

Unraveling the white cocoon, arrives soon

by **Jeff Hitchcock**

Several years ago I was struck by the need for a manual that well-meaning white people could use to explore their relationship as racial (and racialized) beings in a multiracial society. Many other articles and books were available. Some advised white people how to become antiracist. An uncounted number discussed race in comparative, "black/white," terms in which whiteness was implicitly held to be the norm. Several works emerging from the incipient white studies movement went further, critiquing whiteness itself as something particular and specific, not the invisible norm it claimed to be. Still other works described the development of white racial identity. All this was wonderful and worthy.

But nowhere could I find the sort of book I felt would resonate with me. Not simply the me of now, the year 2000. Also like the me of 20 years ago, a good hearted, but naïve liberal white (male) who believed strongly in social justice but lacked the awareness of his own privilege and how his own experience was deeply shaped by being white. That young man had to learn his lessons the hard way, bit by bit, through confrontation, painful introspection, and absorption of many of the materials mentioned above. It was a lonely journey, and truth be told, that's how it is for us white folks. Our cultural supports fail us here. Living a life of subconscious privilege is relatively easy. Learning to see that privilege and how to occasionally step outside of it is not.

So I wrote the book. The one I wished was there for me to read twenty years ago. Initially I called it *White People Living in a Multiracial World*, but at the 4th Conference on Whiteness in Boston, late Saturday night over a beer with friends, Lowell Thompson told me that wasn't the title. Not being one to scoff at an award-winning advertising professional, I took Lowell's advice to heart and finally came up with the title, *Unraveling the White Cocoon*.

The past three months have been a period of intensive work on the book, ending only last week when I delivered the final typeset, proofed, and indexed copy to the publisher. There's been time for little else and some other projects of the Center have lagged accordingly. But now it's done, more or less.

The book is a guide to self-discovery and awareness for white people who live and work in multiracial settings. One thing I find mildly disturbing is white people who try to write about whiteness as if they stand entirely outside it. Though some may claim to be striving for objectivity, I suspect an element of self-hatred informs their stance as well. That's my personal, insider's view on the matter, and I incorporate that insider's view in the book. Some of the material is autobiographical, offering signposts from my own journey. My sympathies go to the white person who is learning to deal personally with his or her own whiteness. Some of us more experienced white people who have made that journey need to offer our support to those still struggling on the way.

Many of us do offer that support, and I've tried to bring that into view as well. Among white people who have become aware of their whiteness and used that awareness to work toward a multiracial society, there is considerable concern for helping other white people through their individual journeys. I've made an effort to draw upon material and to mention people who were pioneers in white awareness. This is a book whose

**New WHITENESS PAPER
available**

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Thanks to our members.

Doubtless many members know our current celebration of "Thanksgiving" comes from a troubled tradition. The Pilgrims were hardly the innocents pictured in our national mythology. But that's another story. "When was the first Thanksgiving in America?" asks native American educator Chuck Larsen in an Internet-circulated article. "Thirty thousand years ago," he answers. A time of thankfulness during the harvest, as the cycle of seasons closes in upon us, is age old and timeless.

With this thought, on behalf of the members of the Board and the Center itself, I wish to thank our members. You've been our lifeline. We literally could not operate without your financial support. As we're beginning the third year of our membership program, we're finally beginning to see our other lines of support (publications, training, speaking) develop a presence. Had it not been for our members, it's doubtful we would be here at all. Not that we've "arrived" by any means. It's still a struggle, and it will be for a long time to come. We're still breaking ground.

As much as your financial support counts, your moral support is just as valuable. There is nothing I find more uplifting than to see another person has joined or renewed their relationship with us. Some members have been with us, in one form or another, since our founding in 1995. Others are as new as this fall. Each and every one of you has given us a little bit of encouragement that sustains us.

So, thank you, and bless you, by whatever spirit you follow.

White antiracist convention: a possibility

Early in August this year the Board met and discussed, among other things, developing the 5th Conference on Whiteness as a white antiracist convention. The Board considered the matter and agreed to move forward to evaluating the feasibility of such a project. If logistics and interest permit, the Center will likely begin planning the event.

The Board also discussed fundraising and declared its interest in receiving donations to defray costs of administering and staffing the project. Consequently, the Center is setting up an account to hold donations targeted specifically for the conference. The approximate time frame until the event is 18 months to 3 years. We'll keep you posted.



White American Culture, Inc.

The *Membership Newsletter* is a publication of the Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc. sent exclusively to its members 4 times per year. 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.

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New WHITENESS PAPER available

Our fourth WHITENESS PAPER is in press and will be available by the end of the month. Written by Jennifer Holladay of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the paper is titled *White Antiracist Activism: A Personal Roadmap*.

As the title implies the paper is both personal and instructive, offering sound advice to those who aspire to white antiracist activism. The abstract reads:

The author examines the impact of white privilege on white antiracist activism. Racism operates on beliefs, behaviors, language and policies at the individual and institutional levels. White privilege saturates our society, providing whites with "perks," real advantages, and a worldview. Activists must ask with whom to work, what information is needed, what must be done, and how to convey that message. White activists must "do their homework" in order to understand how white privilege can shape answers to these questions. One role for white people in the antiracist struggle is educating other white people and unmasking tactics that 1) blame people of color, 2) falsely claim all have equal opportunity, 3) compare "isms," and 4) play different groups of color against each other. A second role for whites is supporting leadership of color by working with white people, by supporting initiatives begun by people of color, by recognizing when and how to use our privilege, and by providing feedback not based in that privilege. Finally, whites must adopt appropriate approaches when leadership of color is not available. Furthermore, whites need to attend to "danger signs" that tell when one is not working effectively. The paper includes several examples of tools and techniques, illustrated with anecdotes from the author's personal experience.

Social work practice and whiteness

By Cessie Alfonso, A.C.S.W.

Social work — being one of the professions in which those who receive the service are different in terms of race, gender, and class than those who provide the service (that is, generally, social workers being white and clients being poor and people of color) — has historically examined how the race of clients impacts their situation and their needs. It is essential that the focus be expanded and that social workers examine how their whiteness impacts the provision of services. Social workers, and those who educate social workers, need to create a process in which to examine whiteness and how it can impede or facilitate the provision of services.

To this end I am currently seeking input from those who have given this issue some thought. For instance, in what areas of social work education, i.e., course curriculum, can we integrate the examination of whiteness? I therefore request thoughts and ideas that will be helpful in the development of a course outline that social workers and social work faculty can use to educate social workers on whiteness and its impact on client service provision. I look forward to hearing from you.

My email address is CessieAlf@aol.com. Or call (518) 489-2491.

Getting the word out

This past quarter we spoke with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* regarding multiracial people and families as subjects in advertising. And just this week we met for 3 hours with the *Asabi Shimbun*, a Japanese newspaper with circulation of 8 million.

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intent is not to reinvent the wheel, but rather to turn from the process of reinvention and look toward a time when wheels become commonplace.

People of color may wonder where they fit within this book, either topically in the content or within the mind of the author as an audience. It's impossible to write a book about race and whiteness without incorporating some content about other racial groups. Because much of my personal experience with people other than white has been with black people, there is a decided "black/white" flavor to portions of the book. But I've incorporated material concerning other racial groups as well. Still, it is a book about white people, intentionally so, and that is where the focus lies.

The reader of color, I imagine, may find a good portion of the material familiar in some general way. Things that disrupt and refocus white consciousness sometimes pass as common sense knowledge in various cultures of color. At the very least, the book tells its story from the standpoint of a self-aware white person struggling with his own whiteness. There are, I believe, some insights into whiteness that can not be entirely discerned from the other side of the color line. And white people have done a poor job articulating our experience. I've tried not to further that trend.

For all readers of whatever color the book contains ample documentation of source material, including extensive notes and a detailed index. One overriding aim of this project was to assemble as much material in as much detail from as broad a spectrum as possible, and convey it in straight-forward, engaging, and simple terms. The first three chapters offer white people a gentle view of how they might become engaged in working and living in a multiracial world. The fourth chapter looks at colorblindness as the dominant racial

philosophy in white culture. Following this are chapters on history, culture, psychology, white studies, and white awareness as expressed outside the academy. The book ends with a discussion of the Center's model for decentering whiteness and fostering multiracial community building.

This is a book whose primary aim is to demonstrate to the average educated audience of white people that whiteness, white culture, white identity and white experience comprise a reality they can no longer ignore. Read it for yourself. Recommend it to your colleagues. Adopt it as a supplemental text for a college course, diversity seminar, or in-service training. Buy it for a white friend who is struggling with his or her own whiteness and needs a little help on the way. All royalties from the sale of the book will go to the Center.

Call for Papers

The editor of the Center's WHITENESS PAPERS series is calling for queries and manuscript submissions. The WHITENESS PAPERS is an occasional series of papers that looks at whiteness and white culture in the United States and throughout the world. The series offers a balance of perspectives, a focus on whiteness as a social, cultural and political phenomenon, a concern for the personal experience of people and how they are racialized in society, and an avenue for writers, scholars and practitioners to offer new thinking about how whiteness may be transformed.

Queries and manuscripts should be sent to Dr. Charley Flint, c/o the Center, or by email to DrCFlint@aol.com. Manuscripts should be approximately 5000 to 6000 words in length. Papers should include notes and a list of references.

Order form for new publications

Book offer

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WHITENESS PAPER No. 4 offer

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