

StirFry Seminars & Consulting

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WHAT STANDS BETWEEN US

James Baldwin once said that "America is one tough town." Those words came back to me as I thought of what is going on these past few weeks in Ferguson, Missouri. So much of the focus has been on the issue of a white police officer killing a young black man, Michael Brown, but almost nothing is said about the environment that creates these types of scenarios that are becoming all too familiar in describing the state of racial relations in the United States, particularly how they negatively impact African Americans. Often, when the issue of a racial divide arises or is even intimated, denial and shock quickly fills the room, as was evidenced in the past two days when an all white male Fox News panel showed disdain for Capt. Ron Johnson (who is Black) for sympathizing with the African American community over the killing of Michael Brown. Bo Dietl, immediately said, "We're dividing black and white again. America has no color, it's all one color." So often times I have wondered...so, what is that 'one color' and what would it mean if we *did* see color?

Soon afterwards, the mayor of Ferguson declared that "There's not a racial divide in Ferguson." One of the great myths in this country is that if we say that 'everything is fine' loud and long enough, the problem will go away. This is perhaps because as someone once said, "When the truth becomes too hard to bear, we create another."

So what kinds of environments, attitudes, and behaviors 'create' a racial divide? First of all, having an almost all white police force creates an 'ethnic vacuum' that shields the white officers from ever having to see outside their 'white bubble' or to get feedback on their actions and attitudes from someone who is non-white. Another is never interviewing officers prior to hire to see if they possess any racial prejudices towards any particular group of people and how that might heighten their perceptions and feelings of distrust and fearing for their safety. This may explain why so many blacks are shot repeatedly, sometimes over twenty times.

In my latest documentary film, *If These Halls Could Talk*, one of the white students talks about seeing people of color as less than human. Throughout the history of the United States, this perception of people of color as animals plays itself out in on the contemporary stage in terms of Guantanamo Bay and cartoon caricatures of the Obama family as chimpanzees and apes. Even Serena and Venus Williams, when they first came onto the tennis scene, were described by one New York radio commentator, "My god, look at how big they are. Who would ever want to date those two gorillas?" With these types of stereotypes of seeing people of color as animals, how might that affect a white officer's perception of safety in times of a crisis or confrontation? As one black resident of Ferguson said, "There is an attitude here where we are seen as the enemy."

So what can be done to bring about a greater sense of community and understanding? By having community dialogues where grievances can be shared, heard and acknowledged. Where there is environment of curiosity and a desire to look at one's own attitudes and behaviors and how that impacts our actions and inaction. As James Baldwin once said, "If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see."

Lee Mun Wah

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Mindful Facilitation Certification Program



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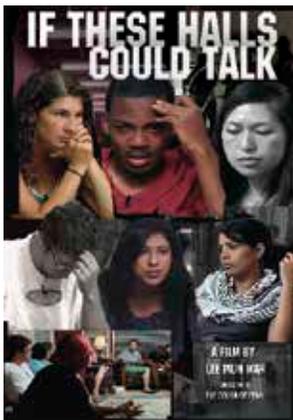
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Get **25% off**, for a limited time, on all regularly-priced diversity training materials (including Lee Mun Wah's newest film ***If These Halls Could Talk!*** Enter coupon code **NEWS25** upon online checkout at www.stirfryseminars.com/store.
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Expires October 1, 2014

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StirFry Calendar of Upcoming Events

September 3, 2014 Asilomar, CA	21 Ways to Use Inclusion to Create a Culturally Responsive Community Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy (AAGT) Biennial Conference • Open to the Public
September 4-5, 2014 Cleveland, OH	The World is All Around Us; If These Halls Could Talk Film Showing & Diversity Dialogue; Cultural Competency for Educators, Administrators & Staff; Creating Community in a Diverse School Environment
September 10, 2014 St. Louis, MO	An Unfinished Conversation Some Events Open to the Public
September 12, 2014 Keene, NH	An Unfinished Conversation Some Events Open to the Public
September 15, 2014 Kenmore, WA	Classroom & Supervision Culturally Responsive Techniques for Allies; If These Halls Could Talk Film Showing & Diversity Dialogue • Some Events Open to the Public
September 30, 2014 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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