



Stronger Together: Episode 6

Audrena Redmond: Hello and welcome to Radio Free CSU the official podcast of the California Faculty Association. My name is Audrena 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 will discuss one of our 10 Guiding Principles with CFA leader activists. Our hope is that you too will be inspired to engage in an anti-racism and social justice work and join us again for more conversations about why an anti-racism social justice transformation is necessary.

Audrena Redmond: I'm joined today by Darel Engen, a Professor of History and Chapter President of the California Faculty Association at Cal State San Marcos. Welcome Darel.

Darel Engen: Hi.

Audrena Redmond: So Dr. Engen and I will be discussing the sixth of 10 CFA Anti-Racism and Social Justice principles and that principle reads "We adopt changes in organizational values policies and practices consistent with principles of anti-racism and social justice." So listeners: what does all of that mean? We're going to talk about that.

Audrena Redmond: Darel, let me ask you — what are some of the values policies and practices CFA has embraced as part of his anti-racism social justice transformation?

Darel Engen: Well that's a good question. I think we can start from the very beginning with changes to our bylaws concerning the mission statement and the mission of CFA. We included anti-racism and social justice transformation in our bylaws as part of our mission to really codify that. To make sure it was front and center and that so in everything we do, we have due consideration for. That's at the core of what we do. We also changed our structure to divide what was the Council for Affirmative Action, which had simply one representative for the entire state of California. But we've now expanded that and divided into north and south. So we have two Associate Vice Presidents for Affirmative Action. We've also instituted anti-racism training among our members both at the leadership levels and are taking it out to the campuses with the Unconscious Bias Workshops, as well as our new Interrupting Racism Workshop, which is a sort of phase two to that. So those are some of the things we've done organizationally. We've also just, in terms of our day to day practices, have made some changes as well. So for example the when before any meeting before anything we do we ground in; we think about what it is we're doing and we do that with an awareness of these principles of anti-racism and social justice. Just to give one example, we always acknowledge the Native lands that we're on. Again, if these things aren't made explicit they're not discussed.

Darel Engen: And you know, we might know them somewhere in the background, but they don't really inform what we do when you kind of keep them in the background.

Darel Engen: You have to put them at the forefront. And so we also have to encourage a policy of stepping up and stepping back so that people in conversations and discussions at our meetings know that they are welcome to speak up. But at the same time know that hey sometimes you have to step back and let others speak to because you know there's a history of that too some people seem to get to say more than others and get heard more than others. So we've made that a big part of what we do and encourage it in all of our meetings all of our gatherings. We've tried doing some of these things within the contract as well. One really good example of that is the assigned time for exceptional service. And this was aimed primarily at the issue of cultural taxation where faculty of color, or who are LGBTQ or have a disability. Our students from various groups, they will, you know, naturally go to faculty who they think can understand their issues. And so especially with the growing diversity of the CSU, those faculty have a great deal more work to do in addressing those concerns of our more diverse student body and some of them just have lines outside of their office doors and they're doing a lot more work to deal with this situation and that needs to be recognized. They need to be compensated in some way and hence that is the point of the assigned time for exceptional service. I believe it's Article 20.37 in the contract.

Darel Engen: So that's important and I also want to point out one thing we did was to study the demographic changes in the CSU of our student body in terms of how we've been funded over the years and we came up with this study "Equity Interrupted." Which is so important and it shows you know in clear terms that as our student body became more diverse the funding decreased. As one faculty member put it "as the student body got darker the funding got lighter." I know some will say "Yeah but there's not necessarily a cause and effect relationship behind that or it wasn't intentional." There's other factors that might well be the case. But the thing is about racism—intent is a relatively minor issue compared to the consequences. And the fact of the matter is our more diverse student body is being funded at a rate, I think it's 40 percent, less than when a less diverse student body was funded in 1985. The consequences are real regardless of intent. And that spells bad news for our students and bad news for our communities bad news for a country. That's not good at all. So those are just some examples I think of how we've changed our structure within the CFA. How in our daily practices we do things and in the policies that we try again. If I can say one more thing about that, "Equity Interrupted" was really important in terms of our budget. So with that data, with that study, we were able to get our state legislators to see that we're really shortchanging our students.

Audrena Redmond: And shortchanging California.

Darel Engen: Yeah exactly right. Because this this has a ripple effect out to the rest of California and that that was an argument that got them to increase that last budget, well over what the governor was going to give us originally. So these things have real effects what we're doing.

Audrena Redmond: But why is it necessary? Why was it necessary to change the values, policies, and practices of it in all respects is a very strong little union. Once upon a time CFA referred to itself as 'The Little Engine That Could'. Which meant it had some power. So why was this necessary?

Darel Engen: That's a great question. You know to begin with, the labor unions are devoted to social justice in terms of labor, right, in terms of you know our workers being compensated fairly for the work they do. Are they given a workload that's appropriate and reasonable, are they able to perform their jobs this profession that they do in our case it's education to the best of our abilities. Are we given conditions that allow us to do that. So we were all always devoted to social justice. Those are all justice issues. However, clearly racism is an issue worldwide but we've seen it so much lately again in our own country. Racism is a social justice issue. And these two things are closely connected. We can't we can't deal with the social justice issues involving labor without also considering race is just a key component in that. And you know I might be jumping ahead to some

things you want to talk about later but it's pretty clear that when it comes to exploitation of labor. Race has been a tool that has facilitated that for those who apparently don't care as much about social justice as we do because of all the the workers the laborers got together and you know using the power of collective bargaining to get fair wages to get fair working conditions. If they all got together to do that we should win the right to we have the numbers. But one of the things that's held us back is the fact that those who don't want us to get fair wages and have reasonable working decisions and want to exploit us they they try to divide us. And the way that they've been able to do that for so much of our country's history is through race by dividing people along racial lines.

Darel Engen: They somehow convince people in one group you know that people in another group even though they are of the same class even though they're doing the same kind of work. That somehow one is more deserving of things than others and that there are actually it's some kind of zero sum game where only one group can have it and if you give it to the other group than you then your group is not going to get it. Or there's something wrong with the other group and therefore they really don't deserve to have all that you have or they a threat to you somehow. And so that that has been used time and again. I'm a history professor as you noted. Time and again in history for people in power to keep others down and exploit them. And so we need to get better informed ourselves and we need to inform others as well that this has been going on and this is why we need to do this as a union. I can speak more to that if you want me to. Well I'm thinking in terms of you know our union it's not just any labor union. This concerns all labor unions all working people and you people who aren't in unions they should be concerned about these things too and maybe consider unionizing if they're not already.

Darel Engen: Yes but as but as educators of all people, of all working people this should be the greatest concern to us because you know we we have an impact on so many more people than just ourselves who are in this union. We teach, you know, the people of the state of California the Cal State University system is the People's University system and if we are not informed ourselves about these things how can we get our students to understand these things.

Darel Engen: And if they don't, then that just perpetuates a system of inequity of unfairness of injustice.

Audrena Redmond: And so the values and practices we undertook are, how influenced are they by outside influences? Of social political climate in America and globally? I mean you know some people like to think of a university campus as living in its own bubble right. And so and immune from the outside world there are folks who think of education as a very sterile project. You come in you learn economics, you learn the history, you learn computer science, but that doesn't necessarily relate outside the bubble or the bubble doesn't permeate through concrete lessons that need to be learned. So how much of this is it and what we're doing is influenced by outside or is it?

Darel Engen: Oh it did totally. To use my Southern California speak totally is. You know it's a pet peeve of mine when people talk about academia not being the real world. It is the real world— it's just part of the real world and it's unique in many ways but it is not in a bubble it is very much affected by what goes on outside it.

Darel Engen: And I can talk about that just three areas that come to mind immediately are the current political situation in our country.

Darel Engen: So remind me to get back to that if I forget. Also also the demographics of our students. You know the demographics of our country has changed. We have a much more diverse population of students in the CSU than before and certainly more than many other universities, private universities, or even the UCs and that affects, you know, what the issues are on this campus

and what we should be teaching and what our students want to know.

Darel Engen: And then I mean we have students, you know, with what's going on right now with undocumented pupils in our country quite a few of our students are undocumented. And these are many of them have lived in this country most of their lives if not almost all of their lives born here when they were brought here when they were infants.

Darel Engen: And so we have to address these things these issues are important to them and we need to educate them.

Darel Engen: But when they're undocumented students in particular are worried about their own safety and whether they'll be able to stay in this country or get arrested the next day or when members of their family have been deported. I mean these are issues we as faculty have to be aware of. We can't just teach our students as if they're just you know numbers on a page and a grade book or something. They're people.

Darel Engen: And we have to take that into consideration, both in terms of of how we teach and what we teach, but also in terms of their ability to learn what we teach.

Audrena Redmond: To receive the information because of their own life stress.

Darel Engen: Exactly.

Audrena Redmond: Even beyond students who are immigrants or of immigrant families, there are folks with disabilities, there's LGBT community, and there are different people of color from around the globe who are on our campuses and experiencing levels of anxiety and not just students because quite frankly this is faculty too.

Darel Engen: Yes yes it is. Right.

Audrena Redmond: And staff on our university campuses who are very much affected by the erosion of safeguards that even fought for hard fought for and are in place.

Darel Engen: Exactly yes. With a much more diverse student body, in all those ways you mentioned — race, gender, sexual preference, disability, et cetera, and all these different ways that affects us that affects how we teach what we teach.

Darel Engen: Their perspectives in terms of what's important to them. You know the traditional subjects they still have their place but there are new issues that we have to teach about too. And as educators we need to adapt to that to give students things that are relevant to their lives and into our current affairs of our country and the world.

Audrena Redmond: So that sounds like you know the classroom is one place but there's also and we've already we know we're talking about the way CFA has adjusted its values and his policies and practice around anti-racism and social justice. But there's also campus life beyond the classroom.

Darel Engen: That's right.

Audrena Redmond: There are policies in place, there are values in place on campus, there are practices in place on campus that affect our university community and the broader society. So with that in mind, what what can our members expect to come out and see if these anti-racism and social justice transformation? What do what do these things really look like in action? And you know will

CFA be a stronger union for engaging in this?

Darel Engen: Well yeah. Well that's a number of things. And I and it reminds me that I didn't get back to that first thing about the current political climate for first. I mean I don't have to name names. I don't have to get into details but I think everybody's aware that that's that there is a tension in our country right now that we haven't seen in a while you know some battles that we thought were already fought and won, you know, in terms of social justice issues somehow apparently they weren't won and they're coming back again and there's a lot of debate about these things and unfortunately also a lot of violence as we've seen. And how can that not affect what's going on on campus and how can then what we do on campus not that have a ripple effect back out into the community.

Darel Engen: So your next question about you know how what CFA is doing with our anti-racism and social justice transformation how that affects what we do than our membership or our faculty. I mean I can tell you personally, just in my in my own teaching, I have become much more aware thanks to the training I've received from CFA some of the workshops I've attended. Just to make these issues more a part of what I talk about history. I mean, I teach ancient history I'm talking about ancient Greece and ancient Rome Egypt. Places like that and you'd think that "oh well who cares. What does that have to do with today or everything?" Are these issues you know of anti-racism, what do these have to do with ancient Greece and Rome? But they do. You can see, you know, where race plays a role in some of those issues. I mean I talk about for example the Roman Empire. It was a multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural big empire. As a historian, I wouldn't want to oversimplify things and talk about you know need nice you know parallels between then and now. But there are certainly areas where you can learn some things about how the Romans handled this, what were their attitudes towards race for example, and compare them to ours.

Audrena Redmond: Race or ethnicity?

Darel Engen: Well and that's the thing they had a different view. They talked about it in terms of ethnicity, different nations and so forth. But it was a different view. For example, they were dependent on slavery for much of Roman history. And yet they didn't single out an ethnic group or a racial group for slavery like we did in the United States and I've often wondered why that is for them. Anybody could be enslaved. They found no reason to say that a person had to be in some way inferior or something like that to justify their enslavement their different values about that. They figured anybody can be enslaved it's just luck that you get conquered in a battle and you get captured that's too bad for you. Somehow in the United States, we got this idea that one group is the slave group. I know American historians, colonial historians, maybe they know the answers to how and why that happened but this is the kind of stuff we need to teach so people understand that you know these injustices and races these are these are social constructions that people chose to do as a society and it's served apparently some people more than others. That's why they did it. Those people in power and they gradually over time the last set of institutions that created these inequities. And they're still with us today we are still trying to overcome these things. But most people don't know anything about that. They have no idea.

Darel Engen: They just think the way things are naturally the way they are.

Audrena Redmond: So dreaming because that's part of what this work is. You can't get to a place if you're not dreaming about what that place is. What do our members or what can our members expect. If you were to say to our members where are we going with this. What would you say?

Darel Engen: Well internally with CFA I would think we would have a more powerful union, a more effective union, if you just want to talk about it in practical terms. We are more than just a

union but also a more powerful and more effective union because union power all comes through unity. It's the power of numbers and excluding anybody, that's counterproductive.

Audrena Redmond: But we the people can be included. We have affirmative action, we have diversity programs and there's representation. But that doesn't mean inclusion. That doesn't mean that there's voice.

Darel Engen: Yeah representation. You know to put it bluntly, tokenism. I mean that doesn't, that doesn't cut it because racism is about power. And just you know just to be represented is not the same thing as having really any real power. And I mean that and I think we've seen that in our own union. We do a pretty good job of representation our board you know is a very diverse body. But that doesn't mean that everybody has equal say on that board it doesn't mean that decisions are being made with all voices considered. And that's something we've really tried to to do. I mean it's obviously it's solving these things overnight it's not going to happen. It's a process right. But we've started that process by encouraging, by embracing, the idea that people can speak up. That we shouldn't keep silent if we perceive something that's not right. That there's an inequity, that there is something that was offensive or that people should call it out should speak up.

Audrena Redmond: And that has happened.

Darel Engen: That has happened, definitely, that there is that culture that is building in our union. I see that and and in fact and we're trying to spread that out beyond just you know within the confines of our union meetings and so forth and our leadership out to that to our membership as a whole through these workshops. We had the Unconscious Bias Workshop, which is still going strong but now we have the phase two. The interrupting racism which is designed particularly to bring these things up to the to the surface, as a way to get people able to to have these difficult conversations, to find productive ways of calling these things out. Rather than either not saying anything and having all these tensions under the surface or unproductive callouts, which make people get defensive or arguing in another way a way that we say that is is we're calling in the elephant we're acknowledging that the elephant is here.

Audrena Redmond: And let's talk about that in a loving way rather than condemning.

Darel Engen: Right exactly. Knowing that we're all in this together we have shared interests in this union, as union members, as educators, as citizens of the world. To do this it's in our interests.

Audrena Redmond: So that's the work that we're doing. And a lot of these changes took place at the broader organizational level, so that the elected officers and the Assembly. How does that translate down to the 23 campuses and our 28,000 members? How do they know that this is happened? How are they feeling that this is happening? Who are these people doing the work?

Darel Engen: There is an organization, the union right. And it has it's you know it's Chapter representation. We have our chapter board members and chapter presidents. And they are on the campus level. They put on events. They put on workshops.

Darel Engen: And so through that means, alone, you're already starting to filter out to the rest of the faculty and those who do the workshops those who come to the events. It is the hope is that they they take these things to heart and they employ it in their own lives, in their own careers, and how they teach and the research they do and so forth. But then they also, you know, talk to other faculty members about this too in their department meetings or an academic senate meeting or some committee. They've learned, for example, from doing the Interrupting Racism workshop on how to use this thing calling out the elephant. And and if something is said or done that doesn't seem, you

know, quite equitable or you know perhaps even racist that there's a productive way of addressing that. And so that you know hopefully again people would become more enlightened about these things and through those means these things filter out farther and farther. So that's just among the faculty. But then we hope to you know broaden it as a whole. I think it's happening and it will continue to happen with our students right.

Darel Engen: When we when we take that consciousness that we've had from the trainings from this commitment to education and social justice transformation we take that into our classrooms. It filters out not just on our campuses our students but they take it out in the communities.

Audrena Redmond: This is creating a lens.

Darel Engen: Exactly.

Audrena Redmond: I'm not afraid of it anymore because I've had dialogue about this and it's OK to talk about it. It's OK to acknowledge what it is. Because if we don't acknowledge it, we can't change it.

Darel Engen: That's right. And you know in the classroom you talk about some of the issues, you can have some real intense discussions and people can sometimes say offensive things. So we as faculty we need to know how to deal with. We need to know how to make those conversations constructive and so what CFA is doing is geared in part towards that very thing. And so hopefully our students get something out of it and they take it with them into their careers, to their families, to their communities. And you get this sort of ripple effect on out. That's the plan.

Audrena Redmond: Yeah from top to bottom and from bottom to top.

Darel Engen: And it's from bottom to top because one of the reasons we're doing this because we're being informed by these changes. By our changing student demographics, by what's going on outside the political world and so forth. You know, so it's brought to us when we have, you know, I've had this happen in my own classes, Sometimes there are some uncomfortable discussions where I felt, a few years ago, that I really didn't know what to do. How do I handle this? So that's what informed us as a union to impart them among so many other things to do this kind of work so that we are prepared for those things. So it is bottom up as well as top down. It's a circle really.

Audrena Redmond: Thank you Darel. Dr. Darel Engen is a Professor at Cal State University San Marcos, Chapter President of the CFA chapter at San Marcos. 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. Remember, transformation is an action verb, meaning "a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance." For Radio Free CSU, I'm Audrena Redmond.