

July 2, 2015

Daily North Shore

Letters to the Editor

Dear Adrienne:

According to several sources including social media postings, many LFHS parents learned the controversial new LFHS principal, Chala Holland, held a closed-door meeting with students on LFHS's student council Wednesday, July 1.

As everyone now knows from many published reports first published in the *Daily North Shore* and later the *Chicago Tribune* and elsewhere, Chala Holland was chosen as Principal of LFHS over the objections of hundreds of parents attending the Board of Education meeting of June 9, countless letters to the Board of Ed and even a petition drive netting over 740 signatures opposing her hiring due to her offensive and divisive views on "white privilege" and "internalized racism" reflected in academic tracking, as well as her attempt to hide these views by scrubbing her internet and Twitter presence when her candidacy was leaked. She was chosen as Superintendent Simeck's top pick after a mere three-week internet posting advertising the job netted 25 other candidates, even though she is relatively young, has never managed a budget or managed direct-reports, and even though her relatively brief professional career to this point has centered around race equity and the academic advancement of minority students in urban schools. (LFHS is suburban, 90% white and 1.2% black).

Student council moderators, who are LFHS teachers and two assistant deans were also present at the July 1 meeting. Parents were not invited. And no one involved with LFHS over the past several years could ever recall a time when a principal called a closed-door July meeting with members of the student council.

Sources reported Holland was late for the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, she had the students watch a "Ted" video entitled: "The Danger of a Single Story" presented by Nigerian born author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. (http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story). You can read the transcript of the speech [here](#).

Adichie's presentation centered on how a stereotype—a "single story"—about a people can rob them of their dignity. She stated that the economic and political "power structures" of the world determine whose stories are told and how they are told. She said: "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly.""

She began her lecture by noting that, as a child, she only had access to British stories in English books and that all her own stories were about blue-eyed children, playing in the snow, talking about the weather and drinking ginger beer, none of which happened in Nigeria.

Adichie attended college in the United States and she described American roommate: “She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity” and decried her ignorance of Africa, noting her roommate had “a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe.”

Adichie did not disclose her own ignorance or “single story” about “Americans” as a college freshman. Nevertheless, she expressed anger at white ignorance of Africa and claimed it was the result of western literature, beginning in 1561 with the writings of a merchant who described Africans as “beasts without houses” among other things. This “represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are “half devil, half child.” She continued: “And so, I began to realize that my American roommate must have throughout her life seen and heard different versions of this single story.”

As she grew older, she discovered African authors like Chinua Achebe and declared that the discovery of these authors “saved” her [n.B. Nigerian author Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart” was required reading at LFHS when I attended in the mid-1970s].

Adichie expressed regret that her childhood reading was exclusively British, not African authors and she rued: “... how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children.”

How true. And capitalizing on the impressionability and vulnerability of children after this silly attempt at softening up her audience ended, Ms. Holland told the children a story. A singular story. A singular story she has not shared with the adults. But if the following story is inaccurately reported, maybe Ms. Holland will stop hiding behind the students and tell the real story. To the adults. In an open forum. Like a leader.

The story she told the children goes like this: Ms. Holland said that someone had suggested to her that she set up a consulting company. She was very busy and had someone create a website for her. She gave the person a bunch of “folders” for content on the site. That person then chose what to put on the website, not Ms. Holland. In fact, Ms. Holland was not even aware of what was on the website until the Lake Forest people she was interviewing with called to ask her about it. She was under a lot of stress at this point and still “very busy” with the interviewing process and site visit. So, not knowing what was on her own website, and because she was so busy, she told the person to take down the website. The End.

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