

**CONFERENCE REPORT:  
3rd National Conference on Whiteness**

On November 6-8, 1998 the 3rd National Conference on Whiteness took place at the University of Chicago. The planning committee contained two members from the first conference, two from the second, and several, most notably Chicago Ink, who joined for this specific conference. The conference was managed with a razor thin budget and staffed completely by volunteers. The University of Chicago generously permitted our University sponsor, Chicago Ink, to hold the conference. But the university community was scarcely represented in the planning or among participants. Other colleges in Chicago may have been represented in greater number. The conference event itself was easily swallowed up among many other events at the university and in the Hyde Park area going on that same weekend.

Our planning process, having taken time to get under way, did not allow enough time for the distribution of materials and information about the conference, or the time needed to renew and build relationships and commitments among persons and organizations interested in the conference. Attendance was smaller than hoped, at around 200 persons (no official figures available at this time). Still, we publicized however we could, and many new people found out about the conference for the first time. New relationships were explored among activists, trainers, new abolitionists, Baha'i, the academic community, and the media. The latter were there either reporting the event, or discussing their professions in a conference-sponsored dialogue about whiteness and the media.

Some unpleasant logistical problems took place, though nothing to jeopardize the safety and well-being of participants. But coffee was unavailable at times. Lodgings were hard to find. Workshops were scheduled in anticipation of more participants. Some rooms, thought to be reserved, were in use by another group. Still, it worked, for those who needed an opportunity to network and learn.

The conference was still biracial (black/white) as has been its history. Given our shortened planning process we did not develop our full multiracial potential. However, we did see some Latino/a support, and perhaps some Asian and American Indian as well. The multiracial community, as such, was not visibly present. In terms of representation by

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**Training Notes:**

In October the Center gave its workshop, *Learning How to Talk about Whiteness*, to the Rutgers Bias Prevention Steering Committee, a group of approximately 25 administrative staff from the various schools and colleges in the Rutgers University statewide system. The workshop combined standard introductory content with content addressed specifically to issues confronting white students in multiracial settings. Participants responded with enthusiasm and excitement. According to a follow up report from our sponsor one month later, participants did indeed learn how to talk about whiteness, and were still talking about it.

**National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR)**

Continuing our work with this biennial conference, the Center has assembled a panel on whiteness for the plenary session on June 1, 1999. The panel consists of **Noel Ignatiev**, from the New Abolitionist Society and author of *How the Irish Became White*; **Judith Katz**, of Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group and author of *White Awareness: Handbook for Antiracism Training*; and **Lowell Thompson**, of Partnership Against Racism and author of *"WHITEFOLKS": Seeing America through Black Eyes*.

NCPCR has received over 400 proposals but only 3 look at whiteness and white American culture in conjunction with the need for peacemaking and conflict resolution. The conference organizers would like to see more discussion of this topic. **If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please contact us!**

Along with the panel, the Center will be organizing a daily white caucus to discuss issues of whiteness and white American culture at the conference. We anticipate the very act of holding the caucus will raise some needed measure of consciousness and controversy, regardless of the number of people attending.

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people of African heritage, the conference probably held a greater proportion than the previous two, perhaps 30% (again, not an official figure). This was true of the planning committee, and seemed to apply to our presenters, and to participants as well.

Conference planners solicited and recorded feedback from 50 participants on the last day of the conference. We have also received a small number of offers to host the conference next year. We will be reviewing them soon as prelude to beginning the planning of the fourth conference. (*This description, above, is also posted on the Center's website at [www.euroamerican.org](http://www.euroamerican.org).*)

**Exclusive report to members:** The conference was disappointing in some ways and encouraging in others. The Center wanted a large, impactful event that would catch the media's attention and bring the topic of whiteness to national attention. So, too, did conference co-sponsor, Partnership Against Racism. It was not to be. In fact, attendance was lower, and our organization was less effective, than at the 2nd conference.

However, the most encouraging aspect from the Center's view is that a conference planning team has emerged intact from the process and is already taking responsibility for the 4th conference. The first three conferences were initiated by the Center and the broader planning committees for those conferences only emerged in the summer months as we recruited. Now there is a team comprising individuals and organizations who have a history of working on the conference. It has been our plan that the conference should someday become its own organization. Sure, we'd like to keep it. But a single organization such as the Center would not be able to draw the wide range of activists and academics we seek to bring to the conference process. It takes a broader coalition. That coalition, and the planning resources it requires, has already begun to coalesce around the 4th conference.

## Mark your calendars.

Next year's conference will be held November 5 thru November 7, 1999 (Friday thru Sunday). The conference planning team is looking at offers from groups in Memphis, New Orleans and Houston to host the conference.

## Getting our name out there

**Listed.** The Center has been listed among "selected research organizations" in a new directory, *Intergroup Relations in the United States: Programs and Organizations*. Compiled by the National Conference on Community and Justice (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews) and funded by the Ford Foundation, this directory is a handy resource for locating over 300 programs addressing racism and intergroup relations. It is a companion volume to *Intergroup Relations in the United States: Research Perspectives*. The latter volume summarizes sociological, social psychological and survey research on intergroup relations and includes 50 pages of tables. Social policy issues are also reviewed. *Programs and Organizations* is listed at \$14.95 and *Research Findings* is list-

ed at \$21.95. NCCJ can be contacted at 71 Fifth Ave., Suite 1100, NY, NY 10003; phone (212) 255-6177.

**Media contacts.** Since October the Center has been contacted by three newspaper reporters, each looking for background information on articles about race. The reporters were from the *Wilmington News Journal* (DE), the *San Jose Mercury News* (CA), and the *Trenton Times* (NJ).

**There's even a Center...** We received a 1-line mention in a new book, *WHITE LIES: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*, by Maurice Berger (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999). In a section of the book discussing the trend to white studies, it simply says, "There is a Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc., in Roselle, New Jersey, and a good number of anthologies, scholarly studies..." This is reminiscent of a mention we received in the *New York Times Magazine* around a year ago. It confirms our suspicion and intention, that in the very act of existing we are making a statement useful to others wishing to validate and legitimize the need to look at whiteness. Berger's book, by the way, is an interesting and easy read—less scholarly, more autobiographical and more self-reflective than the typical "whiteness" book.

## Grant not granted

We reported last quarter that the Center had assisted on a proposal submitted by Lehigh University of Bethlehem, PA to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a summer institute on whiteness. The proposal was not approved. Unofficial word is that the proposal was well written, but in a highly competitive atmosphere it needed a scholarly heavyweight as an administrator, a less isolated location, and perhaps an academically more seasoned topic.

## Web update

We've just completed our Fall update to the Center's web site at [www.euroamerican.org](http://www.euroamerican.org). The web site continues to attract interest in the Center and has developed its own following. Our next update will take place beginning with the first day of Spring.

## Members - new and renewing

Our membership program began in earnest late last year. We converted our former subscribers to members (some elected for refunds instead), and did a mailing to our general mailing list asking for new membership support. We'd like to thank the following members for their generosity:

### Student

Paul Partridge

### Contributor

Robin DiAngelo

Mary Dill

Kathleen Harr

Allen Ivey

Sarah Satterthwaite

Douglas Strum

Mary Washington

### Supporter

Charley Flint

Jeff Hitchcock

### Advocate

Robert Terry

### Sponsor

Karen Chandler

FREE TRIAL! (MEMBERS ONLY)

# Racial Awareness Quiz

**Want to get those white people in your classroom or organization thinking about their assumptions?** Are you tired of spending endless hours simply getting past the miseducation white people bring to discussions on race, whiteness and privilege? Well, try this. Our 20-item, self-administered, Racial Awareness Quiz is a soft approach to exposing assumptions many white Americans have absorbed from our country's Eurocentric system of education and mainstream media portrayals of racial history.

We are now looking for educators, trainers and other interested persons to field test the quiz in class rooms, seminars and study groups. We'll send you a copy of the questions and separate answer booklet. In return, we simply ask that you try it out and give us feedback by email, phone, or snail mail. Let us know if you found it effective, and how it might be improved.

If you can use the quiz in a class, workshop or seminar and report back to us by **April 30**, that's all we ask. In return, we will give you license to use the quiz indefinitely. If you receive the quiz and decide it is not appropriate for your setting, you are under no obligation to administer it. Simply let us know, and return or discard the version we sent.

The Racial Awareness Quiz is an exclusive property of the Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc. and is intended to be marketed as a curriculum resource. This offer is available to the first ten members who take us up on it. Simply contact us by phone or email to make arrangements to receive your test copy.

## SAMPLE QUESTION (and ANSWER)

5. Which of the following describes events following Columbus's first voyage to the Americas in 1492 until his death in 1506?
- a) Columbus was simply an adventurous sailor whose main intent was to prove his theory that the world was round. Looking for Asia, he never knew he "discovered" a new continent.
  - b) Columbus was a practical risk taker who, from the start, ruthlessly exploited innocent and peaceful native Americans for the benefit of his investors. He died leaving his heirs well off.
  - c) Columbus was a religious man whose principles kept him from exploiting the natives. In his wake, more ruthless adventurers began the Spanish conquest of the Americas.
  - d) Columbus wanted to open lines of trade with the "Indians" he discovered, but was unable to get the financial backing he needed to set up a commercial enterprise. He died in poverty.

ANSWER: (B).

Like most learned people in Europe and many other parts of the world, Columbus knew the world was round and land masses lay to the west. His voyage took daring and initiative, but it was not fraught with the mutiny, stormy weather, ill fitted ships and superstitious, backward crew of legend. After a relatively calm voyage of a month from the Canary Islands, he landed in the Americas. In his first act upon meeting the natives, he kidnapped several as guides and, looking for gold, proceeded to the island of Hispaniola. Today comprising Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in 1492 Hispaniola was populated by well over 3 million Arawak Indians.

Individual conflicts occasionally arose among the Arawak but organized warfare was not part of their culture. Columbus described them as docile and trusting, having only sharpened cane sticks as weapons. With 50 men, Columbus said, "I could conquer them...and govern them as I pleased." Collecting gold trinkets, exotic wildlife, and kidnapping 25 Arawaks, Columbus returned to Spain. The following year he returned, prepared with 1,500 armed men, including cavalry and attack dogs, to meet the docile Arawaks. Clearly fair trade was not on his mind.

Columbus, though at times voicing religious fervor, showed little concern for the welfare of the Arawaks. Immediately upon arriving he rewarded his men with native women to rape. The Spanish forced the natives to plant food, hunt gold and satisfy their every wish. The islanders resisted and in 1495 Columbus undertook a war against the population. Crossbows, cavalry and cannon prevailed against sticks and stones. Fleeing natives were torn apart, eviscerated by dogs. Under pressure to return to Spain with some goods for his investors, Columbus showed his religion. "In the name of the Holy Trinity" he wrote his royal backers, "we can send from here all the slaves...which could be sold."

Queen Isabella herself had no enthusiasm for Columbus's suggestion but others did. Columbus packed 500 enslaved Arawaks on his ships and left his troops with another 500 on Hispaniola for their personal use. Twice more Columbus returned to the Americas. Both his brother and his son joined in the rape of Hispaniola. Natives who failed to meet a quota of gold every 3 months had their hands cut off and bled to death. So corrupt were the Spanish, they forced the Indians to carry them about the island rather than walking. They cut slices of flesh from captives to test the sharpness of their knives and murdered them for dog food. In one instance recorded by a historian of the time, two Spanish men "met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys." Columbus himself in 1500 wrote of trade in sexual slavery, "there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls; those from nine to ten are now in demand."

Native men were forced to work for months in the mines, separated from their women who were forced to raise food in the fields. Decimated by disease, forced labor and wanton genocide, the population was no longer willing or able to procreate. Natives committed suicide in droves. Women aborted themselves and murdered their children. After 18 years, only 12,000 of the original 3 million gentle Arawaks were still alive. By 1555 they all were dead.

**SOURCES:** James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1995. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 - Present (Revised and updated edition)*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

## 1998 Financial Report

We tell people the Center operates on a shoe string. Here's the facts. Overall we operated at a slight loss in 1998, though essentially we broke even for the year. The Center still has a negative net worth due to start up costs and deficits during the first three years of operation. The difference was made up by personal loans from the founders. Though these loans remain outstanding, the Center is now showing promise of covering its annual operating expenses. The \$65.00 in "unpaid invoices" represents a write-off of unpaid amounts people owe us for materials they ordered and we delivered more than 1 year ago.

All in all we are trying to have the greatest impact we can while managing our funds responsibly. In 1999 it's pretty clear we need to build our sources of income and support while keeping expenses low. We hope to do this by developing a larger membership, doing more training and consulting, and developing new materials for sale. At the same time we have to look critically at requests that we appear at conferences and events that can not cover our expenses.

<b>INCOME</b>	
Sale of publications	694.84
Contributions	604.00
Membership donations	559.50
Training and consulting	1550.00
Reimbursed expenses	1007.73
<i>Total Income</i>	<b>4416.07</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Printing	271.86
Postage	238.99
Telephone	781.11
Internet operations	895.00
Travel	1326.87
Unpaid invoices	65.00
Books and publications	238.77
Office supplies	689.55
<i>Total Expenses</i>	<b>4507.15</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>-91.08</b>

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# Center opening whiteness listserv

Once upon a time we operated a listserv on whiteness, unmoderated and uncensored. It cost us \$25.00 per month to run and we let anyone join. Several people, who felt threatened by the Center and wanted us to be accountable to their version of social justice, made it their project to launch polemical diatribes against other points of view. They called for continual justification and public review of the Center's actions. Needless to say, it was a miserable process. Many people dropped out, disappointed and alienated. Our critics, doubtless, would not have paid two cents for the privilege of attacking us. But it was free to them. Never initiating their own topics, they simply lurked and attacked when other folks were brave enough to begin talking. It became pointless, a significant drain on our funds and our attention. We dropped the project.

Well, times have changed.

**FIRST**, we can now operate a listserv at no financial cost, using new services on the Internet!

**SECOND**, since we now have a membership, we can draw the line at members only. So we will. We'll still operate unmoderated and uncensored (Censoring content is something we'd rather avoid, especially since the topic of whiteness is controversial itself, and views and expressive styles differ widely). But with a members-only listserv we at least will be talking with people who have an interest in sharing our mission.

**Beginning in the next few weeks we will set the service up. If you are interested in joining, send us your Email address (see our Email address on the front cover). We will contact you with further details by Email.**