



## Stronger Together Episode 1.mp3

**Audrena:** [00:00:10] Hello and welcome to Radio Free CSU, the official podcast of the California faculty Association. My name is Audrena Redmond, and I'm your 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. In each episode, we'll discuss one of our 10 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. Today we're joined by Jennifer Eagan, a Professor of Philosophy and Public Administration at CSU East Bay, and the state President of the California Faculty Association. Thank you for joining us today Jen. So let's jump right into some conversation. First question here. Can you talk a little bit about why CFA has taken up the mantle of Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation?

**Jen:** [00:01:28] Well, CFA takes the lead of its members and their elected representatives that comprise our Assembly. So this comes from our Assembly body. They reflected on the fact that there is nothing that faculty care about that doesn't have something to do with anti-racism and social justice. Faculty care about our colleagues, we care about our students, we care about education, and knowledge. We like our disciplines. We care about quality higher education. The health of the CSU system; the health of the California economy. All of these things that we really care about and we devote our lives to them are really all affected by power and history and systems that affect how they work. So how are the resources for our students secured and distributed. Who has power to affect their lives and our lives as faculty members. We move the anti-racism work to the center of our union work and really we did that because our experience as faculty members demands it and the world is telling us that this is what we need to do. And we've also taken the lead of our Council for Affirmative Action, which has been doing anti-racism work and served as really the conscience of the Union for a long time. They've developed the Unconscious Bias Workshop for example. And I think that sometimes they're very excellent work has sometimes been siloed. The council's work is fierce and it's ongoing. But it really does take the whole union leadership taking responsibility for anti-racism work and social justice work and not relying on the council to do that work on behalf of all of us.

**Jen:** [00:03:13] Each of us has to be engaged in it. So the principles really begin with the work that CFA's Council for Affirmative Action started years ago and are now being fully adopted by the whole organization.

**Audrena:** [00:03:27] So why is the first of the two principles "We are a strong social justice organization but we could be even stronger." What does that mean?

**Jen:** [00:03:37] I like that principle, it is the first one. I think that Labor unions have traditionally been a place where workers seek strength and they get that strength through unity with each other. So for the most part workers have less power and fewer resources than their bosses do. So for any labor union, strength is important. Unions certainly leverage their power through the unity of their

members. It's sort of like the organizing image of the bunch of little fish in a school ganging up on the big fish that's usually captioned with the word "organized." Some folks might think that engaging in social justice work that doesn't seem directly tied to our work as faculty member makes us weaker or it saps our strength or it distracts us from what we should quote really be doing. But I think that's a very individualistic and white and masculinist way of thinking. Those folks think that if we expend energy on Immigrants' rights or Black Lives Matter or a campaign that the students are working on then we won't have enough power to be able to bargain our contract or enforce our rights. And I think that's the wrong frame for how union energy works. Strength comes from the inclusion of all of the little fish and their connection to each other and the way they trust in one another. And how they connect their fights to the fight. Others in the union and beyond the Union. That's how we generate energy. This anti-racism work for me includes more fishes and fortifies the connection between them and how we organize together and in solidarity with one another.

**Jen:** [00:05:27] I think doing anti-racism and social justice transformation work is a prerequisite for a real and deeper solidarity. Faculty, we love to argue with each other. We like to disagree with each other — that's fun for us. But when it comes down to it, we can't just be down for each other when we happen to share a common interest. We need to be there for each other on matters of basic justice and fairness and to acknowledge that what hurts one of us hurts all of us. And we need to believe each other and show up for each other. And I especially point that comment to white faculty members who often fail to do that they often fail to be there for their colleagues of color. So I think that myself as a white faculty member and others we have to be the most mindful.

**Audrena:** [00:06:20] A tremendous undertaking CFA is engaging in. I wonder how did you and other CFA leaders gauge that the union is ready and strong enough for this work?

**Jen:** [00:06:34] CFA has great and broad membership. We've fought some really great fights. We've won a lot of them. You know, we defend faculty rights we defend faculty members' jobs and we have amazing leaders. These leaders were willing to lead a strike for five days in 2016 on all 23 campuses. And I think that level of statewide organizing is nothing short of miraculous. I could bring myself just to tears just remembering all of the high drama and the bravery and just the amazing actions that faculty took in that effort. But I also think strong organizations never stop improving themselves. CFA leaders on the campuses in the past — a little less so now — but they've been overwhelmingly white. And I think a lot of us noticed that that faculty of color weren't engaged in CFA. You know, despite what I think of as CFA's progressive street cred and we do a lot of great stuff. But I think CFA, like all academic spaces and each discipline in academia except ethnic studies, has been traditionally dominated by white men. So all academic spaces will tend to default into white spaces if we're not careful and deliberate. So CFA, as an academic space, is no different in this work I think will help us be careful and deliberate about the spaces we create. And I don't mean that just in terms of being diverse or inclusive or inviting people to the table. That's sort of a first shallow step.

**Jen:** [00:08:16] I think it means really changing our habits and how we relate to each other and to really think about how we create productive spaces for faculty of color and white faculty to work together. Solidarity is a big labor union concept, and is important to us, but we have to acknowledge that we don't really have it if white members of our union don't address the experience of people of color. And if men don't talk about gender equity. And if this gender straight faculty don't talk about LGBTQI rights. And not just talk about it really care about it and care about it as much as they do any other issue that faculty have in common that they care about like salary or academic freedom. I think that's where real solidarity comes from.

**Audrena:** [00:09:05] So how much of this work that you face undertaking the Anti-Racism Social

Justice Transformation work has to do with outside influences of the social political climate here in America and globally?

**Jen:** [00:09:19] Quite frankly, you know one thing I can say is that CFA was undertaking this work long before the 2016 elections so it's not a simple response or reaction to that event.

**Jen:** [00:09:31] But I think for anyone who thought that racism ended with the election of President Obama in 2008, I think we're done with that idea now. Racism also didn't just start over again with our current president's campaign either. I think that we have to look very seriously at how we haven't addressed racism. For example our CFA Assembly all got a copy of Michelle Alexander's great book "The New Jim Crow" last year and we're reading it in book clubs. People have been talking about it. And for me that book really shows two things. The first is how really deeply persistent and abiding and not very changed racism against Black people is and to how evidence isn't enough to change people's minds. I mean that book is amazing. It's so clear and so well-documented that if we believed Michelle Alexander and listened to her evidence we would have dismantled the prison industrial complex by now. But obviously we haven't. And I think it's an important question to ask why that's the case. And I think it's because we collectively don't know how to care about racism and the real toll that it takes on people. I think for me, the anti-racism and social justice work is part of the evolution of faith commitment to social justice and how those issues are deeply connected with one another. At CFA, we're out to change hearts including our own. This isn't a matter of data or evidence and I don't think it's always natural for faculty to think of think in terms of their emotions or their heart or the ways that they care about things.

**Jen:** [00:11:25] We tend to live in our heads instead. But I really think that's what this work is about. Changing our hearts and transforming ourselves.

**Audrena:** [00:11:33] Is that the union's responsibility? Is taking on this initiative is the union's responsibility? And you know, what do you think the average member might think of this effort?

**Jen:** [00:11:46] Well, I think members should know that this is a big project. You know it's the biggest project, this project, and CFA is committed to it for the long haul. It's important. So I think you can expect to hear more about it on your campuses and in your CFA chapters in the very near future. To answer your first question: Yes, it is the union's responsibility and I think it's each and every person's responsibility. And I don't want that to come off as it's everyone's responsibility so no is actually going to take responsibility for it. But really, to a person, this is the responsibility of everyone in the United States. Here in the United States we have done an absolutely terrible job of coming to grips with our history. Which, that involves the genocide of Native Americans, and the slavery and murder of Black people. The deep Xenophobia that has ruined immigrants' lives and our colonial history. And I think a lot of white people can't even say words like that out loud much less acknowledge their reality. And I think the harder lesson is to acknowledge that we're not just talking about the past. All of those things are alive and present in the future. Our history is our present. These things are happening right now. So from the military response to the water protectors the prison industrial complex and those mission projects that little kids make in California in fourth grade. I'm not a native Californian. This whole thing came as a surprise to me. I find it bizarre how many Californians defend the making of dioramas of people's suffering as a good elementary school age project. It baffles me. But I think that we are doomed to repeat our history. It is going to be the eternal recurrence of the same until we liberate ourselves from it, or at least try to. As an analogy to racism and how important it is for us to address it, I think of that scene in "The Color Purple" in the movie where Celie, played by Whoopi Goldberg, is holding the knife to Mr. Albert's throat, played by Danny Glover. And she says "until you do right by me everything you even think about is going to fail." And I think that's true for us in the United States with regard to racism. We absolutely HAVE to figure this out. We have to figure out how to dismantle this system or it is going to be the

undoing of all of us. And I know that sounds dramatic but I think it's absolutely true. If we're not solving this problem we're not solving any problem. And just interpersonally, until we do right by each other. That's going to be especially hard for white people I don't think most white people even could even begin to understand what it would mean to do right by People of Color. And I'm not sure I understand anything of what that means either. But until that happens, we're just spinning our wheels. There's not going to be progress.

**Jen:** [00:15:01] What I've learned so far — the little bit I've learned — is that any time I'm not looking through a lens that sees race that I'm lying to myself and I've been socialized to lie to myself as a white person because that's how it works. In my "History of Virginia" textbook I read that slavery really wasn't that bad and that the Civil War was really about states rights and not about slavery much at all. And you know, clearly I know I've been lied to now but I think that that process of seeking the truth is why I got into my discipline of Philosophy in the first place. You're wanting to uncover that reality that goes beyond the narrow viewpoint that we've been given to start with. So I love that part of the work. And even though this work is really hard and really challenging, I'm hopeful because I think union folks should be really good at this work. We have a natural rebellious streak that I think we can put to use like we like changing the status quo and fighting the power and this kind of transformation should be right up our alley. You know historically, unions haven't been so great at this. They've often repeated the patterns of exclusion that their bosses have established and unions haven't always been at the forefront of justice any kind of justice racial justice gender justice environmental justice. But CFA has its sights on being part of the new Labor movement that doesn't make that same mistake.

**Audrena:** [00:16:30] What can our members expect to come from this Anti-Racism Social Justice Transformation of the Union?

**Jen :** [00:16:38] I think that they should be looking to see the 10 principles in action. It's one thing to write beautiful inspirational language principles, but it's another thing to genuinely transform ourselves in our organization and act. And I don't want to mistake one thing for another. You don't want to do a victory lap for writing some nice language. We see other organizations do that all the time and it's a failed intention to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. So our folks who hold statewide leadership positions are just finishing their last round of three-day intensive Anti-Racism trainings. And having been through that training myself, I can attest it is hard. It's challenging as a white person. I really had to open my eyes to the distance between myself and faculty of color. And that I didn't feel that distance but they did. And I had to own up and look at the ways that I have failed to honor the experience of faculty of color in the past. And the ways that CFA has failed to do that too. We're a strong and good union and we have strong good people in it. But that doesn't mean that we're perfect. And I think the worst thing that we could do is rest on our laurels and not be honest about our mistakes. And I think we have to undergo that self-reflective process both as individuals and as an organization and each of those are a little bit different. Different kinds of practices.

**Jen:** [00:18:21] For me personally, the work continues and I think it does for all the participants who have gone to the training. And we talk about it a lot. We can't stop talking about it because it has we are undergoing a transformation and that's the exciting and troubling and challenging all at once. And I think the next step will be to to bring what we've learned and experienced to the campus chapters and extend that opportunity for reflection and action to more of our member leaders and activists. And I think that's how we're going to get stronger as a union.

**Audrena:** [00:18:56] Well thank you Jennifer Eagan for that perspective and your time. That's the end of our podcast for 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 thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance." For Radio Free CSU, I'm Audrena Redmond.