

StirFry Seminars

April 2008

It's About Time

Barack Obama's recent speech on race excited and moved me, as it also did many of my closest friends. The silence is finally being broken, and though there is also a lot of fear and denial that race is still an issue or being used as an issue, a dialogue has begun and it is about time.

It took a lot of courage on Barack's part, but clearly, beginning the dialogue at this time is unavoidable. It was an historical moment, as important as Martin Luther's King's speech about his dream for this country and the world. What I also most admired about Obama's speech was that he wrote it himself at 2 am in the morning. No speechwriter could have written this speech, because it was one that only *he* could have written – as a biracial man, white and black, running for the presidency of the United States. He is the legacy of his family's journey. He carries the stories of his people, both good and bad, joyful and painful.

The words and thoughts he expressed in his speech are about the reality of what still exists in the United States – race is an issue that still permeates all our institutions, our corporations, our schools, our churches and every single block in this country. The consequence of our not having this conversation with our families or in our workplaces, is that we and our children pay the price for our silence and our fears. All you have to do is look at every lunch area in this country and you will see what I am alluding to – we are still separate and ignorant of each other even though we are all in the same room. We look at each other from afar and make up what others are like from what we have heard or seen in the media. We keep away from certain neighborhoods, certain foods, certain groups and certain places of worship, all because of our fears.

I agree with Barack that we are at a stalemate. And the cost of that stalemate is the loss of a rich and intimate opportunity to truly get to know each other. We must begin a relationship with those who are different from ourselves, however stormy and painful, because it can also lead to understanding and friendship and a better world for our children and ourselves. You see, it is not just about celebrating diversity or tolerating each other, but also about embracing our differences, staying in the room when we hurt or offend each other, listening to another's story, asking questions, reflecting and taking responsibility for our part in the problem. There is no shortcut or pill to do away with all that has occurred in the past five hundred years. We have to take the time to talk and spend time with each other. Yes, race issues still matter. And yes, gender issues still matter. They will keep being a problem until we talk about them and do something about them. Barack Obama was right, race is an issue we cannot afford to ignore and that no one candidate or election is going to save us. The time has come. We each must become the change that we want and hope for. The door has opened and the conversation has begun. As Martin King, Jr. said many years ago, "Real peace is not the absence of conflict. It has always been the presence of justice."

Lee Mun Wah

APRIL WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS

April 2 - **International Children's Book Day** • April 7 - **International World Health Day**
April 8 - **Flower Festival (Japan)** • April 13 - **Sinhala and Tamil New Year Day (Sri Lanka)**
April 19 - **Pesach/Passover (Judaism)** • April 22 - **Earth Day (Planet Earth)**
April 25 - **World Penguin Day** • April 30 - **Beltaine (Paganism)**