

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Taking “The Road Not Taken” with Phyllis and Eugene



Terry Howard

“Here we are, year 2022 and we’re still dealing with race in America. Where do we go from here and how do we get there?”

That’s the question I started with from a list of 15 I’d planned to get answers to from Phyllis and Eugene Unterschuetz, authors of “Longing Stories of Racial Healing” before another author, Mona Matthews, joined us for lunch.

But little did I know that 90 minutes would transpire, and we would never get back to my list that, had we, would have taken us way beyond the restaurant’s closing.

Now about their book.

Hey, talk about Robert Frost’s poem, “The Road Not Taken,” their book chronicles a white couple’s personal account of a ten-year journey across the country in their RV, one that forced them to reconsider their comfortable notions about race as they forged new relationships with people of African descent across the nation. Their stories describe a longing to heal by them - and I suspect others - from racial tensions that has so deeply wounded this country and continue to plague us.

With scintillating prose, the authors draw the reader into the moment, walk-

ing side by side with them, sharing the same observations, nuances and sounds of cross racial dynamics. Their stories are deliberate, sometimes stumbling, efforts to learn about the delicate nature of Black/white relations. It delves into the authors’ efforts to connect with the “racial other,” look squarely at the roots of their racial conditioning—and allow their eyes to be opened to racial realities of others they’d been previously unaware of.

For yours truly, the book’s table of contents is a potpourri of eye-catching chapter titles, a “where do I start” challenge for a linear person like me who is conditioned to reading chapters in sequence, from beginning to end.

Case in point, I was lured to the “Confrontations” chapter in which Phyllis shares her mix of emotions when she encountered “Emilio,” the first Mexican she’d ever met and, later, when she happened upon a group of young Mexican boys on a corner and, in the moment, her conditioned inclination to avoid them, cross the street and averted her eyes away from them. What she learned about them and, more importantly, about herself is forever etched in her memory.

Next, in a striking comparison to race in America today, Gene’s chapter, “That’s a Lid,” describes what happened when two “strange” Black men walked into a restaurant, the diners all white, his innocent complimentary comment to one of them, and an eye-opening positive outcome that surprised him.

For the authors, their discovery of and use of the “Cycle of Racial Conditioning” was a game-changer. The model begins with misinformation resulting in fear, mistrust, and separation.

From childhood, we receive messages about who we are and who others are and the superiority of one group versus others. It comes from families, friends, institutions, and the media. It is the misinformation phase.



Phyllis and Eugene Unterschuetz

Fed by misinformation, separation (We don’t want to be around people “like that”) is the next phase in the cycle. It’s the breeding ground for stereotypes.

The final – and most disturbing say the authors - phase is “internalized oppression” when members of targeted groups accept the stereotypes about themselves and act on them which reinforces the stereotype. That furthers the separation, bringing the cycle full circle.

Which brings this to the question - how can we break the cycle?

The answer, say our authors, is at the separation stage. We must be willing and courageous enough to take baby steps in developing relationships with others who are different. “Relationships are the cure for separation; they are the simplest, most logical and most joyful ways to break the cycle.”

Okay, in case you’re wondering, here are some of the questions from my list that we did not get around to:

1. “White?” “Anglo?” “European?” How do you prefer to be called?
2. Why does race in a black/white context remain such a difficult subject to talk about cross racially?

3. What are some of the most common “landmines” that sometimes torpedo genuine attempts at cross racial dialogues?
 4. If you could both roll the clock, back say 25 years, what do you think you could have done differently in the space of race relations based on what you know now?
 5. Describe a time when you kept your distance or mouth shut because you feared being misunderstood or rejected by someone different.
 6. Describe a situation when you actively sought assurance or approval from a person of color?
 7. What is one mistake you hope to never make around a person of color, or you hope a person of color never makes around you?
 8. What do you suspect persons of color would like you white people to stop doing, continue doing, or start doing, to break down barriers to trust and authentic relations with them?
 9. What does “patronizing” people of color and others look like and how can one interrupt it?
- We will tackle these questions and many more in the days ahead. In the end, one cannot walk away from these and other questions and this book without self-discovery and reflection.
- Here we’re talking about baby steps, and pretty good ones at that.

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller. He is also a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Hometown Advantage News, Blackmarket.com, co-founder of the “26 Tiny Paint Brushes” writers’ guild, recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award and 3rd place winner of the 2022 Georgia Press Award.

No Fossil Fuels, No Fingernail Polish

CNC Staff

The goal to eliminate fossil fuels has significant ramifications to other manufacturing that many may not immediately recognize, but already feel through higher prices and shortage of goods.

One may deduce that the shortage of goods is related to the cost of diesel fuel and the supply chain issues. That’s part of it.

But did you know that petroleum is in household products ranging from furniture, to clothing, to your eyeglasses, and cookware?

Let’s start your day and walk through the more than 6,000 everyday products you may use that are made from what is referred to as petrochemicals.

You awake from the iPhone alarm on your beside table. The very housing of the phone is comprised of petrochemicals making plastic. The actual bedside table, even if made of wood, may be held together by adhesive from petroleum-based materials.

You head into the kitchen to brew your coffee, in the maker manufactured from plastic (petroleum based). You open a box of cereal, which has a sealant on the box, and then a plastic bag holding your favorite morning breakfast cereal. Both the box and the bag contain petrochemicals.

You grab the handle of your refrigerator door, a petroleum-based plastic, to get the milk. If it’s a gallon jug, it’s in a plastic jug manufactured with petroleum-created plastic. Even in a milk carton, the finish on the cardboard paper that prevents the liquid from soaking through is made from a petrochemical.

You brush your teeth before heading out to work

with a brush made of plastic with a generous dab of toothpaste, coming from a tube made from petroleum products. You style your hair with any number of instruments of importance that have plastic parts, wires, and pieces made from plastic – all from petroleum products. Ladies, much of your cosmetics, especially mascara, nail polish, and lipstick, contain petrol-based products. Guys don’t be snickering. Shaving creams and razors are made from petrochemicals and any oils for fragrances or softer skin have small amounts of...oil.

You slide on your favorite brand of sports shoes for comfort and grab your backpack or computer bag. Yeah, that nylon, canvas, and rubber, you guessed it, are made from and contain petroleum products.

As you ride to work or school, your vehicle has countless pieces and parts made from petroleum products, but did you know that the very roads you ride on are made from oil? None of the asphalted roads we travel on could be produced without fossil fuels.

You get to your destination but need to make a purchase before heading into your workplace or class. Your credit/debit cards are made of petroleum-based products.

You get the idea.

Of each barrel of oil, almost 70% goes for combustion, but at least 30% goes to manufacture almost every single consumable product we have involving its actual production to its storage and transport.

Be aware of the effort to eliminate fossil fuels, especially if you like modern life.

THINGS MADE FROM CRUDE OIL

Clothing

Cell Phones

Perfumes

Make Up

Lipstick

Nail Polish

Purses

Shoes

Sweaters

Panty Hose

Hair Colouring

Petroleum Jelly

Hand Lotion

Toothbrushes

Toilet Seats

Soap

Pillows

Shaving Cream

Curling Iron

Hair Dryer

Shampoo

Conditioner

Deodorant

Combs & Brushes

Headphones

Skis

Basketballs

Golf Balls & Bags

Bicycle Tires

Car Tires

Sunglasses

Rubbing Alcohol

Ballpoint Pens

Electric Blankets

Surf Boards

Shoe Polish

Refrigerators

Dishwashers

Boats

Televisions

Luggage

CD Player

Antihistamines

Candles

Blinds

Paint Speakers

Ice Cube Trays

Vitamin Capsules

Battery Cases

Motorcycle

Helmet

Food Preservatives

Cortisone

Fishing Lures

Antiseptics

Life Jackets

Insect

Repellent

Fertilizers

Guitar Strings

Antifreeze

Eyeglasses

Parachutes

Dentures

Movie film

This Week in African American History

Samuel Jesse Battle

Samuel Jesse Battle (January 16, 1883 – August 7, 1966) was an American police officer and the first African-American New York City Police Department officer, sworn in on March 6, 1911.

His brother-in-law was Patrolman Moses P. Cobb, who started working for the Brooklyn Police force in the early 1890s before the unification of NYC and acted as Battle’s mentor.

“Big Sam” as he was known — 6 feet, 3 inches tall, 280 pounds — earned the respect of his fellow officers after saving one officer’s life in the early 1920s. They subsequently voted to allow him into the Sergeant’s Academy. As the NYPD’s first black lieutenant, during the intense Harlem Riots of 1935 - after 3 days of violence he circulated flyers of himself with the young boy smiling who had allegedly been murdered in the basement of the Kress Department store.

He joined the force in 1911, assigned first to San Juan Hill, Manhattan, the neighborhood where Lincoln Center is today, which preceded

ed Harlem as one of the key African American neighborhoods in Manhattan. He was soon moved to Harlem, as the African American population there grew. He would later become the first African American police sergeant (1926), lieutenant (1935), and the first African American parole commissioner (1941).

In 1941, Battle began work as a parole commissioner, working with delinquent youths in Harlem. He initiated rehabilitation programs, such as summer camps and sports activities for the youth of Harlem. During a 1943 race riot, triggered by the shooting of an African-American suspect by a white police officer, Battle, at the request of fellow Republican New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, was called in to quell the Harlem area where the riot erupted. He noted how Lincoln sacrificed himself for the cause of reconciliation and calmed the flames. Battle retired as parole commissioner in 1951 but remained active in community activities for the Harlem area.

He died on August 7, 1966.



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