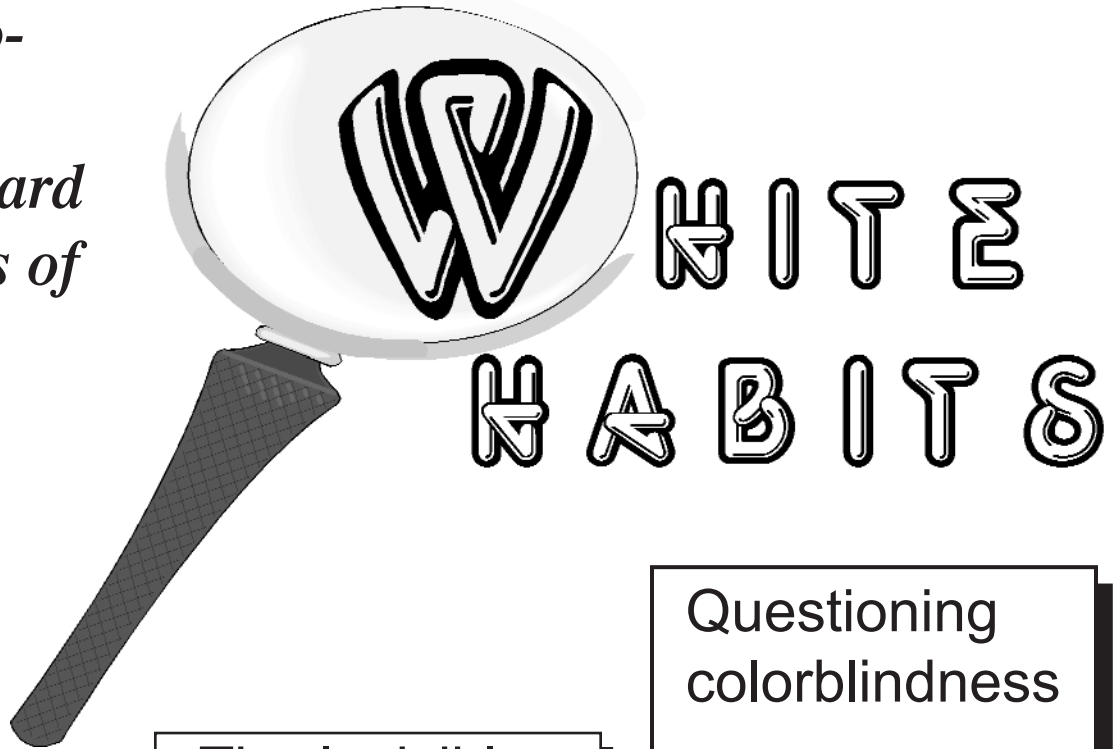
8 Don't Be Afraid to Change Your Mind. Learning about whiteness is a developmental process. Some ideas you have now may change when you have more experience with the topic. Counseling psychologists, for instance, have proposed models of racial experience that suggest white Americans undergo stages of growth from a naive state through racial awareness and finally racial self-awareness.

9 Speak. We'd like to hear your voice, and read your letters. There's no substitute for speaking out as a way of crystalizing your personal experience. Speaking, or writing, lets us know that we are not alone. We're not looking for agreement. The public discussion of whiteness and white culture is too new to stake claims on the truth. We feel many different, and even contradictory, views should be part of the public dialogue on these issues.

Silence only gives one message. That nobody cares. That the status quo is fine. That being white is best when we don't see it, don't hear it, and don't talk about it.



Three true-to-life vignettes look at the hard to see aspects of white culture that often lie right under our noses.



By Jeff Hitchcock

White people go silent on discussion

It happened again, in a way that tells me it's a phenomena to be named and depended upon to repeat itself. We, white Americans, failed to respond to a public discussion of our whiteness. Being a firsthand witness to the present instance, I admit my individual guilt for the offense, though I was at the same time in the company of several other members of my racial cohort.

This instance (I've been a witness to others) took place at a multicultural conference during a panel discussion by three white women. The presenters discussed their experiences with whiteness in academia under their broader theme and subtitle: *What White Women Have to Say*.

The presenters managed their topic aptly. They laid their material out and pinned the audience to the terrain of

See *Silence*, next page

The Invisible European American

In the Test Yourself column last issue we suggested that European Americans are sometimes absent from multicultural listings in publishers' offerings and conference programs. Little did we realize an example of this would arrive in our mail, in the form of a catalog of listings from a publisher (who we will not name) of multicultural materials, sent to us by our request in the normal course of our work.

The catalog is attractively done, with a glossy, full-color cover, seventy pages of entries, and a table of contents.

When I read a catalog like this, I always look for items or events that reference white Americans, or European Americans, depending on the usage. So I scan the Table of Contents, hmmm... Hispanic/ Latino Studies, Native American Studies, Asian Studies, African American Studies, Middle East. Doesn't seem to be anything about European Americans here...wait a minute, More Ethnic

See *Invisible*, next page

Questioning colorblindness

All racial groups subscribe to colorblindness in some degree, but it seems to have taken its most radical form as a belief among white Americans. Colorblindness says you are not supposed to use color to form judgements, positive or negative, about other people.

Radical colorblindness, a variant practiced by many white Americans, takes this injunction one step further. You are not supposed to acknowledge color as part of peoples' lives, either your own, that of other white people, or people of color.

Proponents of radical colorblindness take enforcement of their view seriously. In a focus group conducted by the Center for Study, Helen, a middle-aged white woman, a minister, suggested that white people should talk with black people about race, and discuss each other's feelings about being black or white in America. Robert, a middle-aged white male professional replies:

Robert: [Take the example of] a black individual who's sitting in my home and we're having a couple of beers. Guess what. The topic isn't, 'Hey, how do you feel about being black?' No, it's, 'Have another Bud,' you know what I mean. Or, or even a couple of

See *Colorblind*, page 6

Silence, from previous page

discussion, whiteness. Having done so, they awaited the audience's response. Slowly, tentatively as the presentation sank in, a couple of white people asked questions and made comments, good ones it seemed to me. Then people of color in the audience started asking questions, and continued for a period several times longer than the white questioners had taken. No white audience members asked new questions.

Finally, to my side a few seats away a woman of color arose. From the corner of my eye she seemed Asian; I didn't know her then, nor did I meet her later. She said, with exasperation, words to the effect, "Now isn't this something. All the white people are quiet and people of color are asking the questions. It always happens like this." One or two uninspired questions followed this woman's comment and the presentation ended.

There are several ways to look at this. I want, most importantly, to mark it as an observable social phenomena. In other words, I agree with the facts, if not the tone, of the statement made by the woman of color in the foregoing instance. White people rarely enter into public circumstances where our whiteness becomes the object of discussion. When we do, we are unable to "keep up the discussion," so to speak. We fall quiet and people of color, who are generally more knowledgeable and sophisticated on the topic, carry the brunt of the discussion.

I've seen it happen before, right down to the woman (or man) of color at the end pointing to the inadequacy of the white response to the topic. The particular woman or man, of course, differed from one instance to another, being sometimes African American, sometimes Hispanic. I have seen and heard this scenario enough that it is now like a cliché to me.

Personally, I think the person of color in this and other instances, was saying the emperor, whiteness, has no clothes. We put on airs about equality, but when white people have a chance to discuss whiteness in public, to look at the heart and substance of this matter of race, we create a wall of silence. To those outside the wall, it looks a lot like racism.

Building that wall is incredibly easy for those of us inside it. It's a wall that bridges gender, class, religion, ethnicity, age and everything else but what it is, ...race. It's real and it's there. But, and this is my personal experience of it, the white people involved do not share a collective con-

sciousness of the process.

We white people, who act collectively by no longer speaking, are individually fraught with personal concerns about race. I never fail to actually sit through one of these discussions without my stomach turning in knots with anxiety, intense interest and fear.

I have not always sat silent. As a diversity consultant, I've been part of a multiracial team working with managers and administrators. Sometimes it's my role as a white team member to carry the conversation forward when whiteness becomes an issue. I am able to do that in a sensitive way because of a relationship of trust and support with my fellow team members. Our experience has been that white people do discuss these issues in structured, and relatively sheltered, settings.

At the conference I might have spoken, too. But my team would be presenting a workshop on whiteness the next day. I was preoccupied with last minute details, and I didn't want to speak up boldly and create a public persona that might turn people away from our workshop, or which might

appear as self-serving publicity.

This does not mean that I found it easy to be silent. It's hard for me to believe any contemporary white American will be calm in the same circumstance unless he or she is caught up in the completely monoracial context that white culture sometimes affords its members.

Most, if not all, of the white Americans at the presentation were multiculturally-oriented. I imagine that we all took our interracial relationships seriously and with feeling. For every silent white American in the audience that day, there was a different story. Yet we fell into a common script. That script prevented us all, white people and people of color alike, from achieving a greater understanding.

As a social scientist, I would mark this phenomenon—of white Americans becoming silent in public discussions of whiteness—as worthy of study, for despite its rarity it is highly reproducible. When it happens, it speaks to many of the underlying cultural processes that mediate in race, culture and communication in American society. ❀

Invisible, from previous page

Groups..., only two pages in that section. [Turning to page] Let's see, Slavs, okay, Afgans, Gypsies, Australian Aboriginies, Trinidadian. Some white people, but no European Americans here. Let's see, Encyclopedias, Paperbacks, General, Backlist, Sale Books, Index...let's try Encyclopedias. Ah, there's encyclopedias on Women, Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, and public policy. Still no European Americans. Same for Paperbacks. Let's try Sale Books. Oh oh, these are the going-out-of-print ones. Well there are a lot of Europeans here, "coming to America." Twenty books are listed, covering European immigrant experiences in the United States.

Well, maybe a European fresh off the boat qualifies as European American. In regard to skin color privilege in contemporary American society, they do. There is still that group of assimilated whites who were here when later European immigrants came. This native group has commonly self-identified not as European, but as American. In other words, like most white Americans today.

Suffice it to say, European Americans who were fully assimilated to a (white) American identity do not appear in this publisher's listing except for one entry discussing historical attitudes of

"nativism." Nativism, of course, is an academic term referring to attitudes and sentiments expressed toward immigrants by the resident portion of the country's European American population. Certainly all European Americans were not "nativist" in their outlook in the past, any more than today when Pat Buchanan, modern purveyor of nativist rhetoric, gains visible support among white Americans.

And that's it. That's all this publisher has to offer on European Americans like me. That's not to say they have nothing to offer. We ordered their catalog because some of their items seem useful and valuable, containing information about multicultural themes of interest to us. We expect to order from them. So it's not that this publishers' collection isn't worthwhile.

It is also, as we indicated last week, common practice. So I am singling out the present publisher only for the convenience of the example (they sent us their catalog) rather than for any reason specific to the publisher.

Do white Americans need to discuss their (our) culture and frame it in the same terms as other racial groups? Do we really need to see ourselves there? Yes, I think so.

See Invisible, next page

Invisible, from previous page

If you wonder, as I do, what statement is being made by the invisibility of European Americans in publishers' listings, you also have to ask who's making the statement. Well, publishers make it. They choose the print offerings to release. And publishers, at least successful ones, remain close to the market. That market, of buyers and consumers of multicultural materials, is us.

The creation, production, sale and consumption of diversity and multicultural materials in the United States is, as any conference attendee can attest, a sizeable industry. I have no statistics on this industry, but I imagine it is dominated by white Americans like other parts of the economy. Also, by its nature, the market for diversity and multicultural materials has been fertile ground for other racial groups, as well as women, lesbians and gays, and other groups who face exclusion in American society.

So in a sense the market, both producers and consumers, is racially complex. A decade ago it wasn't so. European immigrants were all the rage. Titles like those now on this publisher's out-of-print list took up most of the self-space given to multiculturalism during the 1980s, reflecting a European American view of diversity in America.

Today's market knows that race separates our society as sharply as ethnicity, and that both race and ethnicity guide the creation of a cultural self. But for people in search of information on the European American cultural self, in today's market that sometimes can be hard to find. ❀

Colorblind, from page 4

white people.

Helen continues to offer her suggestion:

Helen: It would make a difference if these conversations [about race] were taking place.

Robert replies, at first seemingly in agreement, but then professing his colorblindness.

Robert: Probably. Probably, cause now you're educating one another in an understanding, do you as a black person really, I'm colorblind. Alright, really, tell me, what do you feel about me as an individual, or is it my color. And I find a lot of times once you get to know the person, there's no more color.

Helen: Just hearing you say that, and you're the black person, so okay I put myself in that mode, what does it really feel like to be a black person? Just possibly, I thought, here's somebody that really cares about me.

But Helen's idea has not received support. Betsy jumps in, leading a rapid-fire run of appeals to colorblindness from other participants:

Betsy: But why should it be that way? Why should they have to say, 'What do you think about being black...'

Robert: Yeah, exactly.

Gerald: That could turn people off.

Betsy and the group, at the peak of their defense of colorblindness, somehow see a color, "black," and suggest that's why the United States has problems.

Betsy: ...or why do you have to do that? What do you think about being a minister. Now I think that would be more interest-

ing, as opposed to, I think that's, that to me is something that, that's how problems start. That's the reason why in the United States you have the problems with the blacks, because they ask that question all the time. What does it matter? What...

Gerald: They bring up the fact that color exists.

Betsy: Why?

Robert: That's correct.

Helen, having heard all this, gives her idea one last half-hearted try, then waivers.

Helen: But, but I think that's, if that's what it is that's separating you from someone else, then to be able to talk about it is really the only way, well not the only way...

The group rolls along in chorus, endorsing their view of colorblindness.

Betsy: But I don't think you should talk about that. I think you can get to...

Helen: ...talk about things we have in common.

Betsy: Right, yeah.

Robert: If it's nonexistent...

Gerald: Right.

Robert: You're sitting there with a person that's of a different color that you...

Betsy: Yeah, just don't talk about it.

Robert: ...and it's not an issue, why would you make it an issue...

Betsy: Right, just ask about something else.

Robert: ...or ask those kind of questions? You would leave it because it's not a problem.

Betsy: Right. Why, why does it have to be because that person is not the same color as you are.

Robert: I mean, that's taken for granted as long as you can see. You know that, okay.

Betsy: You could take a blind person. You say you wake up. Take a blind person. Do you think a blind person cares who he talks to?

Robert: Doesn't matter to him.

Gerald: Not at all.

The group continued to discuss a figurative "blind person." Helen made one last try and was again guided by other participants' responses to consider some other alternatives. Talking about race and color, she was told, was inappropriate. Though the only authority the participants offered for this belief was their self-cohesive agreement, Helen remained silent for about 15 minutes and did not bring her idea up again for the rest of the group session. ❀

Another view on white culture

For white Americans, acting white comes natural. For youth at an opposite pole of the racial spectrum, 'acting white' has become a social stigma. Seeing little evidence in their communities that educational attainment will lead to employment opportunities, many African American youth in inner city schools participate in an oppositional culture that defines whiteness as foreign and undesirable.

Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu studied the social dynamics among students in a Washington, D.C. high school in which the student body was 99% black. The researchers looked at examples of youth who were academically successful, and those who were not. In each case, students took steps to avoid the appearance of 'acting white,' defined by the students as "(1) speaking standard English; (2)

listening to white music and white radio stations; (3) going to the opera or ballet; (4) spending a lot of time in the library studying; (5) working hard to get good grades in school; (6) getting good grades in school; (7) going to the Smithsonian [museum]; (8) going to a Rolling Stones concert at the Capital Center; (9) doing volunteer work; (10) going camping, hiking, or mountain climbing; (11) having cocktails or a cocktail party; (12) going to a symphony orchestra concert; (13) having a party with no music; (14) listening to classical music; (15) being on time; (16) reading and writing poetry; and (17) putting on 'airs.'

From **Black Students' School Success: Coping with the "Burden of Acting White."** *The Urban Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1986, pp. 176-206. ❀

Reflections on a white awareness workshop

Caring, Sharing, Daring

By Charley Flint, Ph.D.

Standing next to the chair in the middle of the classroom, the young man explained that yes, he had all the characteristics of the dominant group. He was male. He was middle class. He was privileged. He was white. From the woe-begone look on his face it was clear he did not like where he stood. I looked at him with respect. No one had asked him to stand in that particular spot. It was by his own admission, his own self-awareness, that he chose to be there. Looking at him from a very different social location, myself a woman of color, I thought maybe there is hope for this process.

The young man was taking part in a workshop on white awareness presented

by the Center for the Study of White American Culture at a multicultural conference held on an Ivy League campus. At that particular moment he and the other workshop participants were taking part in an exercise. The

facilitators had placed a chair in the middle of the room and designated it as "white culture." The entire room, they said, was "American culture." The participants, thirty in all, were asked to arrange themselves around the room and the chair according to how closely or distantly they felt connected to white American culture. Each participant was free to choose his or her own location, and then

to offer the reason for their choice.

A white woman stood a little further back from the chair, though still close. She seemed homogenous to me, not showing any obvious ethnic identity. Speaking up she said she was aware of her privilege as a white person, and that she wanted to keep it. I was impressed by her honesty.

In the college classes I teach, I often talk to white students about race. White people have so many different ways to name themselves, as Jewish, Italian, Irish,

women, gay, working class, as anything, it seems, but white. To me it looks as though many white people think black people see them as bad, so they say, "Don't call me white. If you're white, you're racist, so as far away

as I can get from white the less racist I'll be."

Thus when I had a chance to attend the Center's workshop as an observer, I was interested but apprehensive. I had visions of a prolonged and defensive exchange between participants and the facilitators. It didn't turn out like that. People talked. Like the man and the woman standing by the chair, they spoke

of their feelings about being white in a way that seemed genuine and honest.

Later I was to witness this exercise again, this time on the campus where I teach in northern New Jersey. Unlike the first workshop that was staged at a multicultural conference, here the climate was potentially more threatening. Racial groups on the campus tend to segregate themselves. The racial climate is polarized and oppositional.

This time no one stood close to the chair. Participants arranged themselves in a circle around the chair, standing about six feet back. No single white person dared stand closer or further than other white participants. The conversation was more hesitant. Many participants did not seem to know what we meant by white culture, and they seemed afraid of being labeled racist if they identified as being white.

Not all the participants were white. A few people of color attended each workshop. During the chair exercise they stood at the periphery of the group, further away in the second workshop than in the first. But as participants, I was happy to see, they were supportive of the process.

Shortly before the first workshop an African American woman made my acquaintance. She was a staff person from the conference, she explained, there to introduce us. Though she had said she would leave right after her introduction, I noticed she lingered much longer, apparently caught up by discussion taking

"I want to know why white people are not aware of being white, or why they do not articulate their awareness of being white. I don't know which one it is."

See *Caring*, page 14

White teacher, rainbow classroom:



Managing the cultural kaleidoscope

By Paul Gorski

One day in the first semester of the 1995-1996 school year, Jose was sent to the office. His teacher, Mrs. Watson, sent with Jose an explanation addressed to the principal, Mr. Williams. It stated, "Jose refused to look me in the eyes as I chastised him about forgetting his pencil. I repeatedly asked him to, and he would not do it. He was disrespectful." When Mr. Williams questioned Jose, a nine year old boy in fourth grade, Jose seemed unable to understand. As Mr. Williams explained to me later, "He just kept looking at the floor. I asked him if he understood why he was sent here, and he shook his head, 'No.'

The following day, Mr. Williams called Jose's parents who had moved to northern Virginia from Guatemala the previous summer. "In Guatemala," his mother explained, "age is most important. In our culture it is disrespectful to look an elder in the eyes. We knew there would be such problems." After talking with Jose's mother, Mr. Williams approached Mrs. Watson. She insisted she did not know about Jose's culture, but she knew he was being disrespectful. Other teachers quickly came to her defense, reiterating that she could not

have known. "In our culture," one teacher told Mr. Williams, "the child was disrespectful."

About a week after speaking to Jose's parents and confronting Mrs. Watson, Mr. Williams called me and told me this story. I am a member of a multicultural education and cultural diversity facilitation team operating from the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, and had kept in touch with Mr. Williams since he taught chorus at the middle school I attended for seventh and eighth grade. Sensing the incident was symptomatic of a greater problem, he asked me to come to his next staff meeting and conduct a workshop on multicultural education with his teachers and administrators.

During the workshop, nearly a month after the incident, I explained to the thirty-two members of the school's staff (twenty eight of whom were white, despite the fact that nearly one-third of the student body were from other ethnic backgrounds) that a crucial aspect of multiculturalism is recognizing that other cultures exist. At any point in time, the interaction among different cultures in the classroom may cause confusion or tension. The "greater prob-

lem" Mr. Williams sensed has proved, in my experiences facilitating these workshops, to be symptomatic not only of a greater problem in his school, but of a greater problem in white America and the American education system as a whole. The problem is one of attitude, that white culture is American culture. White American culture, in turn, tends to define "us," while whatever we cannot (or choose not to) classify as white American culture becomes "them."

What is worse, the "them" is expected to conform to the "us." This attitude is illustrated clearly in the words of the teachers defending Mrs. Watson: "In *our* culture..."

This language exemplifies the lack of cultural diversity training teachers are given in pre-service training and coursework. Few teachers I work with have had any training in cultural diversity and multicultural education beyond a couple of class sessions. Moreover, the percentage of teachers who are white far exceeds the percentage of students who are white. Reflecting the "greater problem," these teachers, like many white Americans, have little practical training on how to recognize, discuss, and challenge themselves on cultural issues. Those who have grown up in the American education system have been taught that white culture is American culture. This attitude is so ingrained in American society that white teachers are often unaware of their own lack of understanding. As a result, I often hear suggestions that "we [the teachers] aren't the problem, the students and parents are the problem." Again, this illustrates the "us" and "them" separation. In effect, the teachers were prepared to hold Jose, a nine year old boy, accountable for attain-

ing cross-cultural skills and awareness which Mrs. Watson, a certified educator, had not yet attained.

This, as I explained to Mr. Williams' staff during the three hour session I shared with them, is a matter of attitude. Cultural diversity and multicultural awareness are not approaches to be implemented or topics for a special unit or themes for a bulletin board. Instead, they are the foundations of an attitude or value system that insists that good education is multicultural, and education consists not simply of curriculum, but also of teaching styles, atmosphere, socialization, and learning how to learn.

Mr. Bell, a thirtysomething white fourth grade teacher, recognized his lack of understanding. His approach for achieving understanding, though, was misguided, reflecting the attitude of many white teachers I have worked with. "What we need is an index of cultures," he explained after I had completed my three hour session at Mr. Watson's school. "We need a booklet which lists alphabetically activities and strategies for dealing with Asian kids, British kids, Canadian kids, Dutch kids..." My facilitation team receives similar requests at some point during virtually every workshop we facilitate. "I need something concrete," Mr. Bell continued. "Give me some activities I can do in the classroom. Give me some strategies for dealing with this diverse group of kids.

...all me my attitude has to change. I ... be same."

...y educators would ... to sim- ... of

...se

... would not have prepared Mrs. Watson

... friction between her culture and

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

usually unaware of these prejudices, I am prejudging them and contradicting my own message. Others point the finger elsewhere, blaming students and parents for the problems. Others deny the fact that racism still exists at all, suggesting that it ended with the Civil Rights era, a suggestion which I have heard from dozens of white teachers, but not once from a teacher of color.

The most common statement I hear from white teachers in defense of themselves is along the lines of, "I don't see colors. I just see kids. I treat everyone alike." In the face of this "teacher rhetoric," as my facilitation team has come to refer to such statements, we often find difficulty working past these claims and creating an atmosphere in which educators can begin to build a community of respect among themselves and discuss uncomfortable issues such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism in an attempt to reshape their own attitudes.

Many teachers become quite uncooperative with our attempts to pull these concerns from the practical realm and place them in the personal realm. But the fact remains that the practical approach that Mr. Bell called for, an approach which addressed the lack of knowledge about other cultures, and the lack of curriculum-based know-how on the part of the teachers, would not have prepared Mrs. Watson

... friction between her culture and

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

... are important in

experience said, "My attitude is that good education allows every child to reach his or her potential. If there is one child I don't reach, I'm not doing my job." When I suggested that with that statement she has, in

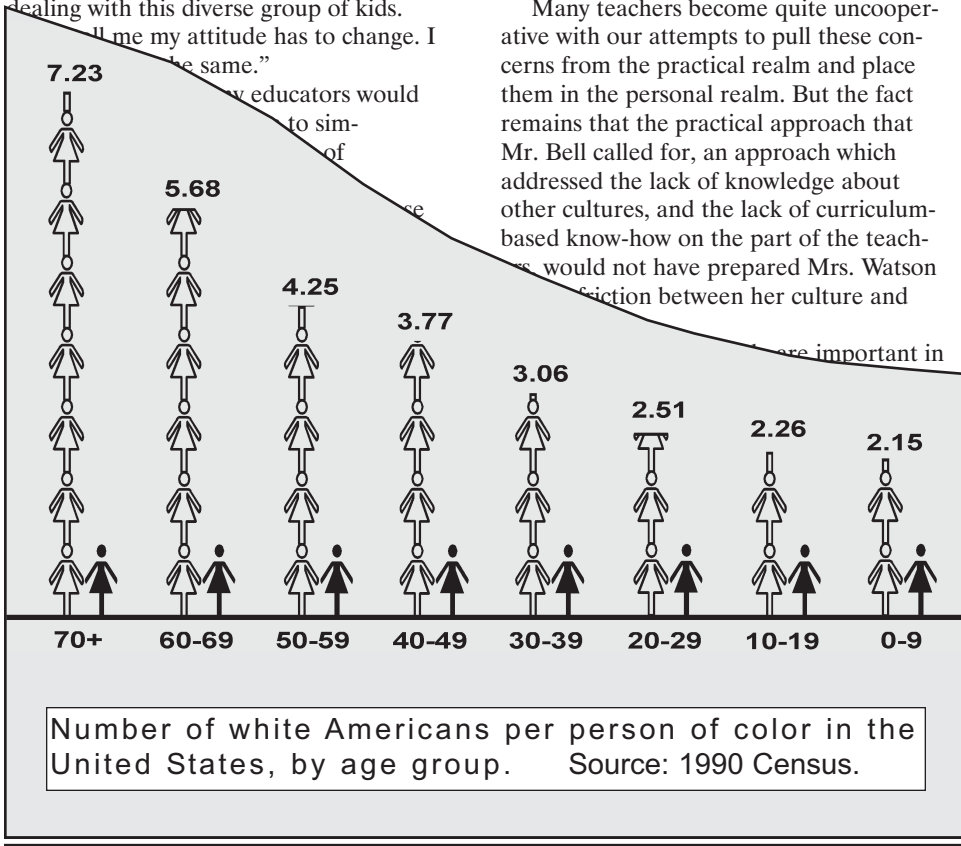
fact, laid the groundwork for her multicultural attitude, and that such an attitude should be the basis for her in-class activities and curriculum, she answered with frustration. "I've tried to stray from the

textbooks and make my classroom more multicultural, but it seems like this often creates more divisiveness among the kids. What's supposed to make a multicultural class turns into arguing and finger pointing."

She explained how she had celebrated Black History Month with activities, articles, and conversation, only to find that her African American students still felt left out. "I don't get it," said Joan. "During Black History Month students learn about individual African American leaders and their contributions to American society." In another example, she explained how she approached native American history: "We made headdresses and drums, listened to native American music, and learned a dance..." She created these activities around the goal of teaching native American culture and history, and thought "this was the perfect way to learn" about this culture and history, but found that "some of the students became disinterested."

Joan's experiences illustrate the critical point here. The most crucial tool for creating a multicultural classroom, that which becomes the basis and background for all others and without which activities and curricula are less meaningful, is a multicultural attitude. For Joan, this means a re-evaluation of how she perceives the multicultural-ness of activities and curriculum. For Mrs. Watson, this means recognizing that other cultures exist both inside and outside her classroom, and that this may be the cause of some friction. In both cases, it means that these two educators must explore what attitude changes need to

"The most crucial tool for creating a multicultural classroom, that which becomes the basis for all others, is a multicultural attitude."



accompany their curricular and activity changes.

While Joan's intentions were clearly good, her beliefs on what makes education "multicultural" were a bit muddled. In multicultural education, the presence and contributions of non-white individuals must be considered in the larger context of American history and culture, not set aside for a special unit or celebration, as in Black History Month. As one African American elementary school principal explained to me, the difference between Black History Month and the ideal situation in which black history is incorporated into the bigger picture is a distinction between addition and inclusion. The addition of Black History Month becomes a justification for the exclusion of discussion of the plight, or achievements, or injustices against black people as part of the larger history. Likewise, in multicultural education, activities should highlight diversity as opposed to focusing on particular groups, such as "native Americans." A multicultural attitude-based approach to Joan's native American activities would be to focus on diversity among native American tribes, which accounted for numerous different cultures, languages, and religions.

In my experience, white teachers frequently have difficulty making these distinctions. Educators of color, who have themselves been victims of the education system in America, felt, as students of color feel today, that their ancestors were excluded from their education. As students they witnessed the tokenism which since has become Black History Month and as a result, they recognize such tokenism more readily as educators. White teachers, whose education was built by and centered around their ancestors, tend to be less sensitive to these concerns, and generally less aware of racial issues both within and without school walls.

For students of color, these distinctions carry much consequence. In the long run they may prove of utmost importance in shaping the attitudes of students about their own cultural identity. These distinctions and their consequences intensify in schools such as Jose's in which the percentage of students of color so greatly outweighs the percentage of teachers and administrators of color. Many students of color will go through grade school never having the privilege of being taught by a member of his or her own ethnic group. Considering, then, that we expect teachers to symbolize authority and be role models, what message does this send the student of color about his or her place in society?

I often ask educators to try and recall what they learned about native Americans during

grade school. They lived in tepees, wore head-dresses and warpaint, and fought with spears and tomahawks, right? Did all native Americans live in tepees? No. Did they wear headdresses? Very few. Did they fight with spears and tomahawks? Some did, but most were peaceful and spiritual and not interested in fighting. Now recall the important figures of the frontier West. General Custer is portrayed as an American hero, though he needlessly and mercilessly slaughtered thousands of native Americans, many of whom were women and

children, often attacking while the tribes were asleep and defenseless. This type of information creates stereotypes and prejudices in students, but the travesty does not end there.

What do we teach about native Americans after the "settling" of the West? How many students on the East coast realize there are still Indian reservations in the West where poverty and disease run rampant? Do we ever discuss the unpaid reparations our government promised for the land they stole from native American tribes?

White students on multiracial campuses: What are the issues?

Many people are aware that the complexion of America is changing; we are becoming browner. But this change is not uniform for all age groups. Among those aged 70 or older in 1990, the ratio of white people to people of color was more than 7 to 1. For the 0 to 9 year old age group the ratio is close to 2 to 1 (see chart, page 9).

Children face a far more racially complex world than the usual rhetoric served up by white American culture would have us believe. Children of color are impacted by structural inequalities in a system that still does not acknowledge their heritage. But white children, too, have to grapple with racial issues. And it's not clear their elders have the necessary wisdom or experience to give them guidance.

From kindergarten onward, white children are given two models. One model, colorblindness, says race does not matter. The other model, explicit racism, says people of color are inferior, their cultures are pathological, and (sometimes unspoken) white culture is superior.

On many high school and college campuses, white students can not escape the awareness that race, particularly their own race, does matter. Lisa Feldstein, age 28, a biracial woman, recalled her experience in *Black, White, Other*, a recent book by Lise Funderberg (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994):

It was okay to talk to the Latino students, you know, and the Native American students; if you had to you could talk to the Asian students, but you should avoid white students unless they prove themselves... I know so many white students who feel completely alienated; they didn't come to Berkeley expecting to have to jump through hoops to be allowed to talk to someone who was black.

Practically no research has been done on the adjustment issues white students face when entering multiracial settings. One study, however, found white high school students, in a school where they were a numerical minority, reacted differently depending on their prior level of multiracial contact. Though many were able to form friendships with students of color, all were subject to harassment for being "white," including name calling ("white bitch") and allegations of favoritism (whites get picked for the baseball team). When asked what it was like to be white at the school, one student replied, "You get shit from everybody."

According to the researcher, "Asian and Hispanic students felt a closer association with their ethnicity during times when they were interacting with their own group members. Black and white students, however, felt this association more often when they came in contact with each other." [See "Ethnicity in the Urban High School: A Naturalistic Study of Student Experiences" by Maryann Semons, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1991, pp. 137-158.]

What does this experience do to the white students' ability to relate to people of color in their adult life? Given that race pointedly does matter in their personal lives, a contradiction of the colorblind view, what model of race relations do white students later adopt? How do they differ from white children raised in mono-racial settings? How is their self-image and self-esteem affected by the experience? How do structural effects contribute to a conflictual atmosphere? What should educators do to address these issues? These are just a few important issues facing white students that have been virtually ignored by their elders, perhaps at the expense of the future well-being of our country. ❁

Readers wishing to learn more about multicultural education can turn to the Multicultural Pavilion on the World Wide Web. This web site, administered by Paul Gorski, is a multi-platform international internet project viewed, responded to, and constructed by a collaborating group of over 120 educators from around the world. The Multicultural Pavilion lists resources for online children's literature, online historical documents and speeches, a "Multicultural Activity of the Month" that teachers can do in the classroom, plus online discussions along with books, articles and other writings by discussion group members. Turn your web browser to:

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu./go/multicultural>

"Okay, we see where this is leading," declared Ron, a white seventh grade teacher in his fifties who attended one of our workshops. "Native Americans haven't gotten a fair shake in the education system. We understand that, now what can we do about it? We have guidelines that lay out what we're to teach those kids. We can't go back now and catch them up on whatever was left out before. What you're calling for is an overhaul, and we don't have the power to do that."

Ron was right. Those teachers in central Virginia did not have the power to completely restructure the education system, and surely could not teach the students all of what should have been included within the context of previous lessons. The system does little to make itself conducive to attempts by

teachers to make needed in-class changes. Teachers are forced to adhere to strict guidelines of what to teach, and get little support when they want to venture from the textbooks and other suggested materials. Such a system makes the temptation to slide comfortably along with the traditional approaches much greater. But try to imagine how long a teacher of color would survive in the system if he or she consistently and systematically failed to meet the needs of white children. It becomes an example of how our society institutionally supports the status quo in schools as it does in all other organizations.

Ironically, white children are victims of the system as well. Their learning and relating is limited by the curriculum and the teacher's attitude. Their attitudes are shaped by the portrayal of different groups in their education. Through the Euro-centrism of American education, they learn that their culture is central. Through the exclusion of groups in the larger context of history, they receive messages about

the importance of those groups. As a result, they not only will be less equipped to manage their lives in an increasingly multicultural country, but may also become instigators and supporters of our racially strained society.

Nevertheless, Ron insisted on a solution. Our facilitation team had been working with his group for many weeks, and we had been meeting significant resistance. "We know," he continued, "the history and literature books exclude certain groups, and the science books don't

mention African American scientists. They're the only texts we have. What can we do about it?"

"Talk about it," I replied. The simplest solution is often the best. When all else fails, and you want to provide a multi-

"...try to imagine how long a teacher of color would survive in the system if he or she consistently and systematically failed to meet the needs of white children."

cultural atmosphere, but constraints are holding you back, open the issue for discussion in your classroom. Learn from each other.

Perhaps I should introduce Ron to Adolfo, a Latino fifth grade teacher who attended another of our workshops. As Adolfo told me, every year, on the first day of school, he sits down with his kids and they go book by book, reading the name of the authors. They ask themselves, "male or female?" Adolfo explained, "I take the responsibility of finding out the race of the author if I can, and I tell the kids. I want them to learn that their social studies book is just one perspective, and that if it was written by a Latino, or an African American, or an Asian American, or a woman of any race, it might be very different." That is education. ❀

Paul Gorski grew up in northern Virginia just outside of Washington, D.C. He attended the University of Virginia as an undergraduate, majoring in Rhetoric and Communications. He stayed to complete his Masters in the Social Foundations of Education and expects to complete his Doctorate in Educational Evaluation with a concentration on Multicultural Education in 1997. Mr. Gorski currently works with a team of multicultural education/cultural diversity facilitators, conducting workshops across the state of Virginia.

Oppositional Trickery:

Europe Invents Itself



By *Bill Benzon*



he European Dark Ages were, as the name implies, dark. The Roman Empire had fallen through a combination of over-extension and internal sloth and complacency and, with the major exception of Moorish Spain, most of the European tribes collapsed into barbarism. Few people had any identity beyond their local village or town. No one thought of themselves as French or Italian or German or Swiss or English and so forth, for those polities didn't exist, not even in the imagination of ambitious aristocrats. No one thought of themselves as European. Europe was just a name on a map and not many could afford to own a map or had any use for one.

However, many people did think of themselves as Christian. While those various tribespeople didn't simply give up on their own religious beliefs, a good many of them did become Christian and manage some compromise between Christianity and their beliefs in Fairies and Norns and such supernatural creatures. As John Hale notes in his recent account of *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, threads of Christianity crisscrossed the continent and formed the basis of the first identification which linked people beyond the five or ten square miles which defined their daily routines. As the centuries ticked off, these various peoples began to think of themselves as Christendom.

Christianity is deeply imbued with oppositional spirit. The ancient Hebrews were nomads and captives. They had no homeland to which they could attach an identity. Instead, they took their identity from a jealous god who forbade that they put other gods before him, who promised to lead them, his chosen people, to a new land. Christianity began as a reform movement within Judaism, with the holy man, Jesus of Nazareth, tossing the money-changers out of the temple and urging resistance against those leaders who urged compliance with the Romans. Christianity is a religion of resistance, of opposition.

Thus it was inevitable that European Christians, especially the nobility, saw themselves in opposition to the infidels, primarily the Islamic peoples who held sway in Spain and around the eastern end of the Mediterranean sea. Christian peoples of Europe traded with these folks, warred with them, were more than a bit taken aback at the superiority of Islamic civilization to their own, and managed to recover some of the ancient Greek and Roman past through contact with these more civilized folk. Out of this rich range of contacts and interactions came the so-called Renaissance, the rebirth of ancient learning on European soil. These peoples began to forge nations, god-fearing Christian nations. Then came the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Christendom was now irrevocably shattered. European peoples thus found it easier to think of their difference from others as a matter of being European rather than being Christian. Protestants and Catholics may have had grave doubts about one another's Christianity, but they were sure that they were both European.

As we continue on, we need to keep these two things in mind:

1. These various European civilizations were hybrid creations, drawing on accomplishments of a wide range of peoples in Africa and Asia in addition to various indigenous European cultures.

2. The concept of Europe is inherently oppositional. Part of the point of being European is that one is not a savage, barbarian, infidel, one is not dark-skinned. One is white.

Europeans used their navigational and naval technology to travel to the ends of the earth where their military technology helped them subdue the peoples they encountered. Wherever they went they worked hard at maintaining a sense of difference from other peoples. And not only of difference, but of moral superiority. However much they were fascinated by and desired the spices of India, the silks of China, however much they admired the noble savages of the New World, they insisted on difference-from and superiority-to. Europeans invented their whiteness to justify their imperial activities.

The fact that these people, for the most part, were able to succeed in this far-flung enterprise suggests that their sense of superiority was no mere ethnocentric illusion. Their technology, on the whole, was superior to that of other civilizations, and their methods of social organization more effective in large-scale economic and military enterprises. But, whatever merit it may have had, their sense of superiority had destructive underpinnings. As sociologist Talcott Parsons noted in his classic 1947 article on "Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression in the Social Structure of the

Reprinted by permission, Dr. Benzon's essay is an excerpt from his article "Beyond Oppositional Trickeration: American Identity in the 21st Century, A Just-So Story." The complete article appeared in *Meanderings*, Vol. 2, Issue 4, 1995, and may be viewed on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.newsavanna.com/meanderings/me204/me20401.shtml>

Western World," Europeans project many of their aggressive impulses onto other peoples so that, in attempting to dominate those peoples, they are, in a psychological sense, attempting to attain mastery over themselves. By defining "European-ness" in opposition to other cultural identities in which they secretly hid part of themselves, Europeans yoked themselves to the never-ending task of conquering other peoples.

Because the European psyche cannot take responsibility for its own actions it cannot find satisfaction for its desires. No matter how thoroughly it may dominate others, that domination brings no final satisfaction because it rests on a debilitating fabrication.

At this point the mechanisms of European identity have gone beyond the simple oppositionality inherent in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Now oppositionality has become psychological trickeration. The European rebirth accomplishment required tremendous emotional repression. Some poured their repressed emotional energy into work—I'm reminded of Max Weber's classic study of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—while others turned their repressed emotional energies against people of other nations and, above all, of other races. Europeans came to punish others for their own sins. Imperial domination and economic exploitation become intertwined with the need for self-control and discipline, a confusion documented in great detail in Peter Gay's *The Cultivation of Hatred*. For the white man, taming "brutal savages" became a defense against the brutality of his savage self.

The weakness of this oppositional psychology becomes evident in a recent statement made by Mario Cuomo, former governor of New York, in the *New York Times Magazine* (March 19, 1995):

The second World War was the last time that this country believed in anything

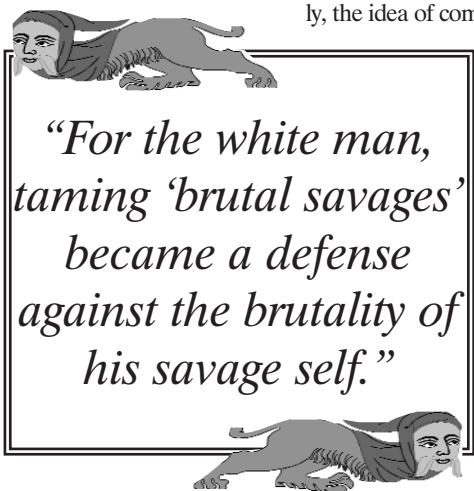
profoundly, any great single cause. What was it? They were evil; we were good. That was Tojo, that was that S.O.B. Hitler, that was Mussolini, that bum. They struck at us in the middle of the night, those sneaks. We are good, they are bad. Let's all get together, we said, and we creamed them. We started from way behind. We found strength in this common commitment, this commonality, community, family, the idea of coming together was best

served in my lifetime in the Second World War.

This is an extraordinary statement by an astute politician, uttered with no apparent sense of irony. What kind of dissension afflicts this American family if it can find deep unity only in battle with an external enemy? What happens to that unity when the enemy is defeated?

The mechanisms of oppositional trickeration became intensified in the United States of America where advanced ideals of democracy and universality came into conflict with chattel slavery, and with the cultures of African peoples. The enslaved black population served many Americans as an "internal" enemy against which they could unite. Blacks also served as a standard of comparison against which "whiteness" could be defined and elaborated. ❀

Dr. William Benzon is an independent scholar interested in cultural evolution. He is on the editorial board of *The Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems* and has taught an online course about African American music through the New School for Social Research. He is also a musician who has shared the stage with Dizzy Gillespie and B. B. King and participated in arts-in-education programs funded by the New York Foundation for the Arts.



New book asks, "Does racism affect white Americans?"

Many years ago (1981) Sage Publications published a book titled *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*. Edited by Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt, this book has been out of print in recent years. Familiar to us only by reference, we had been unable to locate a copy. Our back order with the publisher had been languishing for more than a year. Imagine our surprise when the newly published second edition was delivered to our doorstep just as we were going to press with this issue of the *Quarterly Newsletter*.

Impacts contains twelve chapters by various authors who, as the title states, examine racism as it bears on white Americans. Depending on their focus, the level of analysis varies from psychological to sociological, economic and political science. The content ranges from applied techniques for trainers to highly theoretical discussions of greatest interest to academicians.

Of particular interest to this white male reader was one chapter by Lillian Roybal Rose titled "White Identity and Counseling White Allies about Racism," and a second chapter by James E. Crowfoot and Mark A. Chesler titled "White Men's Roles in Multicultural Coalitions." Roybal Rose, herself a Mexican American, displays a remarkable sensitivity for the development of racial identity in white Americans. In one noteworthy section she describes her experiences asking white Americans to express pride in their collective racial identity. Few are able to do so.

Crowfoot and Chesler, themselves white men, argue that "it is morally right, and in the interest of white males, to work for a just and multicultural society." That such work is not easy is made clear as they describe "white male privileges and dysfunctional behaviors," and then detail a plethora of dilemmas created by the presence of white men in multiracial coalitions. However, they note while dilemmas may differ, coalition work is risky for everyone regardless of race and gender.

Other contributors include the editors, Bowser and Hunt, along with Octave Baker, Robert T. Carter, John P. Fernandez, Gerald Home, James M. Jones, Louis Kushnick, Patrick L. Mason, Walter W. Stafford, and Robert W. Terry.

A "must read" for scholars of white American culture, *Impacts of Racism on White Americans* is available from Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA, Phone (805) 499-0721. \$23.95. 295 pages. ISBN 0-8039-4994-4 (paperback). ❀

Caring, from page 7

place.

Later in each workshop we had participants break into small groups to discuss some models of white culture we had summarized from the literature. In one group a white woman took an angry stance, claiming that black people can do all kinds of racist stuff that white people would be condemned for doing. As part of the exercise, we then asked the people in the small groups to break into pairs. A woman of color took the initiative to pair with this white woman because the other, white, group members were clearly getting down on her.

In one case a young African American man asked 'Why do we have to talk about white culture? Isn't that what we're always talking about?' A year ago I might have said the same thing. White culture is so common and pervasive, it's hard to get away from it. Seldom named for what it is, much of the dialog about race, about difference, about anything in America takes place from the standpoint of white Americans.

But having done the workshops, I listened to people trying to really work around and resolve these issues, not just in terms of white privilege, but as an awareness of being white, struggling with their racial identity. As a black, feminist sociologist from a Southern working class background I frankly get tired of hearing people talking about us. It's refreshing to hear white folks discussing some of their own pathology. I found it very interesting. I'd like to learn more about it, and do more research on it.

It must do something to white people. I just assumed that everybody had a racial

◆ *Businesses* ◆ *religious organizations* ◆ *conference planners* ◆
◆ *professional associations* ◆ *social service agencies* ◆
◆ *student groups* ◆ *schools and universities* ◆

*If you care to make a difference in people's lives...
If you share our concern for racial understanding...
Then dare to explore white culture in America.*

Find out what it takes to sponsor a white awareness workshop in your organization. Contact the Center for the Study of White American Culture at (908) 241-5439. Ask for Jeff Hitchcock.

wonder when they see stuff on TV and they see white people doing this and black people doing that whether it's a sitcom, a drama, a soap opera. There's a lot of implicit messages about color that you can't talk about. So bring it out. As black people talk about color and being black, white people have to talk about being white, between and among white people. But this has become a forbidden subject.

In addition to their ethnic background, their class background, I think for white people being aware of their racial background can only add to their awareness of who they are, how they fit into the whole American culture and how they might be either perpetrators of racism or how they might be enemies of racism.

But it just doesn't seem that important to many white Americans. At my campus I was disheartened to see virtually no white faculty attended the workshop, despite a heavy publicity effort. Only one

the workshop he told me, "I didn't realize it but here I was all this time a rat in this maze heading for the big cheese. I didn't realize how racist it was."

That wasn't the point of the workshop, per se. Very little of the content directly examined racism, though racism as a topic was certainly brought into the discussion by participants, both white and people of color. But in learning something about their culture, many of the participants developed a greater ability to see how they had been a part and product of a common cultural experience that had been hidden from them. By learning something about their own race, they gained a deeper understanding of people of all races.

I can't say with certainty, being an outsider, but I got the feeling that many of the white participants came to the workshops with the knowledge that other people, and especially people of color, viewed them as white. But I don't think they ever particularly connected with one another on that basis. During the workshop, I think they slowly began to see that, yes, they did share some issues. Maybe one person was Catholic and another Jewish, but they found they had similar issues and feelings about being white. By the time they left, it seemed, they began to feel that maybe it was okay to talk about these issues. In fact it gave them some new directions to work on issues of race and equality in America. Granted, I'm still speculating, but I think many participants left realizing that you can be antiracist and still call yourself white. It's all in what you do with it. While racism and racial privilege are bad, having a racial identity, even a white one, can be a positive thing. ❀

"But it just doesn't seem that important to many white Americans."

identity because we live in a society that is very color conscious. I want to know why white people are not aware of being white or why they do not articulate their awareness of being white. I don't know which one it is.

I think white people need to know how it feels to be known as a white person by themselves, and by other people. American culture socializes us everyday about racial consciousness, particularly black and white. You don't think kids

white colleague of mine, the same woman who sponsored us as an event during multicultural week, was there. Other faculty were present. All were people of color. Of the white people on campus, it was the students, and some staff, who came.

The people who were there didn't try to run and hide from the issues. I'm reminded of my colleague's husband, who attended more or less at his wife's behest. Though generally quiet and reserved, he became caught up in the activity. After

White students enrolled in my class...are almost always surprised to hear that we will be discussing the White group's experience. Some students remark that they are not White; they are female, or working-class, or Catholic or Jewish, but not White. When challenged, they reluctantly admit that they are White but report that this is the first time they have had to think about what it means for them.

Rita Hardiman, 1994, "White Racial Identity Development in the United States."

Lack of understanding of self owing to a poor sense of identity causes Whites to develop a negative attitude toward minorities on both a conscious and a subconscious level.

Judith H. Katz, 1978, White Awareness: Handbook for AntiRacism Training.

[Blacks are mired] in a very natural process of inversion in which we invert from negative to positive the very point of difference - our blackness - that the enemy used to justify our oppression...One of the many advantages whites enjoy in America is...[they] do not have to spend precious time fashioning an identity out of simply being white.

Shelby Steel, 1990, The Content of Our Character.

The anxiety that exists for Whites concerning the subject of race should not be underestimated. It is high even for those who believe they have mastered their biases... Management of this anxiety in the interest of confronting bias and achieving greater comfort and confidence in cross-racial interactions should be seen as an act of courage.

But usually Whites do not feel courageous. They tend instead to plead ignorance and to protest that they have never had to think about the meaning of being White.

Elaine Pinderhughes, 1989, Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Power: The Key to Efficacy in Clinical Practice.

Now you may be all right; there are a few white men who are, but the pressure is such from your white friends that you will be compelled to talk against us and give us the cold shoulder when you are around them, even if your heart is right toward us.

Thomas Hall, 1937, in My Folks Don't Want Me to Talk about Slavery.

Whiteness is sometimes hard to see.

There are few resources that focus on the need for white men to learn about their own identity.

Oron South, 1993, "The Learning Problem."

The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters.

Toni Morrison, 1993, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.

All I know is that by the next century, this country is not going to be *Leave it to Beaver*. I saw the future in L.A. I saw Asians, I saw Hispanic, I saw all different types of people. The white people were in the minority. W.E.B. DuBois talks about how being black, you learn how to live in two worlds, you learn how to be around people differently, you learn how to adjust. If you're white, you never really had to do that before. In a sense I feel sympathy for them because they're going to have to learn how to do that pretty soon, and I'm already doing it.

John Blake, 1994, in Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk about Race and Identity.

ENCLOSED IS MY CHECK OR MONEY ORDER FOR:

RATE	4 issues	8 issues
Student	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00
Individual or Soc. Service Org.	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$45.00

MAILING ADDRESS (PLEASE PRINT)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

MAILING PREFERENCE (CHECK)

- STANDARD: Please use a mailing label attached to the back cover of the newsletter .
- DISCREET: Please use a plain wrapper with the shortened version of your name (Center for Study). Some people at my address may find the title and content too provocative, or they may misinterpret the newsletter's purpose.

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Please mail this form, or a photocopy, with your check or money order payable to:

**Center for Study
245 West 4th Avenue
Roselle, NJ 07203**



Video Review

Imagine a woman, the white principal of a high school falling in love

with the Mexican-American janitor, running off to Mexico for the weekend and on a drunken impulse getting married, only to return to the small Texas town where the whole affair began. It sounds like the making of a Greek tragedy, fated to destroy both characters in the affair.

Crazy from the Heart makes this improbable storyline work, not by avoiding the unpleasant issues of race and class privilege, but rather by confronting them. Ernesto (Rubén Blades) first meets Charlotte (Christine Lahti) when called to fix a leaking toilet in her office. Charlotte takes little notice. Her mind is preoccupied with her stagnant, longstanding relationship with the high school coach, Dewey (William Russ) who seems perfectly content to drink beer and watch baseball at her house, ever avoiding the difficult issue of marriage. When Charlotte's high school friend becomes a grandmother, Charlotte sees her life going to waste.

Not that she falls into Ernesto's arms.

She declines his offer of a ride home when her car fails, only to accept when a carload of riotous teenagers passes by. Ernesto, a widower, persists. Taking the advice of his grown daughter that he get out more, he asks Charlotte for a date. On the rebound from Dewey, who interrupts their conversation, Charlotte accepts.

And so their romance begins. On the beach in Mexico, Charlotte sighs, "Have I known you all my life?" "No," Ernesto replies, "just a few days. But it's just that Texas is far, far behind." Meanwhile, back in Texas Dewey awaits Charlotte's return. "You think I ought to be worried about the Mexican?" he asks Charlotte's mother. She replies, "He's been with her for 24 hours on a weekend that doesn't appear to be ending anytime soon, while you are sitting in an old woman's room drinking a warm beer telling me how tough you have it. You're the coach. You tell me. Who's ahead in the game?"

Had the story ended here, it would be little more than a light-hearted romance. The real story begins when the new found lovers return to Texas. While Ernesto honors the sanctity of their marriage, Charlotte feels she made a terrible mistake. Neither is left alone to resolve

their feelings. Charlotte is besieged by the forces of whiteness as influential whites in town try to bring her to her senses. Ernesto is confronted

by his daughter, a lawyer, and told to accept reality.

How they resolve their relationship in the face of these greater social forces is the heart of the movie. Supported by Louise Latham as Charlotte's bemused mother, Tommy Muniz as Ernesto's arsonist grandfather, and a cast of lesser characters, *Crazy from the Heart* manages to examine white American culture without losing sight of the individual characters involved. Never once, for example, is the term "white" used as a reference, though the term "Mexican" appears somewhat frequently, and generally is uttered in a derogatory way by someone white.

Interracial/intercultural relationships are seldom portrayed in a sensitive and realistic way. Usually "mixed" couples are seen as victims of political forces, or as individuals asserting their beliefs in reaction against society. *Crazy from the Heart* acknowledges the realities of social forces, but lets the characters live their own feelings. In the end, that's what makes this an endearing and uplifting movie.

Crazy from the Heart. Turner Pictures, Inc. 1991. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Rated M.

Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc.

A Multiracial Organization

245 West 4th Avenue

Roselle, NJ 07203