CRISIS AND CIVILITY

Many see a “crisis situation” as hopeless conflict, or as yet another example of unrelenting suffering. It seems we have become numb, either overwhelmed by our grief or, at times, unable to feel any grief at all. One outlet for this crushing condition of crisis is simply to scream. To literally yell at any target we see as an oppressor, to rail loudly against policies and practices that only seem to ratify the world’s wrongs, and not its rights. The word “crisis” has, for many, become a placeholder for “injustice.”

But, perhaps there remains a positive possibility hidden in a crisis; a doorway out of suffering, rather than the building of a suffocating cage. From this new vantage point, “conflict” and “crisis” provide the transformative engine and power to ignite change. Only here the change is mutually nourishing, and here the change is forged with deep respect (even reverence) for the complexities and the pain. To invite such a “constructive crisis” requires both contemplation and strategy. I submit that the compass we need to help direct us is Civility.

Yet, I readily admit that the term “civility” is, itself, due for some renovation. For example, if a person or a group shows up at a speaking event specifically to “protest” it, then “civility” for them merely masks institutional “control.” Indeed, so-called civility in this case would probably be perceived as a pernicious code of “censorship” i.e. mandating that one stay silent or muzzled, and where one is summarily banned from exercising their rights to redress grievances. Moreover, if protesters dare to declare their righteous anger by displaying startling signs and shouting caustic comments, then it is likely to be misperceived as “violence” or even “hate speech.”

The reformed form of civility which I am proposing is decidedly not one of status quo control, nor one even hinting at censorship. Instead, it submits a radical proposition; a promise to regard “protesters” with respect. Now, this is not some ploy of politeness or a tricky maneuver to quell anger. Civility, from my perspective, publicly acknowledges that a crowd’s anger is honest and that their pain is real. Therefore, it is not the growing presence of controversy on campus that should concern us, rather it is the absence of a truly constructive commitment to civility that is of greater concern.

Allow me now to offer just two supportive strategies which I hope will illustrate a refreshed covenant of civility. The first I call “Shared Suffering.” One of the most conspicuous absences from most public forums dedicated to discussing “serious and controversial issues” is the absence of discussing suffering. The first step towards respecting protesters is to admit that real suffering is at the source of their anger. But this admission is not a partisan one, it must be mutual, i.e. all parties to the controversy share in the suffering.

This deep and profound grief is seldom spoken of, much less honored, in public. But imagine if your “opponent” cared enough to authentically lament the losses of family that you have experienced (or acknowledged your values by quoting from your own culture’s “heroes”). Moreover, imagine if you reciprocated. The door may be partially opened. Then again it may not, but at least the possibility now exists.

Another respectful demonstration of civility would be to grant to the “protesters” that their questions will be addressed. Imagine, again, that your “opponent” says something like, “It is clear that we have a group...”
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK NOV 13-17

Ongoing Throughout the week:

Right to Education Photography Project - Students at Birzeit Univ. (Ramallah) and Al-Naja University (Nablus) documented Palestinian student life under occupation through their own ideas and experiences— Design Gallery, Room 100.

Monday 11-13
10-11:30~ World Hunger and Food Availability - Faculty Center for Professional Development - Lib. 5th Floor
12:30-2:00~ American Muslims: Many Voices—Dr. Muzammil Siddiqui—The Pointe in the Pyramid
2:30-3:30~ Men & Masculinities in Gender and Development Programs - Dr. Paul Perret —The Pointe in the Pyramid

Tuesday 11-14
11:00-12:30~ The Sun and More of Spain—Multicultural Center (F03-02)
11:00-1:30~ International Related Orgs. Representatives— Speaker’s Platform in front of Bookstore
2:00-4:00~ Consuls of Japan, Korea, and Asian China—Dr. Tim Xie—The Pointe in the Pyramid
3:00-4:30~ Worthy of Faith: Authors and Readers in the Long Renaissance— Faculty Center for Professional Development Center, Library- 5th Floor
3:30-4:45~ The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows —Stan Chu Ilo—Huntington Room, USU-224
5:30-7:30~ Invisible Children documentary—Huntington Room, USU-224

Wednesday 11-15
9:30-11:00~ Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night—Anatol Center, East. Lib. AS-110
12:00-1:00~ Where Western Design Meets Eastern Culture ‘Brown Bag’, Multicultural Center—F03 Room 2*
1:00-2:30~ Heavy Metal Islam: Youth Culture & Religion in the Middle East Today—Huntington Room, USU-224
2:00-3:00~ Travel Tips-101—Career Development Ctr. —BH-250
3:30-5:00~ GOOGLE:earth Puts Geography on the Desktop:Remote Sensing in a Nutshell—Faculty Development Ctr. Library-5th Floor
6:30-7:30~ The Peoples of Central Asia: from Imperial Subjects to IndependentCitizen—Dr. Ali Igmen—Huntington Room, USU-224

Thursday 11-16

Arlington West Display: Reflections on the Iraq War—“temporary cemetery” representing soldiers killed in Iraq—University Central Quad
10:00-12:00~ Chinese Calligraphy: A Microcosm of Culture & Art Form Par Excellence—Dr. San-Pao Li-Huntington Room, USU-224
12:00~Arlington West documentary & panel—Huntington Room-USU 224
2:00-4:00—Easter Island: Archeological Field Research—Dr. Carl Lipo—Anatol Center, East Lib. AS-110
4:00-6:00—Hiroshima/Nagasaki Peace Exhibit— Multicultural Ctr. F03 Room 2

Friday 11-17
International Thanksgiving Potluck & Cultural Celebration Located between FCS & Nursing Bldgs.

GOT CULTURE?

Museum of Latin American Art MoLLA
628 Alamitos Ave. Long Beach, CA
More info: (562)437-1689
www.molla.org

Bowers Museum of Cultural Art
2002 N. Main Street, Santa Ana-
More info: (714) 567-3600 Cost $4

Pacific Asian Museum
46 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena, CA
More info: (626) 449-2742

S.T.A.R. PROJECT

Training workshop will be on Saturday,
February 17, 2007 in the MCC’s Conference Room, F03-02.
From 12:00-noon to 6:00 p.m.
The workshop is free! Please call the MCC to sign-up or come on in!!!
Deadline to sign-up Feb. 14th, 2007 ☏ 562-985-8150

S.T.A.R. Project received the rare honor-being officially designated as a “Promising Practice for the Nation” by President Bill Clinton’s Commission on Race. The S.T.A.R. Project was selected as one of only three programs in L.A. to be visited by Advisory Board members of President Clinton’s “initiative on Race” Commission.

We are continuing the good work that S.T.A.R. provides for our students.
BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada

(2006)
Oscar® winner Tommy Lee Jones directs and stars in this poetic and striking modern-day Western. Peter Perkins (Jones) is a veteran cowboy who embodies the values of the old west, living in a small Texas town bordering the U.S. and Mexico. He hires Melquiades Estrada as a ranch hand and quickly befriends the man. But when Estrada is gunned down under mysterious circumstances, Perkins takes justice into his own hands and kidnaps a trigger-happy border patrolman (Barry Pepper - Saving Private Ryan), forcing Perkins to unearth Estrada’s body and accompany Perkins on horseback on the long and treacherous journey through the frontier mountains and back roads of Mexico to bring his friend’s body home.

Pete forces Mike to participate in his cross-country ritual of duty—a voyage of revenge and redemption that will change both men forever, and bring some semblance of meaning to the senseless death of Pete's good friend.

It is there, amidst some of the most beautifully bleak landscapes in recent American film, that Jones and screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga (Amores Perros, 21 Grams) set their existential quest for meaning. The film focuses on the honor-bound commitment of Pete, the foreman of a Texas ranch (played by Jones with a heavy heart and deep moral conviction) to return the body of illegal Mexican immigrant ranchhand, Melquiades Estrada (played in flashback scenes by Julio Cedillo) to his preferred resting place in the Mexican wilderness. Tommy Lee Jones outdoes himself with his story of friendship and compassion.

Paradise Now

(2006)
Two men, best friends from childhood, are summoned to fulfill their agreement to be suicide bombers for the Palestinian cause. Khaled and Said (Ali Suliman and Kais Nashef, both making striking film debuts) believe fervently in their cause, but having a bomb strapped to your waist would raise doubts in anyone—and once doubts have arisen, they respond in very different ways. Paradise Now is gripping enough while the men are preparing for their mission, but when the set-up goes awry and Khaled and Said are separated, it becomes almost excruciatingly tense. The movie passes no judgment on these men; impassioned arguments are made for both sides of the conflict. This is a work of remarkable compassion and insight, given the shape and sharpness of a skillful thriller. Its psychological portrait goes beyond the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and resonates with fanaticism and oppression throughout the world, be it related to a religious, nationalist, or tribal cause. A stunning film from writer/director Hany Abu-Assad.

Facts that Focus “I Have a Dream” August, 28, 1963

The “I Have a Dream” speech is imprinted on our minds—We see and hear the compelling presence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. standing at that podium. But who else delivered civil rights messages from that same podium and on that same day?

The answer reveals that the movement for social justice was always a cross-cultural coalition of support.

Bob Dylan, this Jewish-American singer/songwriter (aka Robert Zimmerman) also delivered his own powerful message that day. In the documentary, “No Direction Home”, Dylan recalled, “I was up close when King was giving that speech—to this day it still effects me in a profound way.”

Joan Baez, this Mexican-American singer brought her voice to the occasion. She sang a passionate “We Shall Overcome.”

Peter, Paul, and Mary, a European-American folk group added their harmonies in support of civil rights.

Mahalia Jackson, a preacher’s daughter, roused the spirit of the crowd with her gospel singing. (Malcolm X noted that Ms Jackson was “the first negro that negroes themselves ever made famous.”)

Harry Belafonte, Jamaican-born American actor/singer brought his rhythms to the occasion.
CSULB Demographics Spring 2006

32,140 Students
12,573 Males 19,567 Females

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Student Population came from:
56 California counties (30,609)
50 Other states/territories (437)
92 Foreign countries (1,094)

Continued from page 1

who hold intense disagreements with my stand. I don’t, for a minute, doubt or discount your sincerity in challenging me. Here’s what I promise. Give me a fair chance to speak and I guarantee that you’ll have a fair chance to question my views. In fact, I want your group to choose a representative who will join me on the platform so that I may dialogue directly on issues of your concern.” Whether this honoring option for the opposition is actually taken up is not the point. What matters most is that a true gesture of respect was being offered. It takes time, a long time, to develop trust. And it takes great courage to share suffering (especially in full view of your “enemies”)

The second strategy I call forth is “Shared Sacredness.” One of the most overlooked, and underutilized resources for civility may be found in world religions. Often a crucial part of our cultural and ethnic identity is woven in with the wisdom and purpose provided by faith systems. To honor another’s religion (say by quoting from the insights in it’s holy scripture) is to honor a person at their heart’s core. I am not talking about “conversion” here, but rather “global ethics” and an ecumenical compassion, which may be shared from a rich variety of sacred sources (both ancient and modern.) Indeed, perhaps one of the key disconnects we find in discussing enduring “political crisis” is that we virtually ignore the religious dimensions organic to these complex issues. We seldom, if ever, seek out “spiritual leaders” who are part and party to the crisis. Yet without their guidance and their support, or their having a place at the policy-making table, our “political” solutions remain shallow and without the root system that religion may supply. Finally, for me, a “crisis” harkens back to its own root meaning, that is of providing us with “a turning point.” Just as “civility”, if approached with renewed energy and hope, may yet refashion our relationship to public discourse.

The Multicultural Center will soon be inviting small groups to come together for further conversations on both crisis and civility. If, however, you have a personal interest and want to contribute to the transformation of conflict into “constructive crisis”, then please contact us.

A true Covenant of Civility is not some list fraught with prohibitions of conduct, nor one that seeks to silence opposition. A deeper promise of civility is the promise to approach controversy and crisis with deepening respect and an honoring of a universal human heart.

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YOU ARE MY OTHER ME

We're on the Web
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CSULB Demographics Spring 2006