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Stuff White People Don't Like to Talk About:

Whiteness and Social Work

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November 24, 2008

Stuff White People Don't Like to Talk About: Whiteness and Social Work

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

This blog is devoted to stuff that white people like

#107 Self Aware Hip Hop References

August 18, 2008 by clander

... In terms of physical actions, there are few things white people enjoy more than throwing up fake gang signs in photos. Again, the same rules apply: if it is done by wiggers [*sic*] it is tragic, if it's done by the right kind of white people, it's hilarious. It's not a good idea to mention how these signs have often resulted in awful, senseless deaths— that will ruin the joke. In both cases, the actions are done in hopes that a white person will be recognized as “one of the good ones,” who love hip hop, but don't try to appropriate it in any non-hilarious ways. (Lander, 2008)

Trying to explore “whiteness” in a liberal context feels awkward. “Good” white people don't talk about their race. Christian Landers' blog, *Stuff White People Like* (excerpted above), exploded onto the web this year, introducing a discussion of “whiteness”. Landers satirically skewers well intentioned, politically correct whites like himself. UMass professor, Philip Krestsedemas describes the blog as a positive contribution:

What is unique is seeing liberals owning their whiteness. It seems like a non-liberal thing to do. Liberals are supposed to be critical of race, not supposed to see race. The people who are white are the Archie Bunkers of the world. (Jones, 2008, ¶ 8)

But Landers doesn't have everyone laughing. Some Caucasians, unaccustomed to being on the receiving end of social stereotypes, have called his blog “racist”. Peggy McIntosh, the

preeminent scholar on white privilege, thinks the anger Landers has engendered results from whites' unfamiliarity with being stereotyped. McIntosh explains: "When I was growing up, other people had race, and we were normal ... Therefore it's quite new for people to say 'let's study whiteness'." (Jones, 2008, ¶ 11)

For white Americans, their race and privilege is like the water a fish swims in—ever-present, sustaining, invisible. (Brown, et al., 2003, pp.34-65; McIntosh, 1988; Wise, 2008, pp.17-60) In fact, many white people do not even identify as "white"—they distinguish themselves by their ethnic heritage or religion. (Katz, 1978, p. 13) To seriously examine "whiteness" in the United States means shining a light on deeply held beliefs about individualism, meritocracy, and normalcy. (Roy, 1999, pp. 317-344) Looking in detail at "whiteness" exposes issues of class and power that Americans have never been fluent in. (Guinier and Torres, 2002) Considering "whiteness" means listening to the discussion of race in America, which provokes the painful emotions of hopelessness and defensiveness.

As a progressive counselor, working in multicultural settings, my "whiteness" feels like a clumsy joke sometimes, an impossible barrier at others. As a culturally sensitive person, I was puzzled and disappointed by how Caucasian my personal milieu was. As a well-intentioned, progressive woman, who had benefited from economic support from my family of origin, I felt guilty and undeserving of my successes in a rigged game. When I returned to school for my MSW after working on the community level for 25 years, I enrolled in the required course, *Ethnic and Cultural Principles*. I was exhilarated by the diversity of my classmates, but felt I had little to offer to the discussion that did not expose what everyone could see: my "whiteness"—and what could be more tiresome than anguish about white privilege when people of color had "real" problems?

Against the backdrop of the 2008 presidential election, and in the context of my direct practice with diverse, low-income women, I embarked on the formal exploration of race, culture, and class. People of color suffer the most brutal consequences of white privilege, but whites too are damaged by the alignment of skin color and class in ways that are often unexplored outside of academia. Because of the centrality of these issues in the United States, this paper will examine the historical context as well as the benefits and costs of “whiteness”. Because of the unique historical moment, I will explore some of the many issues raised by the election of Barack Obama. Finally, I will return to the personal reason for this exploration: the part my “whiteness” plays in my role as a Social Worker.

A History of “Whiteness”, an American Invention

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

This blog is devoted to stuff that white people like

#20 Being an expert on YOUR culture

January 23, 2008 by clander

White people are pretty conflicted about their culture. On one hand, they are proud of the art, literature, and film produced by white culture. But at the same time, they are very ashamed of all the bad things in white culture: the KKK, colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow laws, feudalism, and the treatment of native americans. (Lander, 2008)

“Whiteness” was socially constructed in late 17th century colonial Virginia, in order to tie skin color to privilege, for the purpose of enlisting poor whites to act against their own interests and collude in the subjugation of African slaves and native peoples. (Buck, 2001, pp.32-38; Wise, p. 140-152; Jansson, 2009, p. 67, p.82)

Before colonization, Europeans felt they had little in common with each other. The violent history of the “First World” does not suggest that citizens of England, France, Germany,

Spain, Scotland, or Ireland considered themselves to share a common race. Europe may have been made up of Christian nations, but hundreds of years of bloody conflict between Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants indicate a sense of disunity rather than a shared heritage. When European settlers first came to the “New World” they replicated a hierarchical, feudal social order, in which a small number of elites owned land and a large number of indentured servants were disenfranchised. (Jansson, 2009, pp. 64-65)

The earliest definitions of “whiteness” in the Americas were correlated with Christianity and the conquest of nature. The first group victimized by the idea of “whiteness” was Native Americans. (Jansson, 2009, pp. 77-80) As early as the 15th century, settlers encountered indigenous people who neither owned or cultivated land, nor practiced Christianity. With little experience of non-European values, settlers saw indigenous people as “savages” or “children”. Since they were “heathens” and “non-persons”, First Americans were able to be exploited as slaves, violently re-located, and exterminated.

The next group persecuted by “whiteness” was African slaves. By 1650, European indentured servants began to agitate for better conditions and the right to own land. Disease and overwork had reduced the indigenous population to the point where Colonists had to look elsewhere for labor to clear the land and cultivate crops. (Jansson, 2009, p. 67) Slavery, a centuries old institution, exploded in an unprecedented scale the New World.

Poor people of European descent were the third group to have their interests exploited by the idea of “whiteness” (though not as violently as the native Americans and African slaves). In 17th century Europe, riots of underclass were frequent. Colonial America was becoming increasingly rebellious as landless settlers, indentured servants, and slaves began to assert their rights. (Jansson, p.80) Poor whites and blacks worked, lived, married, and resisted together.

(Buck, 2001, p. 32) In response to the need to govern the underclass, landless whites had to be taught “the value of whiteness”. (Bennett, 1993, pp.74-75) Laws were enacted that privileged men of European descent, and disenfranchised Africans.

Skin color was established as a means of determining non-personhood for slaves and their descendents. Blacks were no longer allowed to own property or learn to read. They were prohibited from having a family or doing skilled work. Their children lived and died in slavery. Mixed race children were defined as “black”. Whites were given rights to be violent to blacks. Penalties for whites who disobeyed these codes were vicious. Plantation owners needed landless whites to believe that their European heritage had value—so poor whites were given the right to exploit the labor of those who could not own property, and the hope that their “whiteness” might someday allow them to own land. (Buck, 2001, pp.33-35) By the time of the American Revolution, slaves made up 20 percent of the colonial population; 40,000 slaves were “imported” to the New World annually by the end of the 18th century. (Jansson, 2009, p. 82)

At the same time as this great crime was being committed, in the late 1700’s another social transformation was taking place. A utopian, democratic, agrarian society was formed. Two-thirds of white, male colonists now owned land (versus one-fifth of English citizens). Education was valued and widespread. An ethos of hard work, virtue, and individualism promised success to all. Liberty was interpreted as limited government and minimal taxation. (Jansson, 2009, pp. 83-91) But equality and social responsibility had been left out and non-Europeans were considered chattel.

From the beginning, “whiteness” was defined by both what it was *not* and as a false promise of membership in an exclusive club. As Tim Wise explains:

In other words, whiteness was a trick, and it worked marvelously, dampening down the push for rebellion by poor whites on the basis of class interest, and encouraging them to cast their lot with the elite, if only in aspirational terms. White skin became, for them, an alternative form of property to which they could cleave in the absence of more tangible possessions. (2008, p. 149)

Landless whites were given their assignment: to be, as Buck describes, a “buffer class between the elite and those they most exploited.” (2001, p. 35) This is the legacy that continues in the United States today, where race trumps class to the detriment of working people.

In the 19th century, industrialization replaced the yeoman farmer with the urban businessman. During the Gilded Age, personal poverty was linked to personal shortcoming. Slaves were freed at the end of the Civil War, but were deprived of the land and wealth that their labor had produced, and denied voting rights. (Jansson, 2009, p.142) White immigrants from Europe were preferred, Asian and Latinos were subjected to limitations of their immigration and denied legal rights. (Jansson, 2009, pp.192-96) Immigrants and former slaves commanded lower wages and filled a “buffer” role to union organizing. (Jansson, 2009, pp. 150-53)

The history of “whiteness” in America echoes the themes established in the first years: the triumphs and falsehoods of meritocracy and assimilation, and the exploitation of non-whites based on myths of their innate shortcomings.

Fruits of Privilege: Contributions, Diversity, Strengths, and Fantasies

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

This blog is devoted to stuff that white people like

#7 Diversity

January 19, 2008 by clander

White people love ethnic diversity, but only as it relates to restaurants.

Many white people from cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York will spend hours talking about how great it is that they can get Sushi and Tacos on the same street. But then they send their kids to private school with other rich white kids, and live in neighborhoods like Santa Monica or Pacific Palisades. ... (Lander, 2008)

As a group, whites have many strengths, stemming from the incalculable advantages and opportunities their skin color provides. In terms of accumulated wealth, whites have benefited from three hundred years of slavery, segregation, and ghettoization of blacks. (Bobo, 2008, ¶ 7) Sylvia Lazos Vargas has described the phenomenon of advantage based on race rather than merits as follows:

White privilege means having entry to structures and institutions that mete out important economic opportunities, having access to neighborhoods, jobs, credit, and tax benefits that by in large are off limits or available in limited fashion to minorities; it means being presumed competent, intelligent, and hardworking; it means not being discriminated against daily by anyone ranging from a restaurant attendant to a car salesperson. (1998, p.1527)

White Americans generally do not have to move between two worlds. Since normalcy is portrayed as white, they do not have to explain themselves. Whites and their concerns are covered by the press and reflected in the arts. The press' use of "race neutral" language perpetuates ignorance about the realities of diverse groups. For example, when covering "family flight" in the San Francisco newspaper, images of middle class white families are used, while the true face of out-migration necessitated by economic hardship is low-income and brown. As noted

in a recent report by Lee and Boilard of *Coleman Advocates*, affluent voices are “over-represented in the city’s influential political, media and cultural circles, their angst may appear the loudest, but their needs, and their numbers, are by no means the greatest.” (2008, p. 19)

Typically the privilege whites enjoy exists side by side with disadvantages experienced by people of color. For example, San Francisco is home to a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population: 67% of San Francisco’s families are of color; more than 80% of low-income families are racial or ethnic minorities; and the 33% of families who are affluent are disproportionately white. These upper income families enjoy a high standard of living, world class health care, and good educational options: “a 2007 Harvard study found San Francisco one of three ‘best metropolitan areas’ in the nation for white children.” (Lee & Boilard, 2008, p. 12) In contrast, San Francisco’s Bayview-Hunter’s Point, a predominantly low-income, African American community, is home to the highest density of children and families in the City, the highest homicide rate in town, and the highest infant mortality rate in the State. (Lechuck, 2006)

Immigrant whites were able to maximize their skin-color privilege in tight-knit, ethnic communities that provided social support, education, access to the political process, and other empowerment and assimilation strategies. (Jansson, 2009, pp. 159-60) After World War II, white males had unequal access to the middle class through higher education (the GI bill) and home ownership (VA/FHA loans)—in what Karen Brodtkin has called “... affirmative action...[which was] aimed at and disproportionately helped, male, Euro-origin GIs.” (1998, p. 44) The story of European immigrants’ assimilation perpetuates a fairy tale about America as a classless and raceless society. This belief allows whites to blame racial groups for the minority group’s own poverty. Whites take this one step farther when they experience personal economic hardship—and place the blame for their troubles on people of color.

Price of Privilege: Personal Pain and Economic Burdens

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

This blog is devoted to stuff that white people like

#20 Being an expert on YOUR culture

January 23, 2008 by [clander](#)

... It is imperative that you recognize how special and unique this white person is for knowing about your culture. ... These responses will fill white people with that self satisfaction they need. Also, they consider a reminder that they are not racist, which also makes them feel terrific. (Lander, 2008)

Whites pay many prices for racial disparities. There are substantial costs for excluding a significant segment of the population from the economy, including the most extensive prison system in the world. (Brown, et al, 2003, p.249) Lani Guinier has suggested that struggles minorities are the ‘canaries in the mine’ for all Americans:

This is because race tracks power. Used as a diagnostic tool, the experiences of people of color render transparent the real facts influencing decisions and policies related to the distribution of resources. These decisions not only disadvantage people of color, they also and predictably disadvantage poor whites, women and other excluded groups as well.

(2001, ¶ 4)

Surveys indicate that most black people think that they will never live to see racial equality, while the majority of white Americans (despite unequal prison rates, educational achievement, net worth, and life expectancy) believe that racial equality has been realized or is imminent. (Bobo, 2004, p. 33) Currently, some commentators suggest that America is “beyond race”, that we have achieved a “color-blind” society. (Brown, et al., pp.34-65) “Color blindness”

defines race only as skin color and posits that problems experienced by minorities are personal rather than social--thus the government should be “neutral” with respect to race.

Lawrence Bobo describes persistent black-white inequality, obscured by both a reluctance to acknowledge white privilege and an eagerness to blame individual blacks for their problems. (2004, pp. 15-18) In a 2008 editorial, Prof. Bobo explains how racist ideas play out in public policy:

... (A) very large body of social-science research points to the persistence of negative cultural stereotypes about African Americans as lazy, sexually irresponsible, unintelligent and more prone to crime and violence. ... (S)uch cultural beliefs carry real political potency having contributed to the general public vulnerability of affirmative action and social-welfare policies over the years. (¶ 8)

De-fanging an analysis of power by clouding it with racial stereotypes precludes alliances between groups of peoples with shared economic interests.

“Color-blindness” sounds fair, especially to whites. But is it? For example, affirmative action is seen by some as an out-dated program that advantages blacks based on their race. In the mid-1990’s, a low-income white woman successfully sued the University of Texas’ Law School when she was denied admission, arguing reverse discrimination (Guinier & Torres, 2002, pp. 67-74). In reality, the University’s admission criteria relied largely on test scores (which correlate more to family income than anything else) and favored prestigious colleges. “Color blind” and “merit based” solutions advantaged affluent students and discriminated against low-income students of all races. Although the complaint was originally about race, the solution expanded to include class. The “Texas 10 Percent Plan”—granting University admission to the top ten percent of students from all high schools—linked poor, rural whites with black and

brown students. The results were startling—“10 Percent Plan” freshmen out-performed prior students across all races. Lani Guinier explained the implications of this case in a 2001 interview:

Race is a social category that has been misused to distract people from a more systemic analysis of the distributions of resources. Certain public policies have been racialized, allowing policy-makers to enlist the support of poor and middle-class whites for decisions that will ultimately disadvantage them—using race as a distraction. (¶ 5)

Myths of meritocracy and personal responsibility make economic hardships difficult for whites psychologically. One hundred years ago, the majority of rich people were born poor—however unlikely, it seemed possible to go from “rags to riches”. Today social mobility is more a fantasy than a real prospect—by the late 20th century only four percent of wealthy individuals were born poor. (Guinier, 2001, ¶ 18) The strong, inter-generational, ethnic communities that provided support for whites are gone—driven apart by economic forces, Americans will relocate in their lifetimes more than any other people on the globe (an average of twelve times across the lifespan). (Roy, 1999, p.329)

Whites’ expectations cause them to face special challenges when they try to reconcile the expectations of middle class success they were raised on with the economic suffering they find themselves in. Sociologist and therapist, Beth Roy visited working class whites that had graduated from Little Rock’s Central High in the years of de-segregation. She found these Americans in a peculiar state of disappointment and anger—despite a lifetime of hard work and sacrifices, they had not succeeded. Steeped in Horatio Alger’s narrative of meritocracy, they were struggling to provide for themselves and their children. Because they lacked class-consciousness, they were unable to understand their financial distress as a symptom of an

economic shift in which jobs were disappearing and wealth was consolidated into fewer and fewer hands. (Roy, 1999, 335-40) Dr. Roy explored the question these whites were asking themselves: why did we fail?

One possible answer is that the system lied; hard work is not necessarily rewarded in America; we are not a meritocracy. ...To conclude near the end of their working lives that those premises are wrong, that they sacrificed community and fun to pursue a falsehood, is too painful to accept. ...But the alternative explanation is that right living and hard work *do* lead to success and they themselves are lacking as individuals, that they are not smart enough... It is a very strong element of many Americans' internalized ideologies that our worth is a function of our achievements. To fail, therefore is devastating... It is far more comfortable to look for someone who has stolen the promised rewards. Right at hand are images of black men lying about on porches ... superiors promoted unjustly because of their skin color. (Roy, 1999, pp. 337-38)

These white Americans have indeed been the targets of injustice, 'right sized' out of the American Dream. But despite all empirical evidence to the contrary, these hard working whites blame "black advantage" for their failures and their powerlessness.

Thinking about the University of Texas or the alumni of Central High begs the question: why would whites give up their power to improve their lives by adopting an analysis of their situation that is so ungrounded in reality as to be completely unhelpful? The answer may lie in the way we have been taught about that early American invention--"whiteness". With no overt explanations for class struggle, burdened by impossible expectations of what they could achieve if they "just try", white Americans default to our first story: the immutability of race.

“Whiteness” promised success and protection, so when they fail, whites look to minorities for the cause of their distress.

Barack Obama: New Images and Alliances

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

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#14 Having Black Friends

January 21, 2008 by clander

#114 America

November 4, 2008 by clander

Since we are on the verge of electing a black president, it seems important to explain why white people want black friends. Every white person wants a black friend like Barack: good-looking, well-spoken, and non-violent.

Obviously, whites want black friends so as not to appear racist ... (Lander, 2008)



What does the election of Barack Obama show us about the state of “whiteness” in the United States? Does race still matter when many more individuals from minority groups move into the middle class? The disconnect between reality of blacks and the perceptions of whites may be both confused and illuminated by Obama’s election.

Lawrence Bobo reports “barbershop gossip” among African Americans was rife with excitement tinged with dread during the campaign: “What black folks fear is that monumental success for one black man might simultaneously become a setback for the whole race.” (2008, ¶ 6)

For conservative whites, Obama’s election is fuel to the fire of “color-blind” policies. Tom Adkins has proclaimed:

...(The) era of white guilt is over. ... No more quotas. No more handouts. No more complaining that “the man” is keeping you down. “The man” is now black. ... Obama’s ascension also creates another gargantuan irony. How can liberals sell American racism, class envy and unfairness when our new black president and his wife went to Ivy League schools, got high paying jobs, became millionaires, bought a mansion, and are moving into the White House? ... America is officially a meritocracy. Obama’s election has validated American conservatism. (2008)

However, the 2008 election results suggest that race continues to be a major factor for voters. Obama’s election was achieved more from the increased diversity of the electorate than because of an embrace of an African American candidate by white voters. As commentator Alex Koppelman joked:

“Stuff white people like: John McCain. Don’t give yourself too much credit, white people—it’s African-Americans and Hispanics who put Barack Obama in the White House.” (2008)

While it is true that 55% of whites voted for McCain, there are some trends among white voters that point to new paradigms about race. A higher percentage of whites voted for Obama than voted for any Democratic candidate in forty years. Younger voters of all races voted Democratic in unprecedented numbers. Obama received a significant majority of votes from white voters under the age of 30—an extraordinary number for any Democrat. (All polling data from *New York Times*, 2008)

More than any other national figure, President-elect Obama has been able to articulate the common aspirations of whites and blacks. In his Philadelphia speech on race, candidate Obama said:

But the anger [of black Americans] is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don’t feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience—as far as they’re concerned, no one’s handed them anything, they’ve built it from scratch. They’ve worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. ... Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the middle class squeeze—a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed;

a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. ... In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination—and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past—are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds... (2008, pp. 5-6)

The racial lessons of this historical moment are mixed. Obama's election has inspired many people of color—and many young whites. His individual story speaks of progress and possibility in the face of adversity, but also can suggest the obsolescence of programs that address centuries of race-based discrimination. Like the mixed race children in Virginia of 1650, he was born into the immutable construct of race—he may have had a white mother, but as a bi-racial American, Obama is “black”. White racism is not “over”: from exit polling, to widely believed negative stereotypes, to the fears for the new President's safety, we know it is alive and well.

Conclusion: Whiteness in Social Work Practice

STUFF WHITE PEOPLE LIKE

This blog is devoted to stuff that white people like

#62 Knowing what's best for poor people

February 10, 2008 by clander

White people spend a lot of time of worrying about poor people. It takes up a pretty significant portion of their day.

They feel guilty and sad that poor people shop at Wal*Mart instead of Whole Foods, that they vote Republican instead of Democratic, that they go to Community College/get a job instead of studying art at a University.

It is a poorly guarded secret that, deep down, white people believe if given money and education that all poor people would be EXACTLY like them. In fact, the only reason that poor people make the choices they do is because they have not been given the means to make the right choices and care about the right things.

... But it is ESSENTIAL that you reassert that poor people do not make decisions based on free will. That news could crush white people and their hope for the future. (Lander, 2008)

In a dominant culture that insists on assimilation, white Americans have little knowledge of or value for the experiences of people of color. They cannot “know what they do not know”. (Roy, 2002, p.12) Many economically squeezed white Americans don’t feel particularly privileged in the present, nor responsible for past injustices. Some whites would prefer to believe in a color-blind America, where racism is “over”. (Bobo, 2004; Brown et al., 2003, pp. 34-65; Guinier, 2001) The indisputable reality that racial inequalities continue to endure, particularly for African Americans, is not on the mainstream American radar screen. Instead, many working and middle class whites believe that blacks are unfairly advantaged at their expense. (Bobo, pp. 26-31; Roy, 1999, pp. 317-344)

As in every other area of American life, white privilege plays a significant role in social work practice. Peggy McIntosh says whites “...think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’.” (1988, p.178)

The theoretical framework used by the mental health profession comes primarily from the study of the lives of people with European backgrounds. (Golden, 2007, p.2) The diagnosis-driven therapeutic model tends to individualize and pathologize problems and family structures. Poor people and their families are too often seen as disorganized, uncaring, undisciplined, and uncompliant. (Schnitzer, 1996, pp. 574-76)

Social workers in direct practice generally work on an individual level with clients who are up against enormous oppressive forces. Social problems, such as racism and poverty, can

only be addressed on a societal level. The omnipresent national myths of exceptional individuals “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” or “color blindness” can confuse the worker and the client. Social workers may be disappointed with their minority clients who don’t “follow through”, or at other times diminish them by overcompensating. Social workers must guard against falling into the traps of feeling hopeless or having low expectations for their clients.

White social workers are typically committed to challenging racial oppression and empowering their clients. They are aware that they did not create the discriminatory social order, but that they do benefit from it, even if they may not feel particularly powerful or successful themselves. As members of this society, they most likely harbor some racist beliefs—and feel shame about it. Social workers may be in a position of power relative to their clients, but they also have a lot to of listening to do to learn about the lives of people of color.

“Whiteness” describes a socially constructed state of racial privilege that means only what it is *not*—not non-white—so it provides few positive strengths or attributes. (Wise, 2008, pp. 170-71) “Whiteness” is a painful subject for white social workers. Thinking about “whiteness” may make white social workers feel defensive, guilty, inadequate, or anxious. (Roy, 2002, pp. 12-14)

But thinking about “whiteness” and listening to people of color is what we must do. And thanks to Christian Lander and Barrack Obama, we may be able to do a little laughing and a little hoping along the way. With any luck, all that thinking, listening, laughing, and hoping will take us to a place where we can see each other more clearly, form alliances across race lines, and take actions to make our society more just. As President-elect Obama is fond of saying, this is a “defining moment” for the United States:

It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams; that investing in health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper. (Obama, 2008, pp.6-7)

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