

**WHITE PEOPLE, from page 8**

person who goes through this, and everyone is like, "That's me, that's me, that's me." We're all exactly the same. But the truth is, a humbling experience like that is good for me, for sure, because if unchecked, white people become some of the most obnoxious people on earth. (Laughs.)

I know I'm more obnoxious than I'm supposed to be, I know I'm more full of myself than I'm supposed to be. I'm aware of this. And I feel like, by writing and skewering myself, maybe I can become a better person. I mean, it's not working. But I'm hoping that eventually, I can back off and stop spending so much time thinking about how great I am because I eat at Salumi instead of a chain restaurant. I wish it worked better than it did. I really do.

**R.R.:** You talk about these other people who are, "Hey, that's me." Why are there so many of the "Hey, that's me"?

**C.L.:** I think we can blame the baby boomers for that, for raising us that way. It's very strange being raised in this generation where, "We're all unique, we're all special, we're all unique, we're all special." Over and over and over and over and over again. It's amazing. As self-obsessed as we are, we're not as self-aware as you would think.

I don't know. I think we've reached this weird end of history of whiteness, because I've traveled to Australia and the UK to promote the book, and white people there are exactly the same as the ones that I'm writing about here. We get to this point at the end where all we have left is this selfishness and this idea that we're this perfectly unique being. And I don't know where we go from here or how we got here. But it seems to have set in across the world. With white people. Maybe this is late-stage capitalism.

**R.R.:** It might indeed be. So you were going to school for ...

**C.L.:** I was getting my Ph.D. in film and literature.

**R.R.:** And what happened?

**C.L.:** I met my wife, got married and dropped out. And moved to Los Angeles. I was getting fed up with the intolerance of graduate school and it sounds weird, because you think, "Open mind, culture of the mind," everything like that. Everyone thought exactly the same way, everyone was far left liberal. And I don't have a problem with that: I'm a leftwing liberal. I won't ever deny that. But I just got to the point where the smugness and the patting themselves on the back, just absolute conviction that they're right and there is no other way to think, this isn't open-minded at all. That was starting to drive me absolutely nuts. And yeah, we bailed. We packed up and left, and I haven't regretted it.

**R.R.:** What prompted the move to L.A.?

**C.L.:** I always had dreamt about being a writer on "The Simpsons" and "The Critic," and all of these TV shows that I loved. But I realistically felt, "how am I going to get a chance? How am I ever going to get a break?" It was a dream I just kind of gave up on, even at fourteen. I focused on journalism and that didn't work out because I wasn't very good at that. And then I went to academia, so when I met my wife and we dropped out, we were in the middle of the country. We had no debt

because we taught the whole time in grad school. We had her car and we could go anywhere we wanted, just free to the wind at 26. New York was one option, but it didn't scare me. L.A. scared the hell out of me: The driving thing scared me, the city itself scared me, the fact that I was going to figure out how to be comedy writer. And then if it failed, which I actually expected it would, I would know forever.

**R.R.:** White people love to take the shot at the dream.

**C.L.:** Of course we do. "Following their dreams" is in the first book. It's often a huge mistake. But also white people like, when their dream doesn't come true, to blame it on someone else: "It wasn't my fault. It was the fault of society or additives or vaccines."

But look, if you're white and you have the free time and the money to go for it, why not take a shot? Worse case, move back in with your parents, which I know for white people is the worst thing ever, but that's an option. I was kind of floating when I took my shot. It wasn't like I left behind a wife and kids to go pursue my dream as a porn star.

**R.R.:** Which one could do in L.A.

**C.L.:** Exactly.

**R.R.:** So, here's kind of a serious question: Do you think you're writing about race or writing about class? Or are you writing about the intersection of them?

**C.L.:** I think I'm writing about both and I think that the two are linked, that to talk about either in a vacuum doesn't make any sense at all. And so I'm talking about white people, and it's not all white people across the board. I'm not talking about Republicans, I'm not talking about poor white people. I'm talking about upper-middle-class wealthy liberals. And specifically, I'm talking about the class that they're in: the upper-middle-class left. And what's interesting about them as a class, is that part of it is this desperation to believe that we're the most progressive class of all time, the most progressive people in the history of white people. And there's a desperation to sort of get away from being recognized as white and being, I'm a child of the earth now, you know, I don't see race, or all that stuff.

But the fact of the matter is that the progressive class, as progressive as it is, is still so overwhelmingly white, that a list like this can come out, and people get it right away. Yeah, these are all white things. Because white things are: privilege; having the time, money and lack of urgency to get something like an English degree; the time, money and lack of urgency to do an unpaid internship. All of these things, they count as white, because white privilege still very, very much exists. And so this class, in spite of how progressive they are, and in spite of their progressivism, they're whiteness and their class are still mixed. And the fact of the matter is that non-white people are not moving into this class quickly enough. I'm always amazed at how progressive we are, but our inability to make real sacrifices for real change. What do white people do when they move to a gentrifying neighborhood but the public school isn't quite how they want it, because of the test scores or whatever other reason? They put their kid in private school or they move to a different city with a better public school system. Which isn't really a way to progress the class or allow anyone else to join. And so I think the two things, race and class, are so mixed, that when

you say, Upper-middle-class liberal, it still means whites.

**R.R.:** In this book, you list people from various cities and you have little images of them. And there aren't a lot of - Well, I can't say that. There are people of color in these cities, they just seem to be lost in the idea of that city.

**C.L.:** Yes. Although the white person entry in

**Whites like expensive versions of cheap things, food-wise. So \$25 macaroni-and-cheese and things like that, which wouldn't be too hard to interpret as a giant middle finger to poverty. It's like, "Here, we're going to take all the food that you make, because you had really no other option, and we're going to make it \$40. Hey. Fuck you, poor people."**

San Francisco is actually an Asian woman. And the white person for D.C. is Obama. Because that's the other thing when talking about class: If you're not white (but) fortunate to have entered into this class, your tastes and your attitudes will get you branded as white. And this is something that I experienced in high school. We had a guy named Long, who's third-generation Chinese-Canadian. Liked camping, jam bands, everything, all that sort of stuff. And people would accuse him of trying to be white, that he was ashamed of being Chinese. Not true. Farthest thing from the truth. Very proud of being Chinese, loved his family, loved his heritage. He was just rich and he'd acquired these tastes along the way. But that, again, is another message about where we are with class: No matter how progressive we think we are, it's still white to be a part of this class.

**R.R.:** Last question. What is your most favorite white possession or activity?

**C.L.:** The white activity I like the most is waiting in line for food.

**R.R.:** Which you experienced here in Seattle.

**C.L.:** Whites also like expensive versions of cheap things, food-wise. So \$25 macaroni-and-cheese and things like that, which wouldn't be too hard to interpret as a giant middle finger to poverty. It's like, "Here, we're going to take all the food that you make, because you had really no other option, and we're going to make it \$40. Hey. Fuck you, poor people." But waiting in line is something that I'm very guilty of doing. I did it today; the last time I was here, I was in line for Salumi for literally an hour-and-a-half to get that sandwich. And here's the crazy thing: It was worth it. That gives you an idea of how much free time white people have.

**R.R.:** Well, when I come across a \$40 plate of mac and cheese, I'm gonna give you a call.

**C.L.:** No one should be paying - well, that's not true. I've had a \$20 plate of mac-and-cheese, and it was awesome. Awesome. I'm addicted. I can't help it.

Originally published by Real Change, Seattle, Wash.

coffee bean  
INTERNATIONAL®

We tip our mugs to Coffee Bean International  
for donating coffee to Street Roots and  
keeping our vendors warm in the morning!

Thank you!

DETOUR  
cafe

3035 S.E. Division • Portland, OR 97202  
503.234.7499