

The Journey

THE WINCHESTER MULTICULTURAL NETWORK NEWSLETTER

***Wherever there is injustice, we ought to show up, stand up, and speak up.
Whenever we can show up, stand up, and speak up, that's when we start changing the world . . .
and all of us need to do that.***

Joe Ehrmann as quoted in Jeffrey Marx' book *Season of Life*



WINCHESTER
MULTICULTURAL
NETWORK

We Educate, Advocate and Respond.

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Looking Ahead

Let's Start with Ourselves; Bullying Is Not Child's Play.

By Dotty Burstein and Sandy Thompson

We were dismayed at the news that an 11-year-old Springfield child committed suicide in the aftermath of a relentless bullying campaign by his schoolmates. The taunting and intimidation of this promising young student had become unbearable for him. On April 6, he left a note of apology to his mother and aunt and a collection of Pokeman cards to his younger brother before hanging himself on the third floor of his home.

An article on the *Teaching Tolerance* website describes him as a football and basketball player, and active in the Boy Scouts. "But none of that protected him from the bullying he faced when he started sixth grade . . ." According to his mother, he was said to be gay because of the way he dressed, because he "acted like a girl."

In the years since 2002, there have been 15 suicides in Massachusetts by children between the ages of 10 and 14, all tragic and unacceptable loss of life. Many have been directly linked to bullying. These days it appears that bullying often takes the form of homophobic taunts and teasing. If they are boys, targets of this kind of bullying are perceived as not "macho" enough. Therefore, the slightest gender non-conformity—interest in dance or yoga, frequent participation in class, or a show of emotion, for example—is taken as a sign of being a "sissy" or a gay person. Gender-based stereotypes affect girls as well. Some girls don't want to participate in sports for fear of being called a "lessie," or refuse to raise their hands in class because "it's so gay" to be smart.

How do we make sure this kind of tragedy doesn't happen in our town? Each of us has a responsibility to interrupt homophobic and biased remarks, which contribute to an environment that sanctions harassment. We must interrupt bullying of any kind when we witness it and help the perpetrators to understand how hurtful it is. Whether or not we have children in school, we can support efforts by educators to address issues of gender stereotyping.

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Let's Start with Ourselves; Bullying Is Not Child's Play.

Straight-Laced: How Gender's Got Us All Tied Up, a new documentary by award-winning filmmaker Debra Chasnoff, "is the first feature-length documentary and educational campaign to explore how gender expectations limit the lives of all teenagers." The film includes interviews with more than 50 teens and promotes dialogue about gender roles and homophobia. *Straight-Laced* promises to provide an important tool for addressing gender-based bullying.

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, recommends four approaches that schools can begin implementing now to address anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.

- Adopt a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that enumerates categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender expression/identity. Enumeration is crucial to ensure that anti-bullying policies are effective for LGBT students. Policies without enumeration are no more effective than having no policy at all when it comes to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment, according to GLSEN's 2005 National School Climate Survey.
- Require staff trainings to enable school staff to identify and address anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment effectively and in a timely manner.
- Support student efforts to address anti-LGBT bullying and harassment on campus, such as the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance or participation in the National Day of Silence.
- Institute age-appropriate, inclusive curricula to help students understand and respect difference within the school community and society as a whole.

We must put an end to the horror of teenage suicide because of bullying. We must make it a priority to create the kind of community where bullying of any kind does not exist. All of us—community leaders, parents, teachers and school administrators—are responsible for addressing this critical issue. Bullying must never be tolerated as normal childhood behavior!

Recommended Multicultural Films by Mindy Arbo

Films are available through The Winchester Public Library and its Minuteman Library Inter-library Loans, <http://library.minlib.net>, and/or at Video Horizons. All foreign films are subtitled. (F) = great for families; age specific when noted. Go to www.imdb.com for further film information.

Slumdog Millionaire

When you commit to watching this myriad Golden Globe and Oscar-winning film, you step onto a roller coaster that doesn't quit 'til the credits have finished. The film opens with a young man, raised in the slums of Mumbai, India, competing to win big on a hugely popular Indian quiz show. As he continues to answer correctly and gets closer and closer to winning the jackpot, he flashes back to the events in his life that answered those questions. It is a romantic epic in the best sense of the term — Dickens transported to the colorful cacaphony of modern day urban India. (F) young teens and older

The Willow

Made by the award-winning Irani director of *Children of Paradise*. Here the focus is on a well-respected blind professor of philosophy whose life changes radically for the worse when he regains his sight and begins to slide into an extreme crisis of faith.

Happy Go Lucky

Director Mike Leigh usually tackles the seamier side of the lower classes in his native London. But in this multi-Golden Globe-winning film, we are helplessly lifted up in the story of a hard living but happy force of nature who joyfully takes on life's many challenges. Your world will be a better place.

Two Women

Set in Tehran during the turbulent first years of the Islamic Republic, two university students become loyal friends. Fereshteh, the brilliant 'rebel' from a very traditional repressive family, influences shy Royah to become an assertive 'modern woman'. Ironically, it is Fereshteh who suffers a sad spiritual crushing and is isolated from her friend for many years. Through a bizarre series of events, fate eventually brings together the two women and the spectre of hope rises.

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Winchester as a Multicultural Community—a Sampling

(We welcome contributions to this column. Send a line or two to office@wmcn.org)

- The Winchester High School Orchestra and Sinfonietta performed a program of “Music They Brought to America” at the National Heritage Museum on March 22. The program was planned in conjunction with an exhibit of “Ellis Island Portraits: 1905–1920” by Augustus Frederick Sherman. After each selection, students presented short vignettes about their parents’ or grandparents’ immigration experiences, including those who came from China, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Germany, and Italy.
- The seventh grade Olympians team traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts on Friday, March 20th. They toured the Greek Art section of the museum and participated in activities on the topic of “Culture and Everyday Objects.” After returning to school, the students wrote autobiographical essays from the perspective of some of the objects they examined. The “narrators” of the essays ranged from Japanese kimonos to ancient Egyptian mummy cases!
- Temple Shir Tikvah will host an evening of learning about what it means to be a transgendered person and what actions can be taken to protect civil rights for everyone.
- One book group in Winchester read and discussed the novel, *Septembers of Shiraz* by Dalia Sofer. The action takes place just after the Iranian revolution in which the Shah was deposed.
- The Griffin Museum of Photography hosted a talk by Randy Hope Goodman who described her photographs of Iran from the early 1980s. The exhibit is entitled “From Beneath a Chador: A Photojournalist Covers Iran’s Islamic Revolution.”
- Winchester High School held its fourth annual “Day of Dialogue” assembly for ninth graders. A gay student, a parent of a lesbian woman, and a transgendered person spoke.
- In a clear indication of their commitment to welcoming and supporting newcomers to our community, the school system is working with an outside consultant to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their program for English Language Learners.
- “One Winchester, Many Traditions” (a collaborative program between the Winchester Public Library and the Multicultural Network’s International Connections) hosted a screening of *My Beijing Birthday* at the library. Filmmaker Howie Snyder was a special guest at the screening.

- The Jenks Center offered French classes this spring.
- A presentation on the problems facing developing countries was held at Parish of the Epiphany.
- The Winchester Foundation for Educational Excellence awarded a grant for the purchase of books that can be used to plan lessons on disability awareness at Lynch School.
- A workshop sponsored by Brio Integrated Theater was held for children and adults with and without disabilities. Brio founder Sahar Ahmed Awerbuch was featured in an article in *The Winchester Star*.

Winchester’s Disability Access Commission

Winchester’s Disability Access Commission has been reactivated. The Commission’s mission is to protect the rights and facilitate the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of community life within Winchester.

At the May Town Meeting, Commission Chair Jean Batty reported on current initiatives:

- Support the hearing impaired at Town Meeting with a captioning system (still working out the technical issues)
- Make Winchester’s train stations accessible
- Ensure accessible housing in Winchester
- Educate the community about various disabilities through the use of Kids on the Block puppets (hope for Town Day puppet shows — relying on High School Connect & Commit volunteers for that)
- Work with the town on needed curb-cuts and parking issues for people with disabilities

The Disability Access Commission is looking for members, especially for adults with disabilities to serve on the Commission. Anyone interested should contact Jean Batty at battyfamily@verizon.net

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***Ordinary people can and do change
the world every day.***

Mary Pipher from her book, *Writing to Change the World*



“They Take Our Jobs!” by Aviva Chomsky (Reviewed by Dotty Burstein)

Aviva Chomsky, a professor of history and Latin American studies at Salem State College, challenges 21 widespread and enduring beliefs about immigrants and immigration. The title's reference to immigrants taking away jobs from Americans is one of the most commonly heard myths, followed by charges that immigrants drive down wages, don't pay taxes, and benefit from public services they don't have to pay for. In “They Take Our Jobs!” Chomsky not only demolishes these myths, but provides a guide to the current debate on immigration.

Sometimes we are caught without an appropriate response to those who denounce immigration from racist or exclusionary points of view. Chomsky provides a way of talking about this difficult topic, based on factual information and an approach that is not inflammatory. To those who would oppose immigration on grounds that, “of course, this is a nation of immigrants, but we don't want the kind who don't play by the same rules that our forebears did,” Chomsky suggests that those “rules” were different for Europeans—white and voluntary immigrants—than for Africans, Native Americans, or Asians. Whatever rules had been imposed on white Europeans paled in comparison to rules meant only for “the colored races.” At various times in U.S. history, rules applied to non-white immigrants have meant enslavement, exclusion, or racially-defined quotas.

It may be instructive to examine an example of immigration currently in the news. Mexican immigrants have been blamed for everything from taking jobs away from American citizens to spreading disease. And unlike their “unauthorized” European counterparts, Mexican immigrants have been labeled “illegal immigrants” or worse, “illegal aliens.” The distinction is important: it may be the case that a person does not have valid documents and is therefore “undocumented” or “unauthorized.” However, no human being is himself “illegal” or “alien.” To label a person in this way creates a less-than-human image and is not unlike the Nazi-constructed image of Jews as alien, dirty, and inferior. Words can be powerful tools in perpetuating racially-biased notions of “the other.”

Ideas of racial superiority and divisions between the “haves” and “have-nots” of this world are embedded in the racial and economic arguments for both the exclusion and exploitation of certain people, usually poor people of color. In the case of U.S. policy, this has meant the importation of Africans forced into slavery for their economic “benefit,” yet treated as if they were subhuman, or alien. On the other hand, Native Americans became aliens in their own land when the English arrived, for, as Chomsky points out,

“[Native Americans] had to be expelled from the land in order to create a white, English society here.” After all, the English “had no intention of assimilating into the land they migrated to; they wanted to replace the societies that existed there.” Sadly, other examples of economic exploitation and racial exclusion abound in our history: the Chinese were used for labor in building the railroads, yet denied citizenship and excluded. For Mexicans, the story is much the same—using their labor in temporary worker programs, yet often deporting or otherwise excluding them afterward. The incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is another example of exclusion, even as many of them served in the U.S. military and some gave their lives for their new country.

In recent years, especially since the events of September 11, 2001, laws regarding immigration have become more restrictive. Now more than ever we need to rethink our priorities. We can continue to think in racially exclusionary ways or we can choose to welcome different cultures and traditions as a way to enrich our own lives and the lives of those who come here.

Recommended Multicultural Films

(continued from page 2)

Pow Wow Highway

Two contemporary Native Americans—one an angry political activist and the other a very spiritual overweight lay-about—reluctantly embark on a road trip toward shared purpose and friendship. **F**

The Weeping Camel

In spring on the Gobi Desert, a nomadic Mongolian shepherd family has troubles when one camel rejects her unique white newborn. The family's two young sons are sent on a trek to bring back a musician shaman to save the calf. This is a fascinating and delightful documentary-like depiction of family life through the seasons on the beautiful rugged steppes, where the survival of humans and their animals is inseparable. **F**

Man Push Cart

In contemporary NYC, a gritty cinema verite look at the background and day-to-day life of an Arab push cart vendor. **F**

Race and Real Estate

(Reviews by Dotty Burstein)

Last spring the Winchester Multicultural Network offered a four-part workshop entitled “Race and Place” as a pilot program of the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston. The goal was to encourage Winchester’s growth into a community that is welcoming to all races and ethnicities. Some 40 residents participated in this facilitated discussion series based on the screening of the documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. At this writing, we are looking back on what has happened in our town since last year’s workshop. The results are encouraging: The Community Health Network Alliance awarded the Multicultural Network a grant to design and implement the next phase of the program—to bring the documentary and discussion to the schools, real estate and banking community, and town government. Our goal for this phase: “to educate people who live and work in Winchester about our assumptions on race and the resultant disparities that our social, economic, and political systems have perpetuated.” As a guide to thinking about these disparities and what caused them, the following books may be helpful.

Sundown Towns by James W. Loewen, author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, points to a “hidden dimension of American racism”— the policy of excluding African Americans from living in a particular town and prohibiting them from owning/renting property in the town. (In some towns, the term also implied the exclusion of Jews, Mexicans, Chinese, Native Americans, and other groups deemed undesirable.) Even though sundown towns were everywhere, though ironically not in the South, Loewen points out that “almost no literature exists on the topic.”

You may ask why the sundown town policy is of importance today. One answer is that it documents a part of our national history that has been hitherto hidden. White residents of sundown towns established them by using the law itself, harassment, and even murder to keep out African Americans. The fact that exclusion of certain people happened and, in many cases, continues to happen demands our attention to this unacceptable racial policy. As activist and author Tim Wise reminds us, “[This book] shows just how deep the well of racial exclusion and white supremacy runs” in our country.

More than Just Race makes a “persuasive case for re-framing the way we look at and talk about race.” Its author, Harvard Professor of Sociology William Julius Wilson, opens with a sadly familiar story, that of entering the elevator of his condo building as an African American man and receiving a negative, sometimes frightened, reaction by fellow riders. This kind of response to his presence is, of course, rooted in racial inequality, even as America has recently elected a black president.

Wilson tries to understand racial inequality in terms of structural and cultural forces operating together.

For example, structural reasons such as limited economic and social opportunity have resulted in proportionately higher rates of crime and incarceration among young black men. As a result, it is more difficult for young black men to be hired for jobs; they may have been incarcerated or simply have fewer marketable skills. This reluctance to hire is now a cultural phenomenon in which people respond to negative perceptions of young black men depicted in the media.

Family Properties is Beyrl Satter’s “riveting account” of her father’s fight to bring about change in postwar Chicago. Not only did Chicago have some of the nation’s worst ghettos; it was infested with unscrupulous lawyers and slumlords. The horrific plight of African Americans who had migrated from the South to the city’s segregated slums was not due to “black pathology or white flight”; rather, Satter suggests, it was brought about by an “institutionalized system of legal and financial exploitation.” It was the widespread system of discriminatory practices in the banking industry, federal policies that created a “dual housing market,” and the “tempting profits to be made by preying on the city’s most vulnerable population” that Mark J. Satter, attorney and activist, sought to undo.

Resources on Race and White Privilege

In February, the Multicultural Network sponsored a program by Culture Coach International: an Interactive African-American Timeline. Culture Coach shared the following book list with us. *Sundown Towns* is included in Dotty Burstein’s book reviews in this issue. The list below is only a sampling of many wonderful resources available on issues of race and white privilege.

Douglass and Lincoln: How a Revolutionary Black Leader and a Reluctant Liberator Struggled to End Slavery and Save the Union by Paul Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick

Sarah’s Long Walk: The Free Blacks of Boston and How Their Struggle for Equality Changed America by Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick (reviewed in a previous issue of *The Journey*)

We Are One: The Story of Bayard Rustin by Larry Dane Brimner

Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism by J.W. Loewen

Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice by Paul Kivel

Stand the Storm: A Novel by Breena Clarke

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh (article, 1988)

Race, Education & Democracy Lecture and Book Series sponsored by Simmons College and Beacon Press (www.raceandeducation.com). March/April 2009

Lessons Learned

Sandy Thompson

I am a grandmother and although I know something about how children's minds work, I am frequently surprised when I discover how they have translated messages from the important people in their lives. Recently I was standing in line with six-year-old Jonah and four-year-old Ella as we waited to get a once-a-week Dunkin Donuts treat. Knowing the kids might take a long time to decide on their selection, I turned to ask the man behind me if he was in a hurry. "Oh, that's fine," he said. "I'm in no hurry."

Jonah tugged on my jacket. "Mimi, you're not supposed to talk to strangers," he said earnestly, his little face looking quite stern. Jonah had taken in the admonitions and lessons he had learned at school and at home that talking to strangers was bad, maybe even dangerous. He had learned his lesson well. I smiled as I explained the situation to him.

The story reminds me that children receive messages and learn lessons in so many ways. Here's a story that didn't make me smile. A Winchester third-grader from an Eastern European country was accosted in the hallway of her elementary school. "Are you a citizen?" her classmate asked with some intensity. The girl thought for a minute.

"No," she replied. "Well, you must be illegal," the boy responded. "You should go back where you came from."

This boy had taken in messages about immigration that he had heard—from his parents, neighbors, grandparents, or other important people in his life. Maybe the message came from radio or television or books. The message, 'You are not here legally and should go back,' had come from somewhere.

Children continually receive good and bad messages; they take in other people's attitudes and interpret them in their own ways. They learn from what people say and do, from facial expressions, and from body language. For example, if an adult tenses up and squeezes a child's hand in an uncomfortable way when the child asks, "Why does that person have brown skin?" the child will likely get the message that something is wrong, both with asking and with the person who has brown skin.

Let's all ask, "What messages do we want to give the children in our lives about strangers, immigration, other cultures, skin color—about differences in general?"

Wishing you a summer rich with multicultural experiences.

Winchester Multicultural Network

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