

## Perspectives

*“Always give a word or sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, or even a stranger, if in a lonely place.”*

—TECUMSEH



**I WRITE THIS** a few days after the horrific shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, yet another of the all-too-common tragedies that remind us of the terrible virulence of hate.

We responded by urging educators to honor the victims by learning more about their beliefs. Because that’s the principle Teaching Tolerance is founded on: the idea that learning about others—and understanding their struggles—helps loosen our apprehension and lessen our propensity to see them as alien or inferior.

This issue features a range of stories that twine around this essential theme. The cover story looks back to the struggles of the civil rights movement in 1963. Other stories provide strategies to confront the obstacles students face because of race, gender, ability, LGBT status and poverty. These are perennial topics because fear is a hardy weed.

You’ll also see a story that’s a little different, one that invites you to consider stereotypes that, to most folks, don’t seem all that harmful. These are the labels we bestow upon people based on where they hail from here in the United States. You’ll recognize them from TV: the flakey Californian, the aggressive New Yorker, the milquetoast Midwesterner.

They may seem superficial, but I’d argue that their easy acceptance creates a frame of mind all too willing to classify people and judge them accordingly.

And judging people based on these regional stereotypes hurts. I know.

When I was 10 years old, my family moved from Brooklyn to Staten Island, both boroughs of New York City. We joined a migratory flood launched by the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Before the bridge, only ferries connected the island to other parts of the city, and the place was almost rural. With the opening of the bridge or, as it’s been called, “the guinea gangplank,” all that changed. That nickname—a reference to the fact that many of the Brooklyn migrants were Italian-American—was a mild form of the vitriol toward newcomers to which I quickly became familiar.

Within months, this particular ex-Brooklynite learned two things: not to admit to the half of her heritage from Italy and not to flinch when asked, “Are you a native?”

I worked—hard—on changing my accent, by learning how to talk like the Beatles. It worked, in that people couldn’t tell I was one of “them,” especially after I married a native. But even 40 years after the bridge was built, the distinction thrived. One of the last people I met on Staten Island, an engineer hired by the buyers to inspect the home my husband and I were selling, followed the introductions with the inevitable question, “So, are you a native?”

It’s long past time to recognize that none of us are “native.” We’re all coming, at least figuratively, from somewhere else—another ethnicity, religion, culture, race, ability, sexual orientation, set of experiences, point of view.

Here’s hoping that this issue helps you in your work to nurture students who reject provincialism, who welcome newcomers and who encounter the rich diversity of our world fearlessly.

—Maureen Costello