

Dear RCRLN leaders:

October 3, 2018

## **Race, Culture, and Class**

I am writing to continue to reason with the RCRLN to consider discussions on entering class/Social Economic Status (SES) into the race and culture theme of the leadership RCRLN.

Race, class, and culture are mixed historically/inextricably like the physics concept of “space/time.” The irony is class is involved in many, or perhaps most of the main issues and RCRLN “Hot Topics” brought up for discussion; it’s just not recognized. Why?

The paradox and pretense come in when one realizes RCRLN is largely a middle-class/lower upper-class organization that in many cases deals with issues and problems that arise from the lower class who are talked about and judged while not represented in the leadership, or at the meetings to tell their stories.

Other than Mr. Maurice Young, I’m probably one of the few (if any) who attended meeting who currently live at or under the poverty line. As well, I’m probably one of the few, if any, to attend meetings who are from and represent the working-class in background, values, and language, as well as having experiences as a laborer.

## **RCRLN**

According to the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis (EoI)* (p. 640), GIPC was formed in 1964 by then Mayor John Barton who “afforded an ‘advisory committee of business and civic leaders.’” Local banker, tycoon businessman, and local/national Democratic Party bigwig Frank E McKinney Sr. served as a first president. The *EoI* review also noted “...[GIPC] has been subject to criticism that it is controlled by business elites.” GIPC was highly involved in planning UNIGOV.

Now don’t get me wrong; unfortunately, this is true for many organizations/initiatives in town (Mayor Hogsett’s Poverty and Education Working Group, Indy Food Council, CTS Faith & Action Project). From my perspective, this is sort of a “neo-colonial” stance on community problem-solving analogous to a men only group whose self-described charge is women’s issues, with few if any female representatives at the table.

In sociology this is a process of *Othering* by which the subjectivity, humanity, the ways of being and knowing of marginalized individuals and groups are rendered “other” and denied both agency and legitimacy--basically being left out of discussions the *status quo* have about them and their destiny. This is basically done by the situation avoiding the deep-seated, unquestioned assumptions, values, and beliefs of cultural normatively that perpetuates what I call “coloniality” and which delegitimizes their global human right to self-determination

## **The working class and the 2016 election**

Remember too, it was crucially pointed out during the analysis of the presidential election that both the Democratic and Republican parties had historically ignored the working class. This disregard made the working class vulnerable to the appeal of certain politicians enabling the current divisive local/national scenes.

Isn’t this a challenge to RCRLN, which claims to represent each Indianapolis citizen, to recognize social class as a differential in the equation that will determine the sustainability of a pluralistic multicultural democracy?

## **Black America and the class divide: Black RCRLN members and Indy’s black underclass**

Another reason to enter class into the DNA of the RCRLN is the social class hierarchy among blacks, and among whites. The social class disconnect among African-Americans is exemplified by the membership of the RCRLN and those attending the meetings. To the extent that the RCRLN continues to be an “advisory committee of business and civic leaders,” it discourages the Black underclass from attending meetings.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/education/edlife/black-america-and-the-class-divide.html>

## **The origin of ‘white trash’ and why class is still an issue in America**

This same level of disconnect characterizes relationships among Indy’s white folks. Of course the white ruling class and the white middle-class have their issues. Meanwhile, both look down their noses at the blue-collar crowd who joins them in their contempt for the “white trash” whom they all pile on at the bottom of the white pecking order. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/origin-white-trash-class-still-issue-u-s>

Also consider the August 1, 2018 NPR broadcast, “Why is it still okay to trash poor white people?”

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/08/01/605084163/why-its-still-ok-to-trash-poor-white-people>

### **We must wake up to the fact Indy is the segregated not only by race but social class**

Although currently neo-colonialism (i.e., gentrification) is changing the demographics of Indy's working-class neighborhoods, according to the 2010 census our city is one of the 21 most segregated in the US. But, as I will emphasize, Indianapolis is not only segregated by race, but by class.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/5560477952/in/album-72157626354149574/>

Note the low percentage of African Americans south of Washington St. on the map and consequently the high number of white and in this case mainly working-class. Here are maps of the other 21 most segregated US cities <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-segregated-cities-census-maps-2013-4>

Also, note this article on the history of race on the Southside

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Rich-local-Southside-Indy-heritage-lives-on-in-forgotten-areas.pdf>

### **The gentrification of White River**

Finally, appreciate the oncoming displacement of working-class residents and their cultures via the gentrification White River. We can't forget the long history of these African-American and Appalachian\* cultures in Indianapolis. It was residents of the neighborhoods of Haughville, Stringtown, and the Valley who arrived after the First/Second Great Migrations from the South, who ended up doing all the heavy lifting that built Indianapolis up through the era of deindustrialization. Now Indy's so-called "urban renewal" projects will make urban refugees out of these families. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-Riverside-Master-Narrative-H.S.-gentrification-and-the-new-White-River.pdf> \*Note, throughout the '70s and '80s Indy's Appalachian population made WFMS a nationally acclaimed country music radio station.

### **Indianapolis is closing in on January 1, 2019**

The bottom line from my standpoint is the RCRLN is a white middle-class organization. Isn't it time for the RCRLN to recognize the influence of social class on the inter-relationship of race and culture?

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-Race-and-Poverty-in-Marion-County.pdf>

### **My proposal**

The Indiana Institute for Working Families' presentation on race and poverty was a good start. Now let's get Councilor Jerrad Evans, Indianapolis Deputy Mayor Jeff Bennet, IUPUI anthropology professor Dr. Paul Mullins, and myself to be on a panel during a future RCRLN monthly meeting to discuss the white working class in Indianapolis. And, *let's invite unions to be permanent members of the RCRLN inner circle.*

John Harris Loflin

Chair

Southeast Working-Class Task Force

"Since 2015, a proud member of the Southeast Quality of Life Plan"

P.S. To support my contention, I have been invited by IUPUI School of Ed urban PhD program graduate assistant Gayle Cosby (former IPS school board member) who is teaching a class on culture to pre-service teachers to discuss social class with her students. She is having the class read *Hillbilly Elegy*. She's also having the class read my paper on the Southside working-class community where I live and grew up: A proposed compromise regarding the southside debate: "College or die" vs. "Not everyone needs to go to college" <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A-proposed-compromise-regarding-the-southside-debate-College-or-die-vs.-Not-everyone-needs-to-go-to-college.pdf>

I will discuss the importance of teachers who want to be culturally relevant to add the white working-class culture to their list of cultures they must appreciate in order to be culturally competent. She believes the university must add "class" to their categories of diversity which currently are basically race/ethnicity, culture, gender identity.