

Mediators Target Hot Spots

They let angry voices cry out, calm the rage

BY DON LATTIN
CHRONICLE RELIGION WRITER

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They've locked themselves in rooms with Arabs and Jews in Israel, with warring factions in South Africa.

Last weekend, on the way to Moscow, they stopped in Oakland.

It had not been a good month in Oakland. The murder rate was rising in the black community. A white cop confessed that he strangled his wife and tried to frame the city's street gangs by writing "WAR" on the side of her car. White residents of the Oakland hills threatened to secede from the city and create their own town of "Tuscany."

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Arny Mindell started the fireworks by confessing he was among those who have been "unconsciously racist by using his white privilege." That wasn't enough for several of the black members of the audience.

"Don't just acknowledge that you have privilege," replied one black woman. "What are you white men going to do about it?"

When a white man stepped forward and said, "I'm not ready to give up my privilege," Heru-Nefera Amen, who is black, decided he'd heard enough.

"Now we've got a conflict," said Amen, youth program director with the Oakland Men's Project. "You got the privilege. Give it up! Give it up! Give it up, now!"

"How do we give it up?"
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BY MITCH CLOGG/SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE
Jean Gilbert-Tucker (left) talks with mediators Amy and Arny Mindell in Oakland. Their approach 'is the first kind of psychology I've seen that is truly cross-cultural,' Gilbert-Tucker says.

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MINDELL

San Francisco Chronicle

PEOPLE Starting A Healing 'Process'

Controlled conflict
spurs dialogue

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"You figure it out," Amen replied.

Then Spencer Hahn, who is white, decided he'd heard enough. Hahn stepped forward for a face-off.

Hahn, bearded with long brown hair, was wearing a Hawaiian shirt, shorts and sandals. Amen, with thin mustache and close-cropped hair, was wearing a bright African shirt, blue jeans and white sneakers. Anger burned from both faces, six inches apart.

"When you talk like that, I don't want to deal with you. I want to head back to Marin County, rather than try to build a bridge to you."

"That's bull---," Amen yelled.

Hahn explained that he taught high school in San Francisco, and kept seeing bright black kids getting into trouble and expelled.

"I don't know how to work in black culture," he said.

Amen said Hahn's story "sounds too pat," and declared an impasse.

Text from the above article;
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Chronicle Religion Writer

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"I don't feel we're at an impasse," Hahn said. "We have locked horns. I need to stay locked with you and feel safe doing that."

"This is *not* a safe place for you," said Amen, rising onto his toes. "It's not important for me that you trust me. I'm not going to be responsible for your process of change. When you get there, we'll still be here!"

"If you want to communicate," said Hahn, his voice rising for the first time, "you have to stop yelling at me!"

Replied Amen: "This is how I communicate!"

"If you want to make change that way," Hahn said, "you're going to get your ass kicked."

Building R exploded into a chorus of shouts, stomps and waving arms.

"Now we get down to the root of it," Amen screamed over the ruckus. "You're doing the same thing the white man always does — just like those white cops who beat up Rodney King."

Mindell struggled to regain control, reminding everyone that physical violence was not allowed. "It's hard to hear people who are angry and hurt," said Mindell. "But we have to do it."

A Catharsis

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— ARNY MINDELL

Hahn and Amen retreated from the center of the room. Another black man took their place, saying he just couldn't take it anymore. "Accept our rage. Accept our anger, but don't forget to love," he pleaded. "This is not black pain or white pain. This is our pain. This is my pain. As long as anyone is hurting, I am hurting."

And then he began to wail so loud and so long that no one could argue anymore. Another man went to console him, then another, and another, and within a few minutes, Building R melted into one giant, wailing, hugging mass of black and white humanity.

They call it "process work."

Arny Mindell, founder of the Institute for Process-Oriented Psychology in Portland, said most schools of psychology and New Age spirituality "don't want to deal with people in the middle of a raging conversation, people who are ready to pull out knives and kill each other."

"Process work is based on the perception that what you are experiencing is real. When people get angry, we don't criticize them for it." Using role-playing exercises, body awareness and other techniques, Mindell tries to intensify the conflict under controlled situations — hoping that through some cathartic process, conflict will reconcile itself.

"Nobody understands conflict and tension as much as those people who are sitting in the middle of it at any given moment," said Mindell, whose latest book is "The Leader as Martial Artist: Techniques and Strategies for Resolving Conflict and Creating Community."

Jean Gilbert-Tucker, a black woman who worked for 16 years as a psychiatric nurse in public hospitals, organized the Oakland gathering as a way to get leaders in the black community to learn process work.

Cross-Cultural Psychology

"This is the first kind of psychology I've seen that is truly cross-cultural," she said. "Most psychology doesn't allow for ethnic differences. It evaluates people by white, American, middle-class standards. Arny doesn't come in like some holy man with all the answers, but as a motivator to uncover and develop leadership potential in the community."

Amen, whose Oakland project runs workshops on racism, sexism and other topics, credited Gilbert-Tucker for the large number of black people at Mindell's workshop.

"Having an African-American woman leading this made it safe for us to come," he said. "When you share power with someone, it gives them a voice, and you get a chance to hear what they have to say. Maybe that, in itself, is the lesson from this workshop."

