



Susan O'Halloran

DIVIDING LINES: THE EDUCATION OF A CHICAGO WHITE GIRL IN 10 ROUNDS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY SUE O'HALLORAN

INTRODUCTION - 1969

- Do you now or have you in your past dreamed of “changing things”?
- What groups have you joined to accomplish this goal?
- Do you think that the times you’ve grown up in have affected your thinking and your sense of purpose? How?
- In the area where you live is there a “burning” issue such as segregation? Is there something you’ve always wanted to make sense of?

ROUND 1 – 1964 - Us vs. Them

- What activities did your family take part in that brought you closer together?
- To what “us” (or us-es) were you told, verbally or non-verbally, you belonged?
- Who were the “them”(or them) when you were growing up?
- How did you make sense of racial dislike when you were younger?
- Were there areas of life where your community or family acted as though they were under attack?
- In what areas of life did/does your community or family take pride?

ROUND 2 – 1965 - Us

- What books have changed your consciousness around race?
- What did Sue mean when she said that learning about the “Jim Crow” South and the Civil Rights Movement turned her world “upside down”?
- Why might the woman in the book, Soul Sister, have been in “more danger” if she called the police when she was attacked? In what other ways are our experiences of America very different because of our different racial histories?
- What part has friendship played in your understanding or experience of race in America?

ROUND 3 – 1966 - Marching

- In Susan’s grandparents’ opinion, why were the Open Housing Marches being held?
- What effect does it have on children to be raised around a constant bombardment of racial prejudices? How might they view themselves, their loved ones and their world?
- What makes it difficult for families to talk about race?

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ROUND 4 - 1968 - Migration

- What difference has it made and does it make when students and adults speak out on current issues? How much power do young people have to “change the world”?
- What had Sue been led to believe were the causes of the increased Black population in Chicago? Why was Sue afraid to ask about it?
- What part does silence play in perpetuating ignorance?
- What misunderstandings have you had about race simply because no one talked about it?

ROUND 5 – 1969 - Drawing Lines

- Have you ever had a mentor (someone who explained things to you) or have you acted as a mentor for someone else?
- How do you suppose it happened that Susan was never taught about a time when Chicago had very little segregation?
- What was the source of some of Susan’s grandfather’s bitterness towards Black people?
- What choices confronted the city leaders after the 1919 race riot? What choices did they make? What were the consequences?
- What does it mean that segregation was “forced”?

ROUND 6 – 1969 remembering 1955

- When was the first time you met someone of another “race”? What effect did it have on you?
- What unspoken lessons around race have been transmitted to you?
- What does Sue mean when she says that it was “even more damaging” that she received a message from her mother that they and the place where they lived was “better”?
- How was Sue damaged by being taught that she, her family and her community were superior?

ROUND 7 – 1969 - Black Belt

- What was the effect of locating the “Black Belts” in the oldest, most overcrowded parts of town?
- Why were the landlords able to rent unlivable areas in their buildings (storage sheds, coal bins, etc.) and charge more for those places than White families had previously paid for whole apartments?
- Why did Nate and his family flee the public housing high rises? What were the causes of the increased poverty, crime and drugs? What part did the politicians and police play?
- What would true Open Housing have meant for Nate and his family?
- What did Nate mean by the statement that Black people had little “control” over the look of their neighborhood?
- How did the White women from Sue’s neighborhood view the Black people’s involvement? What do you think the neighbor ladies knew and what do you think they didn’t know?

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- What misunderstanding did Sue have about the Open Housing Marches? What missing pieces to the racial puzzle did Nate give Sue?

ROUND 8 – 1966 - Eclipse

- In your opinion, what effect does seeing constant images of violence in the media have on us?
- What did Sue mean by the observation that the Nazi Rally was “merely informational, as though all the persuading had already been done”?
- How do you think Sue felt being torn between her ideals (wanting everyone to love everyone) and her fears (if Open Housing worked, everyone in her neighborhood would be gone)? What did she mean when she said that she could feel the city’s dividing line tearing her in two?
- What difference do you think it would have made if Sue, at age sixteen, had known what she learned at age nineteen from Lee and Nate? What difference would it make today if we all knew about the history of forced segregation in our cities and the need for fair, open housing? Why is the silence of an eclipse “heavy” and “complete”?
- With more knowledge, how might the choice between Sue’s ideals and her fears have been resolved? How would Sue’s neighbors have benefited from Open Housing as well? Who gained from their unawareness of these benefits?

ROUND 9 – 1969 - Kicked

- Why was Sue reluctant to talk with Joseph about the Open Housing March in her neighborhood?
- Why did the mother react as she did to Joseph helping her daughter with her bike?
- Why did the Millers ask the girls to leave their two-flat? Why did they feel betrayed?

ROUND 10 – 1969 and today - Power

- What effect did it have that the HOLC (Home Owners’ Loan Corporation) “made up” a color-coded rating system to evaluate making loans in certain neighborhoods?
- How did the rating system give those with social and financial advantages an additional “leg up” for the next several decades?
- What were the consequences of not examining the causes of decay in certain neighborhoods?
- What purpose was served by the decision to build public housing towers in all-Black areas?
- Urban Renewal did “save” certain neighborhoods in Chicago (by preventing them from falling into abject poverty). However, what price did the citizens of Chicago pay then and now? What would have been a “win/win” alternative to pushing people out of their neighborhoods? Why weren’t those alternatives tried?
- What fight did Susan feel she had been fighting her “whole life”?



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- When Sue brings all the characters from her story together at the end, who or what is she saying put them into the ring to fight it out? What does she mean when she says that everyone is swinging at the “wrong people” and “playing the wrong game”?
- What does Sue mean by the statement that the boxing match and chess game have been a “strategic decision”?
- Who are your heroes? How do they inspire you? Who do you believe is making a difference?
- Sue mentions four areas in which we, as citizens can make a difference. What are they? (monitoring our financial institutions, our real estate boards and our zoning and political councils; and getting to know people throughout the city).
- Can you dream of a world beyond “us and them”? Do you believe and experience that we are one people and one family?
- What do you think the world (our daily interactions and our institutions) will look like when there is racial harmony?
- Imagine children in the next century. In what ways could their lives be much better than ours vis a vis living in diverse, vibrant, loving communities? What can we do to make that vision a reality? What one action would be meaningful and enjoyable to you?

RESOURCES

American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass by Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton – Harvard University Press

Black, White and Shades of Brown: Fair Housing and Economic Opportunity in the Chicago Region and *Here Comes the Neighborhood: Building a Diverse, Stable Community* Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities 312-341-5678

Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Do to Work for Racial Justice by Paul Kivel – New Society Publishers

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong by James W. Loewen – Simon & Schuster

“The Shadow of Hate – A History of Intolerance in America” Video by Teaching Tolerance