



Stronger Together- Episode 4.mp3

Audrena Redmond: Hello and welcome to Radio Free CSU, the official podcast of the California Faculty Association. My name is Audrena Redmond and I am the host for this 10-part series "Stronger Together" here on Radio Free CSU. This series is inspired by the intentional Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation CFA began in late 2016, and each episode will discuss one of our guiding principles with the CFA leader activists. Our hope is that you too will be inspired to engage in Anti-Racism and Social Justice work and join us again for more conversations about why an Anti-Racism / Social Justice Transformation is necessary. I'm joined by Charles Toombs, a Professor and Chair of Africana Studies at San Diego State University and the statewide Vice President of the California Faculty Association. Professor Toombs and I will be discussing the fourth of 10 CFA Anti-Racism/Social Justice principles. The principle reads: "We acknowledge that WE can be part of the solution by being intentionally committed to addressing it" and that "it" is racism. Thank you Charles for joining us today. So let's jump right in. What does that statement mean? "We acknowledge that we can be part of the solution by being intentionally committed to addressing it."

Charles Toombs: A couple of things stand out. First, that whatever we do has to be intentional. And for me, that means being deliberate and consistent and being open to talk about racism; not to talk around it, but to talk about what racism is in our organization and in the world. And to say that the organization is vested in anti-racism or social justice is one thing but the doing it part is another.

Charles: CFA has done quite a bit since we began focusing on this transformation. Leaders have gone through training — three days of 8-hour training. It is a Anti-Racism training. And during this training we were able to begin the process of actually looking at the issues of race in America and in our organization directly. In addition to that we've changed our bylaws to make those bylaws more inclusive. So there will be opportunities for more underrepresented members to have leadership roles and we have made Anti-Racism and Social Justice one of our core missions statements.

Audrena: So the sound those sound like ways of which CFA is ensuring the commitment to addressing racism changing the by laws, training the leaders, making it a core principle of the organization. Is anything else that's a face to it.

Charles: We're also developing workshops for members, for members at statewide meetings but also we want to make sure that we're able to bring this work to the campus and chapter levels.

Audrena: Where the members are.

Charles: Where the members are and where a lot of work has to be done.

Audrena: Yes yes. So speaking of a lot of work needing to be done, what might be some of the obstacles that you can anticipate with that. With moving this work to the campus level?

Charles: Some of the obstacles are that some of our members are not necessarily invested in the idea that Anti-Racism and Social Justice issues are a part of union work.

Some of our members are certainly concerned with the bread and butter issues. They're concerned with salary and academic freedom and some of these issues. Our goal is to let them know that union work has always been about social justice. Maybe not always about Anti-Racism, but union work and union rights are always about social justice. Whatever we ensure in bargaining applies to everyone equally.

Audrena: Speaking of bargaining, what happens when we engage in bargaining? The next round of bargaining? We were able to sign a tentative agreement this time. But what happens down the road when we go back to the bargaining table or there's that next big budget fight for the CSU. How is thinking, planning to make sure that this focus of Anti-Racism and Social Justice remains at the center? That we are true to that core principle of Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation?

Charles: Let me tackle the budget fight and budget issues first. Because 70 percent of our students are now students of color under - represented students. It in fact means that when we advocate for our students we are always dealing with Anti-Racism and Social Justice issues. Our rally on April 4th was at the State Capitol was an example of that. We want increased funding because we want the students that we have now in the CSU to have the same benefits and opportunities as 30 years ago when the students were predominantly white. So that will be on an ongoing fight. When it comes to bargaining as we advocate for lecturer rights that certainly is a social justice issue when the majority of faculty in this the issue are lecturer faculty.

Charles: Moreover whenever we have an opportunity to specifically focus on issues related to faculty of color or students of color, we will do that as we did in our last contract when we were able to get an article addressing exceptional service to students. And our intention was to really begin to delve into the cultural taxation piece even though we could not absolutely say that in the language and cultural taxation is that faculty of color and women faculty do a lot more service work. They particularly pay a lot of attention to students outside of the classroom.

Audrena: Thank you for further defining cultural taxation, you used that term and I want to make sure that our listeners know what that term is. Is there anything more you want to say about cultural taxation?

Charles: Yes. One of the problematics of cultural taxation, and why it is called a tax, is that because faculty of color and women faculty who do this exceptional service often are not doing all of the publishing that they need to do. It takes up a lot of time and space, and because most of us are most principally committed to teaching and making sure that students have success at the university, our energies often go there first and so we might neglect some of our research activities.

Audrena: And that's what this contract Article 20.37 is meant to provide some relief.

Charles: It provides assigned time so that you have opportunities to do your service work and then maybe not teach an additional class. You can therefore do your research and publishing.

Audrena: So that is clearly an example of how CFA 's engagement and focus on Anti-Racism and Social Justice shows up in the bargaining fight. Shows up for faculty, for students, for the university.

Charles: That's right and when we commence our next bargaining, I'm not sure all of the ways in which it will. Certainly academic freedom is an issue where faculty who are addressing issues of

race and class and gender etc. have to have the right to do that to be able to speak freely about those issues so we'll see how that goes. Certainly our bargaining team is committed to moving Anti-Racism and Social Justice forward where we can in bargaining.

Audrena: Well I can see that that's going to be an issue given that political times that we're in. Given that some faculty are being targeted by groups and students on campus. Given that on some universities where faculty don't have a union like CFA. For example people are losing their jobs for teaching what they have got their Ph.D. in because it makes some people uncomfortable or it's not in line with those viewpoints.

Charles: That's right.

Audrena: So the academic freedom issue would probably be a pretty big one to tackle in the next round of bargaining. So that's good. That's good to hear how CFA is invested in this and to have some concrete examples of that work. But along the way there are individual obstacles and difficulties because the work moves because individuals are engaged in it. Can you like give us some ideas of your own obstacles with doing this work and how you have processed through this? Even though you are a professor of Africana Studies, You've been active in the union for a long time, this is a new thing.

Charles: Well yes it was, and is. I think an obstacle that was anticipated and yet not anticipated was what was the reaction going to be of our white colleagues to this work. For many of our white colleagues who perhaps have the right, you know, social injustice values it doesn't translate into action most of the time. And many of them do not actually delve into the issues beyond the surface. So in beginning this work and even during the training the leaders went through I think it was eye opening for a lot of our colleagues to see sometimes the different point of views the different lenses that their fellow colleagues of color approached a similar topic or issue and I think some white colleagues, who perhaps viewed themselves as progressive or liberal, were just not aware of how complex these issues are and how faculty of color and members of color felt and had to live through these issues on a daily basis. So it's really developing that critical race theory instead.

Audrena: Look at this from other angles other than your own.

Charles: Absolutely. And I remember when we first took to our Board of Directors the Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation that we wanted approval of them. I recall a member saying "But I'm not racist." And that became very telling because no one is accusing you or even thinking perhaps since are individually racist. We wanted to confront the systemic racism that is a part of our organization, and our organization is no exception. We live in America and most institutions and organizations have rampant systemic racism.

Audrena: Give us an example when you say systemic racism, so the folks can follow what it is that we're talking about. What is an example of systemic racism?

Charles: In our organization, I think it has really centered around who makes the decisions.

Who creates sort of policy. And on the surface it looks like perhaps that our organization, you know, is going and putting this in quotation marks although you cannot see it, that we're diverse. So we have Board of Directors who represent lots of ethnic groups. But many of these folks have little say in the decision making and one of the ways that we are certainly beginning to change is that there were always small groups that made decisions and then brought them to the table. So one of the changes now is that more of us who are part of the leadership are in some of the smaller groups now. And so that's the way that we're changing. But in terms of it being an example of systemic

racism, white folks were the ones who were making those decisions in organization.

Audrena: And that doesn't mean that it was "intentional" and I'm using air quotes. That doesn't mean it's intentional, it just means it was a function of the way things were.

Charles: It was a function of this organization. That's how this organization operated.

Audrena: So what is it going forward, moving forward with this Anti- Racism/Social Justice for us, what can others particularly of faculty and other leaders activists of CFA, who identify as Caucasian or white, what can they do, help to do, to ensure that they are part of the solution and intentionally committing themselves to the work.

Charles: Just on a personal level in terms of my interactions with some of the leaders, white leaders, some of those leaders have got to step back and they have got to share the work and they have to share the power.

And it's difficult for many of them giving up power. No one really wants to do it. And they have to recognize that members and leaders of color are going to continue to ask you politely, nicely to give up some of your power and we will do that in all the meetings that we have at every opportunity. It is critical for the work now, and the decision making, to be shared by all leaders and we're continually adding new leaders. So that's something that their white colleagues can do. We respect the work you do. We respect your decision-making, but you need to understand that there are alternative ways of getting the same results and some of us have you know points of view that could move us forward as well.

Audrena: That sounds like making room for social justice, making room for cultural competency, making room for the step beyond just diversity, making room beyond just the representation, but actually having that proverbial seat at the table with voice. That comes with voice. And I want to say if I could think of it another way, which is oftentimes when we're facilitating group discussions and there's that person with that group of people who talk a lot. Does it matter what is there in class, for example. right a lot. And you have to practice that step up, but step back.

Charles: Yes.

Audrena: Just hold on for a second let somebody else; they may take a little longer to find that voice, but they're probably going to say the same thing you're gonna say just slow it down. If you're that person that you know is a step up step back moment, it's bringing us all together because as we started this podcast with the term "Stronger Together" because that is what this is all about. This is not about neutering anyone or necessarily. It is a sharing of power. And so it what we're asking for. Sounds like it's an ask for folks to step up, step back.

Charles: It is that and it is certainly, and my colleagues my fellow leaders have heard me say this before, but I want to say it again is that often leaders and members of color were put on display when it was necessary to have a person of color. And I said to them and I will say again: that has to stop, and that as you just mentioned Audrena, that the power must be shared, and there are many ways to get to the same solution. You don't need to talk all the time and sometimes our white leaders talk all the time so that everything that's really been said and had they just waited, other leaders would have probably said the same thing. So that's something that transformational, it's ongoing, it's a learning process for white leaders who've been used to always controlling the conversation.

Audrena: It's also a learning process for four leaders of color to learn to speak up more.

Charles: Well it is because part of our transformation is that we can disrupt.

Audrena: Yes

Charles: And we could interrupt and we never really thought I had that forum before where we can do that.

But our Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation means in fact that everyone is perhaps expecting that on of every agenda document that we have we have a statement at the bottom that actually talks about the fact that we can interrupt, particularly when it seems to be sort of a retreat to the old patterns.

Audrena: I think that's great. We're going to wrap this up. Thank you so much Dr. Charles Toombs for that perspective and your time. That's the end of our podcast today. But do join us again for more conversations discussing the 10 Guiding Principles of CFA's Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation. Remember, transformation is an action verb meaning a formal or dramatic change in form or appearance. For Radio Free CSU, I'm Audrena Redmond.