Topics to Consider in Unit X

- *What do we mean by "humanity's" coming of age – and what must take place for this to occur?*

- *What is "creolization" and how is it a metaphor for the human condition?*

- *How did the origins of "racial" distinction both distort our perception of creolization (and cultural/human reality) and facilitate the exchange between cultures – leading to much of what we value today? And – how do we maintain simultaneous truths (or develop flexible perception) as we evolve to "equity"?*

- *What are some of the alternatives to perception based on race – offered by the Seychelles Island's cultural evolution and "kreolité"?*

- *In what way can jazz be seen as both a reflection of the disease of racism and an embodiment of American creolization?*

- *What do each stage in jazz evolution: ragtime, traditional jazz, big band, be-bop, or modern jazz reflect of both creolization and racism?*

- *What are critical musical elements of any "jazz" genre?*

- *What do musicians such as Charlie Gabriel, Michael Zaporsky, Dennis Tini, Chris Collins, or Ben Koen say about different manner in which jazz is a fusion of influences and cultures?*

- *How can we understand creolization as a dynamic in Celtic-based cultures (or for that matter European cultures as well)? And – what does such an understanding do to liberate us from culture biases and hierarchy or cultural centrism?*

- *What might we expect to find in the music of modern day Arab, Persian, Gospel, or other modern fusions? Is there any culture exempt from the process of extensive creolization?*

- *What does a Hungarian born – Afro-Cuban-conga playing musician, living in Columbia, playing the music of Bach with a Slovak orchestra say about human creativity and the ancient art of "creolization"?*

- *How might we understand the different phases of creative community in the group creative process? What role must individuals first have? How do we honor the creativity of the individual in the context of community building?*

UNIT X

Creolization: Creating Community Beyond Race and Nation

"Culture is an historical process: man is at once the creator of culture and creation of culture. Like language and religion or law and art, science, technology and the economy are primarily cultural phenomena created by societies in the course of their history, shaping their ongoing development." "The Multi-cultural Planet," UNESCO International expert group, 1993, p. 189.

"World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice – of every kind – race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others." "The Promise of World Peace," The Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel, pp. 28/29.

By now, we might see all humanity as a perpetually evolving single community, one that despite diverse traits or having experienced a diversity of events—has yet to learn how to reconcile its vision of itself to a more mature and realistic perception of its reality. We know today, that to truly "come of age" (mature) would minimally include:

- The understanding of the **universal human experience** as reflecting itself through symbols of diverse but equally universal proportion.
- The recognition of **bias structures** as a severe impediment to the perception of reality and justice.
- The understanding of **religious continuity** and the importance of such a recognition in undoing stereotypes and separatist visions (stereotypes that have been at the root of the worst conflicts in human history).
- A deeper recognition of the importance of seeing the **impact of history** (positive or negative) – as important to a clearer perception of our own goals and perceptions of life's purposes.

Pic. 10.0 *A group of students holding a talking circle (roundhouse). They are discussing the creative abilities and passions they wish to contribute to their "community" in creating their own performance piece. The development of a collaborative artistic or creative vision should not be viewed as limited to artists, but is in reality an essential feature of community building and, more generally, the acquisition of an equitable vision of ourselves in the context of our world.* Photo: Courtesy Washtenaw Community College students, Authors.

- A recognition that we can and must **balance the inequities** and imbalances of our cultures—especially those that marginalize other culture groups in even the slightest fashion.
- That our **communities** have now evolved to include members from the farthest corners of the earth. The challenge of creating strong communities demands the development of meaningful rites and rituals which mark the life cycle and solidify community life.
- The understanding that **balancing (healing)** in all areas of human existence can be fostered through a better understanding of the other members of the human family, their assets and needs, and, ultimately, through a greater emphasis on the arts, spiritual disciplines, and storytelling.

— and of course — *that all of these areas of understanding and growth can be enhanced with a deeper understanding of the world's creative expressions, arts, and music* ***— through the development our own creative capacities as well.***

We might also have noticed that the absolute greatest distance and most fortified barriers between cultures or "races" are powerless to thwart the exchange of musical ideas or cultural information. Even in instances when dissension, hatred, or conflict exist between groups, the singular reality of our human condition and general appreciation of human creativity will prevail over the contingent perception of human division. Where music is concerned, affinities for the diverse combinations of vibrations and the manner by which they fulfill or reflect human experience will penetrate the opaque boundaries of politics and human bias based upon cultural differences.

We might also consider that nearly everything in our human institutions of learning, commerce, and culture is tainted by divisive perceptions and must be scrutinized and understood in that context if any hope of accuracy or a sweeping re-inventory of human history and, subsequently, our human reality is to be envisioned. This is the dichotomy of the "coming of age" of humanity: i.e., we are called upon to recognize with equal intensity the divisive reality of our past history and the mind- and spirit-expanding ramifications of an ever-emerging global reality.

"Racism (nationalism, etc.) is an expression of power. Therefore, it is ever-present in public and private institutions (schools, businesses, government bodies, etc.). In practical terms, institutional racism treats in an inferior manner or marginalizes 'ethnic groups.' Institutional racism results in imbalanced representations of people from 'minorities' in public life, in higher education, and in positions of responsibility at all levels of society. Those who advocate abolishment of affirmative action, saying… that getting a job or getting into a university should be based on merit and not on an individual's cultural background… fail to recognize that methods of merit assessment are geared toward a majoritarian conception of desirable traits, which do not take important cultural differences into account. To combat institutional racism, anti-racism training at all levels is necessary, and those who are vulnerable to racism must be given a say in how institutions can be improved so as to increase the participation of 'minorities' in the actual running of our institutions." From "Information on Racism in Ireland," Internet: Institutional Racism in Ireland, 2004, http://www.tcd.ie/Education/Teachers

It is difficult to see the manner in which cross-cultural fusion and the creative dimensions of human exchange have been perpetually advancing over our perceptual boundaries of racial or cultural division. This is in part because perceptions and the methodology of human social structures (much like sound) move slowly, while human exchange (much like light) moves incredibly fast. Therefore, we may find ourselves using labels of ethnic designation, or we may categorize and discuss cultures with dysfunctional perceptual tools that we've inherited. However, we may also find ourselves longing consciously or unconsciously to be free of the burdens of such labels as "white/black," "classical/folk," or even "French/Italian," especially when they carry with them implications of greater or lesser value. In essence, the creativity of our world's cultures has vastly outgrown many of our perceptions of history and our methodologies of discourse to grasp both intellectually and emotionally our own collective essence.

As concerns a search for alternative perspectives, we may find ourselves attracted, once again, to the world's diasporas or cultures that most represent the graphic clashing and mingling of diverse cultural influences. For example, each island, country, or continent in the Americas has had a three-hundred-year head-start in the intense processes of global exchange and ***creolization*** (creative dynamic of cross-cultural fusion and exchange – see below) as they have escalated over the course of this last century.

As concerns American[10.1] music, each expression or genre that we call "American" (pan-American) has undergone numerous fusions and cross-cultural exchanges. However, there may be a substantial void between the true nature of any American musical expression or genre and the manner in which many are trained to perceive it. Especially cultures having a history burdened by extensive intrusions into human dignity through slavery and the institutionalization of racial division are unable, proportionate to the abuse, to see their own cultures' integration accurately alongside their divisive history. Is it possible to overcome perceptions of separate cultures and music to see sufficiently the patterns of integration, while maintaining (or developing) and understanding of one's divisive history and its impact upon our lives?

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Pic. 10.1 A (Paris) & B (USA) *The clichés "When we were children, we didn't see race," or "Everything I ever needed I learned in kindergarten" have particular validity as we contemplate the simple reality of human existence against the enormously complex process of deprogramming deeply entrenched biases. These children on a fieldtrip in downtown Paris and in a playground in the Midwestern U.S.A. are now completely devoid of the capacity to see race, and would remain so were it not for the education and experience they will soon acquire to see simple differences as "distinct" races or cultures.* Photos: Authors.