



## Stronger Together- Episode 2.mp3

**Audrena Redmond:** [00:00:10] Hello and welcome back to Radio Free CSU, the official podcast of the California Faculty Association. My name is Adrienne Redmond and I'm your host for this 10-part series, "Stronger Together," here on Radio Free CSU. This series is inspired by the intentional Anti-Racism and Social Justice transformation CFA began in late 2016. In each episode we'll discuss one of our 10 Guiding Principles with a CFA leader or activist. Our hope is that you too will be inspired to engage in Anti-Racism and Social Justice work and join us again for more conversations about why an Anti-Racism Social Justice Transformation is necessary. Today's discussion is on the intentional centering of anti-racism as part of CFA mission. We are joined by Sharon Elise, a Professor of Sociology and Department Chair at Cal State University San Marcos. Welcome Sharon.

**Sharon Elise:** [00:01:15] Thank you for having me.

**Audrena:** [00:01:17] Absolutely. In our first podcast we had a great discussion with CFA President Jen Eagan, at which she reminded us that we are strong social justice organization but we can be even stronger today. We'll be discussing why CFA has chosen to intentionally center anti-racism as part of our mission. Sharon is going to be helping us understand that. So my first question to you Sharon is, you know it may sound silly because as Americans I think we can take this thing called race for granted because it just is. But has race always been and is, and can you explain to us what is it in the way that we think about it in America?

**Sharon:** [00:02:11] Well I think it's important to ask this question: what is race? Because in fact in our society, we're really focused on ignoring it and pretending it doesn't exist and certainly never even saying the word race or its twin, racism. So what is race? Critical race scholars today would argue that race is an invention — a social construction. An idea that first operated in service of colonialism to justify the expansionist efforts of Europe as it wielded violence in the subjugation of peoples for the exploitation of their resources and their labor, while attacking their cultures and their very bodies in the process. So race was developed as a tool to rationalize this process and the systems that produced systems such as chattel slavery other forms of forced labor genocide and reservations. Some people were to be subordinated and oppressed so that others would be elevated and privileged and an ideology and practice of white supremacy was established along with the hierarchy of people's race suggests that there is some meaning to be made in the idea of physical difference, and then theories were developed to create a science of race that carried an ideology about human nature, intellectual capacity, and levels of humanity and civilization. So race is integrally connected to white supremacy and to the major separation of race along lines of white and not-white.

**Audrena:** [00:03:56] White being at the top of that.

**Sharon:** [00:03:58] At the top of that system that they develop as a hierarchy.

**Audrena:** [00:04:05] So in light of race being a social construct — which another way to say that is that it's not a real thing — it's made up; fabricated for reasons of industry and commerce and capital. So in light of that, what is racism? Racism comes because we have identified or decided or someone has decided that there are races and that there are differences among them.

**Sharon Elise:** [00:04:33] Well, in looking at what is racism we need to center in that discussion white supremacy. Because in short racism is the maintenance and reproduction of white supremacy. Thus, our racism in the U.S. is white racism, no matter who practices it because it is a system in practice that blends and maintains white supremacy. It should be understood as systemic. So it's not simply racist individuals and their bigoted attitudes and actions. It is also an enduring part of U.S. society, as we're a society that has been and continues to be shaped by race and racism. Now, as a system, racism operates on many levels. We know from the stories of those who experience racism. That it is an everyday experience. We know from the statistics on race throughout our social institutions that racism permeates every aspect of society our economy. Who has poverty? Who has the best paid and most prestigious positions and who works on the floor of society our educational systems? Who runs them? Who predominates among the top echelons of the faculty? Who is associated with the most and least prestigious of our institutions? Who benefits most from education? Our media. Who's associated with leading roles? Who is the protagonist? Who's pictured as the enemy? Who gets killed off early in the plot? Who is awarded for their performances? Who is vilified in the media? Our criminal justice system — who is locked up? Who are the judges and prosecutors and juries and wardens that sustain the system and so forth? So racism is institutionalized. It is also part of our everyday social interactions.

**Sharon:** [00:06:30] Whether these reveal notions of colorblind racism or the continuance of hard core Jim Crow, it is cemented in our ideologies like the notion that we are a meritocratic society so we earn our social positions through our hard work and ability. Therefore those at the bottom must deserve their lonely place. We carry it with us.

**Sharon:** [00:06:53] It is our heritage, our daily practices, our culture, our way of knowing.

**Audrena:** [00:06:59] And it's invisible to the majority of Americans for the most part, because they benefit from things that just happened for them. Take redlining as an example. I may have earned a good living and I would like to purchase a house. But I was forbidden from purchasing houses in certain areas and because of the real estate industry the houses over here are worth more than the houses over here.

**Sharon:** [00:07:28] And that gets obscured through ideas like nice white neighborhood being cemented together as if those are just naturally occurring and that those were not structured by the government itself.

**Audrena:** [00:07:43] Right. And I think that's an example of systemic racism for sure, as we always wonder well how do we get ghettos? And why do people live like that? And why can't those people get along? And why are the schools so bad? And all of those questions, not thinking that this has been produced for us.

**Sharon:** [00:08:02] Right, and that the flow of resources is dictated by race.

**Audrena:** [00:08:07] Yes. Yes. Yes. So given that and given that America and that we have a systemic race problem and we haven't had a Truth and Reconciliation series of hearings yet in this country to bring more of this out in the open light, why do you think why has CFA chosen to intentionally focus on Anti-racism? It's hard. People we have run from it in American history for a long time and we're still running even in this current climate. So why do we take this on?

**Sharon:** [00:08:41] Well certainly it runs against the grain of dominant cultural practice. But given that we have come to understand racism as systemic and understand that it may operate in very covert and coded ways when it's institutionalized in our everyday lives and organizations, we understand in CFA that if we are not purposeful in investigating how racism is implicated in our daily practices, in our work culture, in our interactions, then we cannot interrupt it. So if we want to end racism, we have to notice the race and how it plays out or racism will continue unabated.

**Audrena:** [00:09:26] I think that is champion of CFA to take that on. How does this affect you — this work that we've taken on and you're a faculty member of color. How does this affect you, CFA's Anti-Racism effort?

**Sharon:** [00:09:42] Well, I have to say I've had a very long history at CFA because when I entered the professoriate and the CSU there was no question that one of the things that attracted me to the CSU was that the faculty had unionized. However, when I walked into CFA it was a wall of senior white men and their cultural practice, their notion of the professoriate, and their notion of the issues of faculty did not reflect my experience at all. So when CFA develops an Anti-Racism effort it means that they have heard our voices when we have said we are having experiences that you don't see, that you don't know. That as our union, you are not able to engage in advocacy for us because you're unaware of our experiences as faculty of color here. And to see CFA adopt this stance means that they are going to be advocates for faculty of color and that means that they will better serve the people of California.

**Audrena:** [00:10:59] So you know piggybacking on that, as a CFA member, you just said to other folks who are members who might be listening, What this means for you. What do you think others can expect more fully to come from the Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation of the California Faculty Association. Where ultimately would you like to see this go?

**Sharon:** [00:11:26] Well we need to accept that this means we are going to be changed. We can't be un-impacted by this because we need to be impacted by this effort because it will allow us to better serve our students, which means to better serve the people of California. We are public servants and I feel this very passionately. As a longtime Californian born here, lots of my family educated in public institutions, we are the face of California. Now, people of color and we have this everyday experience of racism. We come from histories of genocide, slavery, conquest, and though people may think of these as in the past their residue continues to today. So we continue to experience these everyday instances of racism in our social interactions in how people view our capacity. So when people haven't addressed the ways that this culture and our socialization with them impact us, then we cannot properly serve students who are having these experiences. And I know, even from some of my white colleagues, that they walk into a classroom now and face a class of predominantly students of color. They want to know what their pedagogy should be and they realize that it needs to change, and that they need to know what the experiences are; that these students are having—what they're bringing into the class with them, how we can be enriched by that. This is not just a question of us helping others, but it's that these are proud stories and rich cultures that are really going to make us so much better at what we do and our understanding of humanity and of our capacity. So it's really, I think, a beautiful day. And California is going to be in the forefront of this because of CFA.

**Audrena:** [00:13:45] I couldn't agree more thoughtfulness in this, and the ongoing and growing intention with regard to this Anti-Racism and Social Justice work that we're engaged in. So, dear listeners, we thank you for tuning in. I'm Audrena Redmond, your host for this show. That's the end of our podcast for today. But do join us again for more conversations discussing the 10 Guiding Principles of CFA's Anti-Racism and Social Justice Transformation.

[00:14:21] Remember, transformation is an action verb meaning "a thorough or dramatic change in form or experience." For Radio Free CSU, thank you Sharon Elise, Sociology Professor at Cal State San Marcos. And I'm your host Audrena Redmond.