

StirFry Seminars & Consulting

NOVEMBER 2014

WHY AREN'T YOU ANGRY?

On October 25th, I turned sixty-eight years old and so I'd like to share some of my thoughts and observations about the world around me. Partly, because I think I've become an elder of sorts, but also because this past year has been especially hard for me, given all the shootings and the legislation that has further divided us and created an environment of fear, distrust and anguish.

Someone recently called me and wanted to know why I was so angry. I hesitated for a moment, and then I replied, "Perhaps a better question might be: Given all that is happening in this country and in our communities, why aren't you angry?" I think this question is begging to be answered in almost every sector of this country. I read last week about a young black girl who was an honors student at a high school in Detroit, Michigan. She was suspended because she carried a pocket-knife to a high school football game. Her grandfather had put it in her backpack because he was concerned about her safety as she travelled to and from her school that was outside of her neighborhood. It wasn't the suspension that angered me – it was the length – one year. This was the same length of suspension for a group of black male students who got into a fight with a group of whites who were calling them racial epitaphs at a high school football game in Chicago.

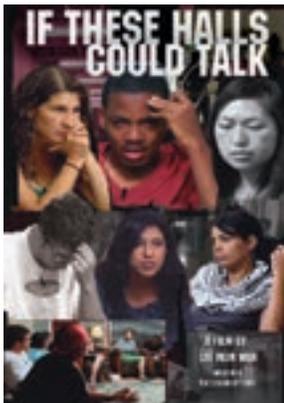
As a former special education teacher for twenty-five years in the San Francisco Unified School District, I cannot, for the life of me, comprehend how a suspension for one year serves any of these black students, except to make them feel more embittered and disenfranchised in a system that already often sees them as dangerous, unimportant and unintelligent. What purpose does a one-year suspension serve from an educational perspective? On top of that, upon reviewing the school board decision, the Superintendent of Detroit replied that the girl was 'lucky' she wasn't expelled and, besides, she would be home schooled by an assigned tutor. I wonder, as do so many other minorities in this country, would the same sentence had been administered if she were white? I think not.

Perhaps the answer lies in the story of young black student at an elementary school somewhere back east who came to school beaming with pride because his newly cut hair had beautiful designs barbered throughout his hair. The principal called him into his office and proceeded to fill in the spaces of his hair with a permanent marking pen as the little boy frantically cried. The principal defended his actions by saying that he had the right to do so under the district code of 'inappropriate school appearance'. When the mother came to school she was in total shock and disbelief. She cried and screamed at the staff and faculty, "What's wrong with you people? Why didn't you stop him...how could you just stand there and let him do that? What if he were your little boy?"

Her questions are the same as mine. How can each of these students' teachers, staff and administrators as well as teacher's unions not say anything? How can they stay quiet as such outrageous acts of injustice are perpetrated on these young minority students, disproportionately punished because of the color of their skin? The answer lies with each of us. It is not enough to simply feel remorse for these students, but we must stand up and say something. That is why I am sharing these stories, so that we no longer hide behind our sadness or another Martin Luther King Day celebration and think we have done enough. Every day these types of acts are perpetrated and the silence is deafening. Do not go silent into the night. Speak up and do something because it is the right and decent thing to do. I am reminded of a quote by Thich Nhat Hanh, "You are not an observer, you are a *participant*."

Lee Mun Wah

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Expires November 30, 2014



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StirFry Calendar of Upcoming Events

November 11, 2014 San Ramon, CA	Cultural Competency for Leaders Not Open to the Public
November 12, 2014 San Diego, CA	If These Halls Could Talk Film Showing & Diversity Dialogue Open to the Public
November 18, 2014 Berkeley, CA	Cross-Cultural Facilitation Techniques/Mindfully Resolving Conflicts Not Open to the Public
November 20, 2014 Minneapolis, MI	Creating Community in a Diverse School Environment Not Open to the Public
November 26, 2014 San Bruno, CA	Cultural Competency Training: A Cross Gender/Race Conversation Not Open to the Public
December 9, 2014 Nashville, TN	Creating a Culturally Responsive School Community Learning Forward Conference • Open to the Public
January 13, 2015 Berkeley, CA	Cross-Cultural Facilitation Techniques/Mindfully Resolving Conflicts Not Open to the Public

*** Held at the Quan Yin Training Center, 2311 8th Street, Berkeley, CA*

For StirFry's complete Calendar of Upcoming Events, please visit www.stirfryseminars.com/events

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