

Confronting Racism

This is the first monthly column generated by the Confronting Racism Task Force. We hope these writings will help raise our level of awareness, and generate positive actions to challenge racism in ourselves and in our country.

PES member **Linda Richardson** writes: For more than a year, the Ethical Action Committee and the Subcommittee on Racism have developed discussions on race and forged the congregational response to Black Lives Matter.

I have been a member of the Ethical Society for a few years and have had a long-term relationship with the Ethical Society since my parents joined in the early 1960's. I got married in the society and my oldest daughter had her naming ceremony at the society. As new members then, there were three active African American Families, plus individual members. Those families such as the Lemons, the Waters and a single parent Lois Kucksinovitch had children in the Sunday School.

Our relationship with racism in the Ethical Society was both individual and programmatic. Once, a member asked my mother if she could hire her to sew her clothes, not knowing that my Mother was a great seamstress, but assuming that that was what she did for a living as a Black Woman. My sisters and I would be asked if we knew people's maids or childcare workers, and once a member brought us a bag of her discarded second hand clothes. My mother with grace and dignity always responded to these individual experiences, although some of us older teenagers were both offended and outraged.

As we moved into the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Young Adult Group of the Ethical Society would have guest speakers and once invited members of the Black Panther Party to speak. My siblings and I were active members of the Young Adult Group and I was a co-chair of the group. The diversity of speakers on the platform then and now was minimal; however, the Black Panthers and their social service programs were of interest to us. We lived Ethical Values and felt that this was a legitimate issue for the youth. One of my brothers and his friend sold the Black Panther newspaper and, while not members, had extensive contacts with the party. We organized a meeting and invited the Panthers to speak. At the Board meeting, we reported out our plans and were met by the Board and membership with opposition. We were asked to disinvite our speakers and the Young Adult group waged an educational campaign to have our meeting. After getting the final decision to disinvite the group, many members of the Young Adult group including all of my siblings left the Ethical Society. Except for rare occasions, they have not been back.

During the years I was very active and served as Treasurer, very often if I made a statement or had an idea, it would be met with silence. A few minutes later another member would state the same thing and it would be very well received. I am not going to go into every little experience I have had, but wanted to give a personalized view of how others are viewed by many members.

Examining both individual and collective ways that racism affects us all is the first step in making our society a diverse community.