

Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc.

MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

A multiracial organization

FALL 1999

An open letter to our members

Dear member,

A few weeks ago our Board of Directors met in Washington, DC to discuss and strategize about the Center. There we talked about the role of membership. I want to express as personally as this medium will allow that we, the members of the board, are thankful for your support. Your financial contributions matter greatly. Even more important is the endorsement your membership makes for the Center as an organization. If we weren't doing something worthwhile, nobody would join. It's pretty straight forward. We're doing something you feel needs doing.

As it is, that something is controversial. We're highlighting the fact that whiteness affects all of us in our racially structured society. The effect may differ, depending on who you are, but nobody is immune—no one is truly neutral and unaffected. That's why I, a black woman, feminist, and sociologist feel no contradiction heading an organization that takes whiteness as its subject.

As Toni Morrison pointed out, taking on the great white whale of whiteness can lead us individually, like Capt. Ahab, to desperation, ridicule and failure. Make no mistake. We intend change and transformation, not tragedy. To do that, we need to work together and so we're glad you are with us. As the Center moves forward, we as a board pledge ourselves to building the shared communication, forums and networks needed to challenge the central role of whiteness in the United States.

We hope you'll continue to share and contribute in building this process. In Washington the board found we know very little about our members demographically. Often we know even less about your specific views on white culture. *So we've enclosed a short survey form in this newsletter. I hope you'll find some time to return it to us.*

In the meantime, please enjoy the newsletter. It details some of our plans and activities. Our resources are limited, and we always hope to do more. But it's a start, and you are part of it.

Thank you,

Dr. Charley B. Flint
President and Chairperson, Board of Directors

Our mission, revised

At the Board of Directors' annual planning session held in Washington, DC on August 31, 1999, we took a critical look at the Center's mission statement and made some revisions. The new statement reads as follows:

The Center for the Study of White American Culture is a multiracial organization whose mission is to define and examine white United States culture and to address its role in, and impact on, the greater American culture.

While similar to the previous mission statement, the new statement reinforces a need to define white culture. The apparent difficulty many people experience in seeing white culture is one means by which white culture retains its position as central. We need to make the invisible visible, name the unnamed, and define the undefined.

We also plan to do more than simply define and examine. We intend to promote change by addressing the role of white culture in the greater American culture.

Finally, we recognize that the term "American" is problematic when used simply in reference to the USA. To many, perhaps most, citizens of the United States the term "American" is heard to refer to their own country, yet it refers to two continents containing many nations. In our work, we believe it is critical to reach the white United States mainstream, thus we often use the shorthand term of "Americans" rather than flying in the face of convention and using longer, though more accurate terms such as "citizens of the United States" or even "United Statesians" as some have suggested. In doing so, we are working within the native idiom of the people we are trying to reach. But we recognize and acknowledge there is more at stake here. Thus our mission statement identifies the thing we wish to define, examine, and address as "white United States culture." This examination takes place within the context of the greater American (used both ways, here) culture.

Members - new and renewing last quarter

Contributors

Lowell Thompson

Laura M. White

Supporters

Cessie Alfonso

Advocates

Janice Eddy, Inc.
Rev. Gil Hatcher

Amanda McBride
Dr. Dorothy Simpson-Taylor

Current board of directors

Following the board meeting in Washington, board members and officers for 1999-2000 are:

Member	Term ending
Cessie Alfonso*	2002
Charley Flint, President	2002
Gil Hatcher, Vice president	2001
Jeff Hitchcock*	2000
Judith Katz	2001
Peggy O'Donoghue	2000
Susanna Tardi, Treasurer	2000
Lowell Thompson, Secretary	2001
Mary Washington	2002

* ex-officio member

Strategic planning session

At our recent board meeting, members participated in an annual review and planning process for the Center. After carefully considering the Center's mission, we turned our attention to how it might be carried out in practice. First and foremost we conceptualize the Center functioning as a network and linkage for issues related to whiteness and white culture in the U.S.

Among the constituencies we expect to be interested are those in the academic world, social change organizations, the helping professions, and in private practice as consultants. Many of our current members come from these constituencies. Consequently our services are targeted toward these groups.

Among some of the new products and services we considered were a speakers bureau, organizational memberships, a position paper on defining white culture, a regional conference on targeted topics, and workshops targeted to specific professions. Regarding the latter idea, it was noted that young, white service professionals are becoming resentful, saying, essentially, "I don't have a problem dealing with Asians and black people, but how come no one is dealing with me." Needed is a 1-day workshop looking at whiteness and integrating white cultural issues into one's practice in a nonracist manner.

We've begun to make a start on some of these ideas. By this time next year we hope to see some of them reach fruition.

From our Training Director

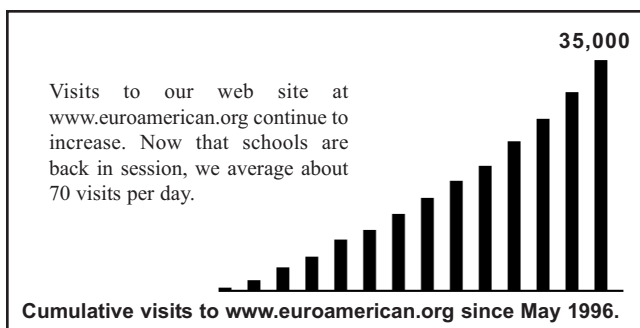
Dear members,

I am pleased to announce that I've become Director of Training for the Center. As a multicultural consultant for the past 16 years it's become clear to me what was needed was including an awareness of whiteness when trying to heighten an appreciation of multiculturalism in our culture. Therefore I am thrilled to join the Center and to provide direction to the Center's training programs on whiteness. We are committed to developing a comprehensive approach to examining and appreciating multiculturalism.

As an Afro-Puerto Rican-Cuban woman born, raised and educated in America, I not only bring years of professional experience, but I also bring my personal perspective on how essential it is to appreciate all the components that shape culture in America. So I invite you to give me a call, email or write with your ideas and perspectives on training. Your input will enable the Center to provide many of you with the tools you need to integrate a perspective on white American culture in your trainings. Therefore I ask for your input in terms of ideas, materials and perspectives that you believe will enhance trainings in this area.

As members we are all committed to creating an environment in which we can have a discussion on multiculturalism which includes talking about whiteness without it being perceived as racist. That is based on the belief that if we are truly going to have a culture that is comfortable discussing race and culture, it must develop a comfort level when discussing whiteness. The possibilities are enormous. Looking forward to hearing from you. I may be reached by phone at (201) 798-5156, by email at AlfonsoAss@aol.com, or by writing 123 Franklin St., Jersey City, NJ 07307.

Cessie Alfonso
Director of Training



4th Nat'l Whiteness Conference postponed.

Yes, that's the unfortunate news. The planning team in Boston ran up against substantial logistical and resource concerns. With little more than a month before the conference was to be held, we still could not find space. Current plans are to hold the conference some time in 2000. In the long run, because of the time it takes to plan and acquire support, we are considering holding the conference every two years.

Getting the Center's name out there

Since the summer, the Center received an inquiry from *Jane Magazine* concerning an article on white studies planned for November or December.

We also heard from *Response Magazine*, a publication for United Methodist women, concerning a story on the changing nature of race relations in the coming century. The story will appear around the end of the year.

Finally, the *Detroit Free Press* interviewed Jeff Hitchcock and Judith Katz and also contacted members on our listserv for a feature article on whiteness appearing at the end of October or early November. Interestingly, the article looks at the rise of white consciousness in society at large. Together with a similar article in the *Baltimore Sun* earlier this year, they suggest the press is turning from its preoccupation with white studies to see what's happening "in the street."

Current projects

The third paper in our WHITENESS PAPERS series has been received from Judith Katz and is being reviewed by series editors Charley Flint and Mary Washington. Feedback on the White Awareness Quiz has also been received, and drafting of a facilitator's guide will begin soon. Jeff Hitchcock continues to work on his book project. Cessie Alfonso and Jeff Hitchcock are together working on ways to raise awareness of concerns surrounding whiteness within the profession of social work. Being considered are an article, a regional conference, and a workshop for social workers for CEU credit. The Board of Directors has initiated a survey of members asking how they would define white United States culture.

Letter to the Editor:

Did you know we have a letter to the editor section on our web site? It's one of our most popular features. A couple weeks ago we received the following letter:

When I found your site, I cried. I've felt lost for so long, because everyone had a racial identity except me. To breathe a word about this alienation was to nominate myself for Klan membership. I felt inferior because of my race, poisoned, as if I had a genetic defect. Growing up and realizing that being white was the worst sin imaginable, it felt queasy, as though I discovered I had genital abnormality. "Race Traitor" wants to destroy any sense of peace, pride and contentment that white people have. I've been walking alone so long, that I feel like I could never be a part of any group, because I am white.

The loneliness is unbearable. Can you make being white something good again?

Lillie Wade

Leaving aside the question of whether being white was ever "good" in any moral sense, this is a touching letter. Many white people are struggling with the question of what it takes to live in a multiracial world. White culture provides no training for this. As older modes of white supremacy wither, many white people are left without any sort of guide or connection to a greater process that recognizes their own sense of humanity.

We believe whiteness has a cultural component. Perhaps this is our point of greatest difference with the Race Traitor folks, who otherwise are doing some very fine things unmasking privilege and forcing, at least intellectually, some issues that cry out for attention.

Alternative models can be made. Cultures can change. Change is exactly what we intend. Whether we can make white something good again is asking a lot. But we certainly hope to make it compatible with a multiracial society.

Biographies of new board members

Cessie Alfonso, A.C.S.W., L.C.S.W., is founder and president of Alfonso Associates and a nationally recognized expert in forensic social work. A bilingual (Spanish speaking), bicultural (Afro-Puerto Rican-Cuban) social worker, she has over twenty years experience as a human relations trainer. Her recent activities include training attorneys to appreciate and integrate into their practices the ethnically diverse and cultural aspects of their clients' lives. She is also a nationally recognized domestic violence/battered woman's expert who has appeared on national television (*Sally Jessy Raphael Show*, *Montel Williams Show*) and has conducted training in this area to professionals in the criminal justice system. In addition, Ms. Alfonso and her associates provide psychotherapy to attorneys' clients and to individuals from all walks of life.

Judith H. Katz, Ed. D., is executive vice president of The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc., and a member of the firm since 1985. Dr. Katz offers over twenty years of international experience in developing strategic change processes to address systemic oppression and help organizations become high performing and more culturally inclusive. An internationally known author, Dr. Katz's first book, *White Awareness: A Handbook for Anti-Racism Training* (1978) remains a landmark in the field, and her courageous autobiographical work, *No Fairy Godmothers, No Magic Wands: The Healing Process After Rape* (1984), is still widely used in assisting rape survivors in the recovery process. She has also made a number of television guest appearances as an expert on issues of race and gender.

Lowell Thompson is a creative ad man who, in 1992, founded Partnership Against Racism (PAR), a non-profit communications agency that has produced anti-racist public service announcements in almost every mass medium, including television, radio, posters, outdoor billboards, even T-shirts. Mr. Thompson has appeared on *Nightline* with Ted Koppel, CNN, and has written, or been featured in articles in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Advertising Age*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and has been heard on radio stations throughout America. He published "*WHITEFOLKS*": *Seeing America Through Black Eyes* (1996), and in 1997 started RaceMan.com where he answers the race questions most of us never hear asked in the mass media.

How to contact us

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MEMBER SURVEY

We would like your opinion on the following question:

How would you define white United States culture?

(Please use back or additional sheets if needed)

We presently do not have demographic information on our members, but we believe it is important for us to know the ethnic, racial, gender and age composition of our membership. This will help us interpret survey findings and also understand the nature of our membership support.

Name: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Race: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Please return to 245 W. 4th Ave., Roselle, NJ 07203 (see enclosed **pre-addressed envelope**), or by **fax** to (908) 245-4972. Or, if you prefer, send us your reply—definition and demographic info.—by **email** to DrCFlint@aol.com

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