BLACK & WHITE

A BALANCED DISCUSSION
VERSION 2.0

HEALING RACIAL DIVIDE

C.L. HOLLEY

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DEDICATION

To Dad & Mom
(My high school teachers)

Paul and Jeanette Hargrove

In a time of racial unrest and resistance to school integration, you accepted black boys and girls as if we were your own. You gave us love, discipline, and great examples of godly character. You changed the lives of many minorities, including the life of the author of this book. May God bless you and your offspring forever for your unconditional love. I love you both with all my heart.

Reviews

"An Amazing Book - Buy it, read it, learn from it. If I could give this book a thousand stars I would."

"This is a book that welcomes you. It does not declare, pronounce, posit, demand, or do anything of the sort."

"This is a very thought-provoking book. You cannot read this and not be moved by its powerful content, ideas, and stories."

"This is a very eye-opening book and really does make you stop and think."

"There is so much to like about this book. Its non-confrontational approach…"

"Anyone not seeing the truth and wisdom of this book is simply in denial."

"I really enjoyed reading this book! It's a perfect combination of more academic/historic research and telling the author's personal story."

"This book, more than any other I have read, helped me understand the racial divide in the US and gave me ideas on how to improve things."

"What I liked most was the dispassionate balance and sincerity of the arguments made – No propaganda here."

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Diversity and Open Culture

Diversity is a human need. I want to share a personal childhood experience that demonstrates this truth.

In my pre-teen years, I was haunted by one object in our house. It was a small mirror. I hated it because I disliked the rich-dark face that stared back at me.

Psychologists have a term for this mental condition. They refer to it as self-loathing. It is a condition where a person may constantly compare himself or herself to others only to point out perceived defects about himself or herself. It can lead to extremely low self-esteem and other issues. I struggled with this for years without knowing the cause.

One manifestation of my low self-esteem was extreme stuttering. When speaking in public, especially in front of white people, I could not complete one short sentence without slapping my leg. That was funny at age six, but not at eleven or twelve years old. Teenagers can be brutal.

I believe the onset of my self-loathing occurred due to my surroundings during the Jim Crow era of the South. As a

young impressionable boy, everything in my little segregated world screamed one constant message: blacks are inferior!

Living in a segregated and poor neighborhood, most black-owned things I saw were dilapidated, deteriorated, or dirty. The water fountains, restrooms, school buildings, and even the houses of worship were inferior compared to the same things owned and used by whites in the community.

As a result, I internalized what I saw and equated the filth around me to who I thought I was—poor black trash incapable of nothing great.

As a six-year-old with a vivid imagination, I often pretended to be Superman. I loved his cape but could not afford to buy one. I made a cape by tying my older brother's long sleeve shirt around my neck. I ran around the yard and leaped over huge rocks, looking back at my cape as it danced in the wind. "I'm superman!" I yelled.

When my young black neighbors saw me running around the yard, they rushed over.

"Hey! One of them yelled. "What you doing? Who you supposed to be?"

I stopped saving the day for a moment, tossed the cape behind my back, and struck a power-pose before making the announcement.

 "I'm superman!" I thundered. "The world's greatest superhero!"

Silence.

  They looked at each other. They looked at me. "Ha! Ha!" They all burst into thundering laughter and bellowed over from the pain in their stomachs.

 "Boy! What's wrong with you? You can't be superman. Superman is white! You black! There ain't no black super-heroes! Ha! Ha!"

They laughed me to shame as I slowly eased into the house.

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Five years later, after I integrated an all-white school, the teacher wanted the class to learn about politics. He collected names of students who wanted to run for class president and vice president.

"Yes!" I cheered as I pumped my fist in the air. I gladly submitted my name for class president and immediately ran to my first group of "supporters": my black classmates.

"Hey ya'll!" I blurted out as they sat outside during play period. "Guess what? I'm gon run for class President!"

Again, I struck a power-pose anticipating applauds and congratulations. Instead I got silence. They looked at each other. They looked at me.

"Ha! Ha!" They cried laughing. "That's real funny!" One of them said in between gasps.

"Boy, you can't be President cause all the Presidents are white! You black! There ain't no black Presidents!" Again, they laughed me to shame.

But this time I wanted to have the last laugh. So I campaigned, talked to white students, shared my ideas, and when the voting was done, I won..........Vice President.   My white friend won President.

Sadly, I concluded they were right all along. Maybe black people were not meant to be great or do great things. I lived with that inferiority complex for years.

But one day I heard a voice on the radio. It was the unique voice of a black man speaking about civil rights. His words were elegant and powerful. He said things like,

 "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice!"
            (Martin Luther King Jr.)

His presence. His demeanor. His words of wisdom and his unapologetic attitude about being black made me rethink my

negative view of myself. He was what I needed to see, hear, and emulate. Each time I listened to or saw him, I imagined myself speaking as he spoke, with power and passion.

I got over my self-loathing because I saw what every human being needed to see: someone who looks like him or her, doing great things and setting good examples.

I often share this story with organizational leaders to make a powerful point. Diversity is a Human Need.

Unfortunately, some leaders view diversity as a:

A necessary evil with no company benefits.

A cultural trend forced on organizations.

A popular minority equality tool.

Yet another government quota requirement.

But truthfully, diversity has always been a deep need of everyone, regardless of race. All people need to see a physical representation of someone who looks like themselves in high places doing great things.

Natives
Caucasians
African Americans
Mexicans and Hispanics
Asians
Europeans
Middle Easterners
And all others need to see diversity.

Therefore, when you as an organizational leader recognize, celebrate, and honor diversity within and among your teams,

you are providing a deep psychological need for everyone: The need to see themselves in the world around them.

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Creating an Open Culture

Several years before writing this book, I worked for a good company. The diversity present at that organization was rich with several races and cultures working side-by-side. I had never collaborated with so many different people. I took the opportunity to learn from and observe the unique perspectives that manifested on many occasions.

I worked beside Asians, Middle Easterners, Mexicans and Hispanics, Guatemalans, Caucasians, and African Americans. Although the work environment was overflowing with diversity, unfortunately, the company itself did little to capitalize on and recognize the strength of that diversity.

It was what I call a traditional organization in the sense of, "We don't talk about three things: Race, Religion, and Politics (RRP)."

For example, the company had two employee events per year: Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations. I loved them both. But I did notice there was nothing in those celebrations to recognize or honor other races and cultures represented in the company.

The company never mentioned the strong diversity we had and never demonstrated its regard for the value of those unique cultures. There was nothing about diversity or the value of other cultures in its communications: website, email, newsletters, and business meetings. Race and diversity were never mentioned publicly.

One would think the company did not value diversity. But I happened to know they did based on private conversations with some leaders. Perhaps the leaders were fearful based on the traditional avoidance of RRP.

Reaching hiring quotas, placing diverse people on the payroll, and appearing diverse on company reports, is not TRUE diversity. That is having diverse appearance only without having diverse functionality. Diverse appearance only is suitable for meeting diversity quotas, minority advertising, and gaining certain governmental contracts. But it is far from diverse operation.

The killing of George Floyd has left business leaders searching for ways to improve diversity and racial awareness. Now comes the difficult part: Openly discussing race, privilege, and prejudice.

As a former farmer, I understand the importance of preparing the ground before planting. When it comes to building racial diversity, the first exercise should be focused on mentally preparing attendees to embrace and engage diversity and equality.

The best way to do this is by doing anti-bias training before openly discussing the tough topics related to racism. This is necessary to help individuals embrace and engage in conversations while being aware of their own biases.

The steps I recommend for enhancing racial diversity are:

Communicate Diversity

Talk about it. People will never know diversity is important to your organization unless it is communicated in various ways.

From organization leaders and executives at meetings, conferences, holiday gatherings, company updates, etc.

Through various electronic means such as email, texts, newsletters, special announcements, etc.

On various social platforms such as company websites, blogs, podcasts, and many other social media apps.

Talk about it. Explain how racial diversity will build stronger teams and increase the bottom line of the organization. Celebrate it when you have various events. Teach your people to value it and in turn, seek to do their part to build unity around diversity.

Sometimes, leaders need to repeatedly emphasize "different is good" to counter the popular mental perception that different is bad.

Make a Long-term Commitment

Commit to long-term anti-bias training complete with a budget line item that has designated personnel, resources, and time. Bias is something that is continuously built over time and cannot be instantly plucked out of the mind. Locate and identify good anti-bias training programs, authors, and speakers, and exercises your organization can use to reinforce the positivity of racial diversity.

Create a Welcoming Environment

It can be challenging to get people to freely talk about tough conversations like race. Leaders and employees must feel they can open-up without backlash or negative consequences. Employees need to know that what he or she shares

from pure honesty will not be held against him or her in terms of performance reviews and other work-related areas.

The goal of anti-bias training should not be to force beliefs on individuals, but to help people become more racially aware so they can make better decisions on how to engage with others.

Develop Rules of Engagement

As rewarding as racial diversity can be, there are lines that can be crossed when people engage. That creates a need for rules of engagement such as be respectful, pause for time out, and set a time limit for each speaker. A moderator may be needed to help facilitate the discussions and make sure everyone stays on topic.

Determine Progress and Needs

The age-old leadership rules of know where you stand and know what you need are time proven to be true. When it comes to racial diversity, organizations need to know where they stand and know where they need to improve. But that takes open communication and the willingness on behalf of leadership to engage in uncomfortable topics.

After engagement, use various forms of feedback such as surveys, polls, questionnaires, and written and verbal responses.

Set Clear Learning Objectives

Set goals for in depth understanding of racial bias and its sources. Some goals could be to identify specific racial biases some employees may have. Address mental obstacles to discussing racial diversity. Provide tools and techniques for

daily bias identification. Use persuasive speech to encourage an "embrace" and "engage" mindset.

Give People Diversity Freedom

It is important for organizational leaders to expressly give people what I call diversity freedom. For example, let people know, under certain circumstances, that is okay to wear their native clothing in certain circumstances.

For example, to a private company event or on free-for-all Fridays if they do not meet with customers. The same with speaking their native language. Let people know it is okay if done according to company guidelines. Explain why that might be disruptive if done in a business meeting where some people may not know the language.

When leaders give people more freedom, they should also give guidelines and examples so there are no misunderstandings.

Keep going!

Budget for anti-bias training every budget cycle if possible. It can be tempting to stop when racial diversity and inclusion seem fine. But bias influence employees are subjected to on TV, on social media, and in their personal lives never stops and could influence them at any moment.

I believe it is now or never regarding racial healing. Now that racial diversity has the world's attention, what will we do? Will we forge ahead through unpleasant encounters and difficulties to create racial healing? I believe we will.

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The Challenge of Company Culture

In my nearly thirty-years of professional business experience, I've witnessed company cultures that were created in one of two ways: by Assimilation or Collaboration.

I've shared in a previous chapter about the damage of forced assimilation, but what does assimilation have to do with company culture? I will explain.

While interviewing over my career, I've often heard these phrases from interviewers:

"We are looking for someone to fit into our culture."

"We need someone who will buy into our culture."

"We are seeking someone who fits in. "

These statements follow the long-used business philosophy where leaders formed the culture they wanted and searched for people who fit that pre-defined cultural model.

That cultural model was much like a jigsaw puzzle complete with hard-defined boundaries and pre-shaped pieces. Like a puzzle, each person has a specific place where he or she fits. When one person or piece of the puzzle leaves, the leaders search for someone who can be molded into the same shape and fit in.

While every company needs policies, guidelines, and rules, the culture does not need to be limited by unnecessary hardline predefined boundaries. That tends to lead to an assimilation mindset where employees may feel their appropriate native expressions are not welcome in the company culture.

A hard unnecessary boundary may be:

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Discouragement of speaking in a native language under any circumstance.

A firm dress code limited to American (European English) culture.

No recognition or celebration of diversity or inclusion.

Unwritten expectation that employee success depends on fitting-in. Thus, employees may attempt to mask things they think may not coincide with company culture even though those things may benefit the organization.

I've been there several times in my career. I've worked for companies whose leadership was so strict and firm about fitting in that I constantly walked on eggshells. There were times when I questioned my appearance, my professional opinion, and even my responses because I wasn't sure if they fit in.

I constantly watched my leaders because I knew they would not have become leaders if they didn't fit in. I took note of how they dressed, the way they interacted with others, and how they conducted meetings all to clone them. After all, so I thought, I must be just like them if I want to succeed in this company. I really cannot be myself. I must change and fit in.

Sometimes, that is what a fit-in expectation does—it unintentionally creates a workplace environment where people are encouraged to:

Dress like
Speak like
Interact like
Think like

And be like others.

That is assimilation—the centuries old belief that everyone must be the same to collaborate and operate efficiently.

In contrast, I've also worked in a few companies whose culture was built on collaboration alone and had what I call an "open" culture. Those companies taught and gave guidance and freedom in areas such as:
Appropriate time to speak a native language.

Appropriate circumstances to wear native clothing.
They constantly recognized and celebrated diversity.

They encouraged employees to be themselves.

These company leaders did not use the phrase "fit-in" to our culture. They used phrases such as "enhance our culture" or "add to our culture." Both phrases give employees the impression they can be unique, genuine, and still be a valuable part of the organization's success.

Over my career, my best work and brightest innovative ideas occurred when I worked for companies with an open culture environment. They had policies, rules, and guidelines, but they didn't have hardline predefined cultural borders like a jigsaw puzzle. I witnessed vastly diverse teams come together and achieve some amazing accomplishments.

My advice is to have anti-biased training first, formulate the guidelines with leadership, and end with implementation. That way there will be less pushback because people have gone through training and know what to expect in terms of future diversity endeavors.

Who says people must be the same to be productive?

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Functional Diversity

Years ago, I worked with two Chinese coworkers at an organization with a large amount of diversity. However, the leadership and company policies reflected a closed diversity culture with the motto of "fit-in." Most of us worked in divided cubicles with semi-privacy but could overhear conversations around us.

One day, two Chinese employees in the next cubicle were having a casual conversation about their families. They spoke some sentences in English and others in their native Chinese language. I could hear them because I was in the cubicle next to them, and so was another male employee.

I thought their conversation in Chinese was beautiful and appropriate given the circumstances. I was amazed at how fluently they changed from English to Chinese. But my male coworker had a real issue with it.

"I don't like it when they do that." He confided to me.

"This is America. Speak English so everybody can know what you are saying."

I shook my head and grimaced at him. "Oh man, just relax. They aren't talking to you, and they aren't talking to customers."

This is an example of diversity on paper but not in functionality. I'm sure that organization met its diversity hiring goal and probably seemed impressive on diversity reports. But in terms of operation, diversity was not expressly welcomed, valued, or recognized.

What that company needed was to go beyond diversity in hiring practices and create diversity freedom by having anti-

bias training and developing diversity guidelines for employees to freely operate in their various native expressions.

Diversity should go beyond workforce and into other aspects of the organization. Diversity should be a consideration in the following areas:

Customers
Clients
Vendors
Community Outreach
Partners
And other areas.

Here are some examples of diversity guidelines.

Inappropriate times to speak a native language are:

In the presence of customers or clients who do not know the language.

In a group of people where some may not know the language.

When discussing company issues in an open area where you might be overheard.

Appropriate times to speak a native language are:

In casual or private non-business conversations between two or more people where all individuals know the language.

At the need or request of customers or clients who may not be familiar with the common language of English. At such times, please interpret back in English for those in the group who only speak English.

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An example company statement:

"Our organization has a rich representation of diverse races and cultures. As a result, we issue these guidelines as encouragement for all who wish to communicate in their native language at the appropriate times. We are convinced that making room for freedom of native expression will enhance our company culture and will benefit everyone in the end."

The same type of guidelines can be issued for native dress and other aspects of expression. Freedom should always come with guidelines. When those guidelines are followed and people take advantage of the freedom, it will become clear that your organizational culture is not based on assimilation, but collaboration through an open culture philosophy.

Ten Self-Evaluation & Discussion

If you work for an organization, does the culture resemble that of a closed-culture or open-culture?

Do you think employees should have the freedom to express their cultures at an appropriate time and place? Why or Why not?

Think about the different aspects of your organization and determine if diversity is needed. If so, what can you do?

What other points would you want to group-discuss in this chapter?

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Charles Lee Holley is an Award-Winning Inspirational Speaker and Author who specializes in Racial Diversity and Communication. He is a Toastmasters International Speaker and thirty-plus year business professional who captured the 2021 Toastmasters International District speaking championship. He is the author of several inspirational books.

He was born in North Alabama during the height of the civil rights movement and is the youngest of seventeen children. His father was a sharecropper, and his mother a farmer and maid for white households.

Steeped in severe poverty and surrounded by the racism of the segregated South, by the grace of God, he managed to overcome many obstacles, including a severe speech impediment and low self-esteem to become the first college graduate of his family.

He was a standout basketball player in high school and attended college on a basketball scholarship. He graduated from the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. He also graduated from Heritage Bible College (later Legacy Christian University) with a Master of Biblical Counseling.

He began to write after the sudden death of his thirteen-year-old son in 2001. His son collapsed from cardiac arrest while playing basketball at his middle-school.

Drowning in depression, he used writing as a way of expressing his grief and his hope—emailing Wednesday inspirational messages called Hump-days.

Charles is gifted at connecting with his audiences. Whether speaking or writing on Diversity, Communication, or Inspiration, his goal is always to make a lasting impact. For speaking engagements or more information about the author, visit SpeakerHolley.com.