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FROM THE PRESIDENT—

Carolyn F. Swift,
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Photo by Alex Lowy

As I'm writing this column in the fall of 2006, I'm remembering this time a year ago. Our members in the U.S. were still reeling from the impact of Hurricane Katrina—not only for the lives lost, the families disrupted, the homes, schools and infrastructure destroyed—but for our own lack of preparedness to mount a concerted community psychology response to assist our sisters and brothers in New Orleans, LA, in their efforts to persevere and recover.

With that time in mind, I am pleased to describe below how some of our members have taken that disaster as an opportunity to develop comprehensive community plans to deal with disasters in general, natural or man-made. If their efforts are successful, in a few years SCRA will have in place plans to reduce the disaster-related incidence of destruction, loss of life and trauma, to maintain the integrity of families and neighborhood communities, and to reduce the time and energy required for communities to recover following disasters.

In this column, I also share a complaint from one of our senior members that has resulted in an experimental fee category for seniors. Finally, SCRA is systematically transferring membership data from hard copy to electronic records, and switching from U.S. postal services to SCRA's website and email listservs to communicate with members. These changes are part of our organization's ongoing push to bring SCRA into the 21st century in communications technology.

SCRA's Response to Katrina

After Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast and decimated New Orleans, our SCRA listserv was filled with emails expressing the shock and grief of our members at the human suffering and loss of life, and their overwhelming drive to do something to help. Like many divisions, we eliminated the annual

CONTENTS

Columns

- 1 President's, by Carolyn F. Swift
- 5 Editor's, by Elizabeth Thomas
- 6 *New!* Children, Youth, & Families, edited by Richard N. Roberts
- 11 Community Action Research Centers Network, edited by Chris Keys, Bob Newbrough, Bradley Olson, & Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar
- 15 Cultural and Racial Affairs, edited by Pamela P. Martin
- 17 Disabilities Action, edited by Fabricio Balcazar
- 20 Education Connection, edited by Jim Dalton & Maurice Elias
- 20 Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender, edited by Cathy Chovan & Peter Ji
- 21 Living Community Psychology, edited by Gloria Levin
- 24 Prevention & Promotion, edited by Monica Adams & Derek Griffith
- 28 Regional, edited by Gary Harper
- 31 *New!* Rural Issues, edited by Cécile Lardon
- 32 School Intervention, edited by Susana Helm & Jane Shepard
- 34 Student Issues, edited by Michael Armstrong & Marco A. Hidalgo
- 36 Women's Issues, edited by Nicole Allen & Christina Ayala-Alcanta

SPECIAL FEATURES—

Pullout Section

A Compendium of Graduate Training in Community Research and Action

compiled by Kelly L. Hazel
& the SCRA Council of Education Programs,
Greg Miessen, Chair

New Columns

Children, Youth, & Families

edited by Richard N. Roberts

"Families, Children, and Youth in the Context of Community Psychology"

Rural Issues

edited by Cécile Lardon

"Reviving the Rural Community Psychology Interest Group"

contents continued on page two ↪

CULTURAL AND RACIAL AFFAIRS—

Edited by Pamela P. Martin

Ethnic Diversity in Religious Practices: The Call of Community Psychology for Exploring the Intersections of Faith and Race

~Pamela P. Martin, North Carolina State University & LaTrese Adkins, Southern Methodist University

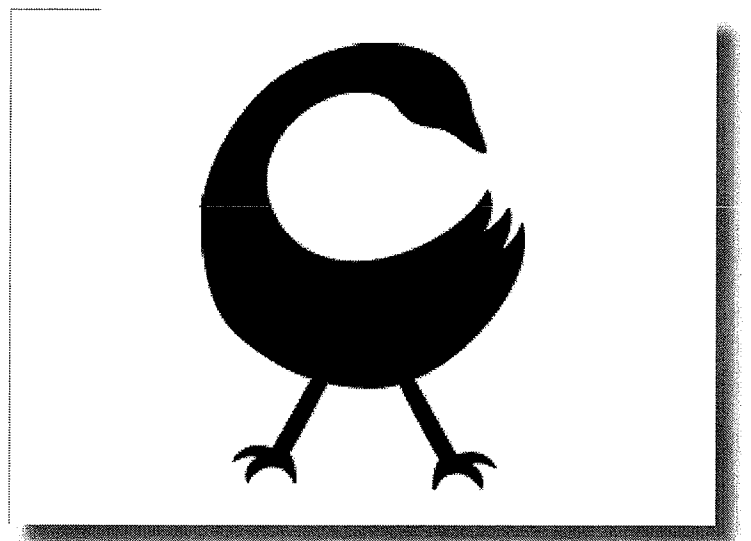
More than one aspiring young black Christian has been prompted to ask: Reverend, if we are made in the image of God, and if Jesus Christ is the son of God, why is it that all the pictures of Jesus in our church show him as a white man? (Billingsley, 1999, p. 170)

Pargament and Maton (2000) contend that community psychologists have to investigate the importance of religion in the United States. The Committee on Cultural and Racial Affairs (CCRA) concurs, recognizing that religion, a multidimensional phenomenon, permeates cultural, political, educational, and familial contexts. In particular, data from national surveys report that eighty-seven percent of the U.S. adult population believes that religion is a very or fairly important part of their lives, and eighty-one percent of the U.S. adult population belong to a religious group (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001; Storrs, 2002). Among youth in the United States, ninety-five percent of the U.S. adolescent population report they believe in God, and ninety-three percent of the U.S. adolescent population are affiliated with a religious group (Benson & Donahue, 1989; Gallup & Bezilla, 1992). In addition, research on religion reveals that individuals utilize their faith as a coping resource to tackle many daily stressors, while other studies reveal that religion is related to positive outcomes (Brega & Coleman, 1999; Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison, 1991; Ellison, 1993; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2003).

Although these studies significantly contribute to the research on U.S. religious behaviors in diverse contexts across time and place, theology itself has not been explored as a factor which directly or indirectly affects ethnic/racial identity (i.e., the degree to which an individual acknowledges, understands, and identifies with being apart of an ethnic/racial group). Particularly, theology comprises the guiding principles or foundations of religious teachings as well as religious behaviors experienced by individuals practicing their faith. The transactional relationships between the religious organizations that generate theology and individual recipients provide opportunities for community psychologists to investigate or

question the intersections of race/ethnicity and faith. However, when researchers marginalize theological orientations in their explorations of religious behaviors, they risk overlooking core principles of community psychology such as social justice, sense of community and human diversity. Yet, in moving beyond traditional descriptors of religious organizations like denomination or church size, community psychologists will need to analyze theological orientations in order to uncover more interesting person-environmental fit issues. Consequently, researchers must begin to address questions of how theological orientations (as an organizational characteristic) instill values about race/ethnicity.

The African American Faith Communities Project (AAFCCP), consisting of psychologists, historians, and seminarians, uses a multidisciplinary approach to investigate the influence of religion on the developmental phases in African American life. As a result of such scholarly collaboration, this multidisciplinary research reflects a continuum between the historical and contemporary religious behaviors among African Americans, specifically clarifying the affective resilience of religious faith. Perhaps the most symbolic representation of this methodological approach is the Sankofa, a West African Adinka sym-



bol underscoring the significance of looking back in an effort to move forward. In contrast, most research in community psychology commonly presumes only a contemporary emphasis when investigating social challenges. For that reason, the AAFCCP intentionally adopts a historical focus for understanding the role of religion in racial identity formation among Black communities across three time periods, i.e., the slavery, segregation and post-Civil Rights periods. For example, AAFCCP research incorporates the religious messages of enslaved preachers. In so doing, the AAFCCP connects the earliest evidence of racial identity development formation found in enslaved communities to contemporary racial identity models.

Beyond affirming the value of a multidisciplinary perspective, the AAFCP concomitantly calls for shifting research impetus in studying religion. Conventionally, research on religion has focused on religiosity or religious involvement. Beyond religiosity, the AAFCP also examines theological orientations to explore context. Specifically, this investigation assesses the relationship between theology and individual variables such as racial identity, racial socialization, and psychological well-being. Like Pargament and Maton (2000), the AACFP's researchers assert that community psychology principles can elucidate precise contexts that influence particular behaviors of congregation members.

Summarily, upcoming articles in *TCP* will present research highlighting relationships between specific community psychology principles, ethnic diversity and religious faith. In the forthcoming issues, community psychologists are presented with the following questions: (1) how do theological orientations influence political participation among diverse ethnic groups? (2) how do non-Protestant faith (e.g., Buddhism, Santeria, etc.) teachings and subsequent religious behaviors reveal human diversity and promote ethnic/racial identity? and (3) how does the diversity of community activism within Islam inform community psychologists' most innovative research regarding the intersections of religious faith and ethnic/racial identity? The answers to the above questions and many more can educate community psychologists about the complexities in conducting research beyond religiosity. This new knowledge will elucidate the relationship between race/ethnicity and religious practices. Researchers should focus on covert and overt religious symbols and messages imparted at places of worship. These religious symbols and messages facilitate the indoctrination of theological orientations. Theology transmits ethnic/racial and cultural values through the Sunday school literature, sermons, and community outreach efforts (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Thus, referring back to the little boy's question about the image of Jesus signifies the importance of theological orientations in explaining the intersection of race/ethnicity and religion. ■

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