

Colorstruck

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On July, 22nd, I attended a two hour discussion of the infamous “Why I hate Blacks” article published by *AsianWeek* last February. The discussion occurred before a performance of Donald Lacey’s one-man show *Colorstruck* at the Buriel Clay Theater. The publisher of *AsianWeek*, Ted Fang, was there to apologize for printing the article; Charlie Walker was there to chronicle the decline of black contractors in the city; Ross Mirkarimi was there to identify the SF Redevelopment Agency as a source of inequality in the city; and Raye Richardson was there to provide historical context to the SF black experience. The discussion was billed as the first of many that would encourage blacks and Asian Americans to work together rather than be divided and conquered.

As I listened to the various speakers express their pain and frustration, I was struck by how far away we are from creating the kind of coalitions that would allow San Francisco to be a “city for all.” Some of the conversation devolved into a weird sort of “one up-manship” as to which group has suffered the most (e.g., blacks displaced by the Fillmore urban removal project versus the shrinking of Japantown from eight to two blocks). Professor Richardson explained that blacks were recruited to come to San Francisco during World War II to build the ships at Hunter’s Point and the recruiters did not intend that the blacks should stay. After she said this, I was expecting someone to point out that when the Chinese were recruited to work in the mines and build the railroads, they were not expected to stay either. That is one reason why it was illegal for Chinese females to enter the country. No one attending seemed to have a similar command of Chinese American History as Richardson had of black history. I thought that Ronald Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore* was required reading for all Californians?

I was surprised that there was no talk about how SF Chinese Americans and blacks have been set up, historically, to be at each other’s throats today. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres in chapter four of *The Miner’s Canary* talk about three dimensions of power-over others. The first dimension is direct force or the creation of zero-sum competition. The second dimension is the manipulation of the rules to shape the outcome of the competition. The third dimension is to manipulate the competitors psychologically so both winners and losers believe they deserve their status. The second dimension of power can be illustrated by the SF NAACP’s long and failed legal drive to desegregate the SF’s public school system. The power structure, in creating a competition for resources in this country, has created rules that overwhelmingly favor rich, white men. One of the rules is that if you don’t like something, hire a lawyer and sue. In 1970, when whites opposed a voluntary busing plan, the SF NAACP sued the school district, which made busing involuntary. Wealthy Chinese Americans then used the legal decision to exercise the third dimension of power over the more numerous poor Chinese Americans by creating private schools for Chinese students.

This is only begins to address how subtle and complex the exercise of power is in this country. I hope July 22nd was, indeed, the first of many discussions that happen in

San Francisco in which the “losers” can begin to better understand the history of how the competition has been rigged and how to envision, together, an alternative to a zero-sum competition.