In 1946, more than a million African–American GIs were returning home from World War II, where they had played a crucial role in helping to defeat Hitler and destroying fascism in Germany and Japan. Most of these black GIs were returning to homes in the southern states, where unfortunately, Jim Crow fascism still ruled. A new wave of lynchings spread across America at that time. In the very first year after the end of the war, some 56 black men and women were lynched in this country, mostly in the South and mostly black GIs returning home. At first there was not much news coverage, but in July the New York Times carried this story on their front page:

GEORGIA MOB OF 20 MEN MASSACRES 2 NEGROES, WIVES; ONE WAS EX-GI

MONROE, Ga., July 26 — Two young Negroes, one a veteran just returned from the war, and their wives were lined up last night near a secluded road and shot dead by an unmasked band of twenty white men…

The Negro men were taken out of the car first and led down a side road. The women were held at the automobile. Then a member of the mob said that one of the women had recognized him. Several of the men then… dragged the shrieking women from the automobile…

The story also reported that the victims had been shot at least 60 times, and the bodies were “scarcely recognizable” because of the large number of bullet holes.

Like millions of other Americans, Albert Einstein read that morning about the lynching. He could have made a speech denouncing lynching. Since he was Einstein, his speeches were published. But Einstein felt that words were simply not enough to deal with this awful racism. So he joined Paul Robeson as co-chairman of a new organization: The American Crusade to End Lynching. They organized a demonstration in Washington, DC, demanding that Congress make lynching a federal crime. They had a confrontation in the White House with President Harry Truman. [Einstein was too ill to attend the demonstration, but he sent a letter with Robeson for President Truman….The letter was published in the New York Times…but Truman said “The time is not right.”]

In many ways, the Robeson/Einstein-organized demonstration was the forerunner of the Civil Rights Movement that began 16 years later.

James Baldwin wrote, “If history were past, history wouldn’t matter. History is the present… You and I are history. We carry our history. We act our history.” It has only been through writing our book, Einstein on Race and Racism, and then talking to folks about it—traveling all over the country to talk with folks—that we have come to understand what James Baldwin meant when he said “We are our history…we live our history.”

You see, we thought we were writing about long-ago history …last century history…Albert Einstein and W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson…famous people all (although Robeson and Du Bois were not nearly as famous as we’d thought), famous people, but not today’s people—history people. But we discovered that in writing about the struggle against racism—or shall we say that writing about anti-racism in America—we were writing about today!

So our path through the history of today starts here with a little game of “Concentration”—you know, if I say “ice”, you say “cold”, and so forth. So, if I say “Einstein”, what word or phrase comes to your mind? Perhaps “genius”, “E = mc^2”, “relativity…” It’s almost universal. We have tried this again and again, and the age, sex, race, or background of our respondents do not seem to matter. Everybody says the same thing (some say “the hair!”). But very few people will say “social activist”, and virtually no one says “anti-racist”. When we point out Einstein’s stands against racism, people say “I had no idea!” How many times have we heard those words, said those words, and FELT those words while working on this book!

In the numerous biographies written about Einstein, amid
Albert Einstein was forced out of Germany when Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933. While growing up in Germany, Einstein was so disgusted by the militaristic nature of German society that as a teenage draft dodger he left the country and renounced his citizenship. Einstein returned to Germany many years later as a professor at the University of Berlin. As an outspoken pacifist, the world’s most brilliant scientist, and a Jew, Einstein also represented everything the Nazis hated. Had he not become a refugee, he would have been arrested and killed. Thus, in the fall of 1935 Einstein ended up in scene Princeton, New Jersey, “a banishment,” he joked, “to paradise.” But there he quickly discovered a virulent racism against African-Americans, led by one of the oldest, richest educational institutions in the country. Princeton University then did not accept black students. Its most famous president, the toxic racist Woodrow Wilson, exemplified the university’s and the area’s segregationist traditions. The great singer, actor, and activist Paul Robeson, who was born in Princeton, called the community “the northernmost town in the South”: schools, jobs, homes, churches, and restaurants were segregated there into the late 1940s.

In direct defiance of those who ran the Princeton establishment and in solidarity with the local African-Americans, Albert Einstein, the town’s most famous citizen, established and in solidarity with the local African–Americans, Albert Einstein, the town’s most famous citizen, the community, and the “northernmost town in the South,” the eastern璩;„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„„…..