

***Commitment to a Better Tomorrow: A Community Conversation on Race***  
**A Community Forum Hosted by Project 20/20**  
**May 4, 2011, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., Family Health Center of Battle Creek**

After presentations by Battle Creek area youth speakers: Brock Grosso, Ernest Jackson, Tha Par and Jalen Richards, attendees (56) were asked to work in small groups to answer the questions below. A discussion question was assigned to each table (each question was discussed by 2-3 tables). A recorder wrote down ideas from individuals in each small group. Below is a compilation of each group's notes separated by question.

**1. WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE AND CHALLENGING THINGS THAT IMPACT RACE IN OUR COMMUNITY?**

***Compilation of Notes (in no particular order)***

Positive

- Willingness to discuss race and its impact (in same arenas – young people more free)
- Enjoy a diversity of cultures because of variety of foods
- Diversity in food and art and music
- In America we blend all cultures
- We sometimes confuse race with culture (positive vs. challenge?)
- Positive collaboration that no one had an agenda. The start of something positive – bringing Jim Crow Exhibit
- Some people like to be with people who are different → can't always be a part of another community
- Organizations numerous in the community

Challenges

- Still feels like a very segregated community
- Developed some discomfort around discussion
- Older people grew up with it as part of our lives
- Came from just being in a certain neighborhood – carries over to college
- Everyone plays their role in segregation – based on others expectations and stereotypes
- Not finding barriers breaking down
- Continued application of the stereotype of different races
- Guida – negative or descriptive?
- Not always role models available (in school)
- Institutional set – long way to go
- Outside four walls move on to conversation, see others, meet others
- Getting past stereotypes and judgments
- New experiences to get outside of comfort zone
- Looking at things through other's perspective

- Knowledge of culture
- Take time to know a person
- Decide to open up
- Status
- Challenge to stand-up and have a voice
- Afraid to confront issues because of favoritism
- Breaking through our community/cultural ties
- Programs are positive but not for all
- The want to do more
- Number of schools – too many
- Talking with no action

## **2. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHANGES THAT NEED TO HAPPEN TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING AND AFFECT CHANGE ACROSS RACIAL LINES?**

### ***Compilation of Notes (in no particular order)***

- A change of heart, thinking and thinking of thinking
  - Didn't know things growing up; appearance = valued
  - We have common interest of being here; how do we get the word out = communicate; respect the bits and pieces of dialogue. Individual to individual having serious dialogue. We have to instigate. Welcome them into conversation.
  - Learn about others. If we knew each other more we would be less stereotypical. Get to know each other and dare to do things together. Celebrate each other's' similarities and differences
  - Social equality: best and worst civilization in cultures. Multi-cultural radios. Walk in others shoes and we would be more compassionate.
  - 1) stereotypes, 2) language, 3) exclusion
- What a man thinks so go he! Stinkin' thinkin' takes a lifetime to change.
- Talking to each other (have a meaningful, deliberate conversation) and opportunities to engage in these types of conversations.
- Be able to engage people that need to be at the table
- Building relationships – finding commonalities
- Teach the children
- Attack the issue on different levels (families, neighborhoods, communities)
- Embrace that each of us are diverse
- Be intentional about breaking bread with someone that is different racially and culturally. Ex. BC Reads – book groups
- Community calendar so that multiple cultural events aren't being held on the same date and time, so that we can support each other and engage in new things
- BC Leadership Challenge – having a component around cultural diversity
- Events (no segregation)
- Education/learn where people come from
- Starting education at a younger age
- It is past race, it even goes to gender

### 3. WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY, WHAT SHOULD WE KEEP DOING AND STOP DOING IN ORDER TO UNIFY OUR COMMUNITY?

#### *Compilation of Notes (in no particular order)*

- Right → coming together and confronting problems (all inclusive)
- Getting out and started → change psychological
- Get youth involved
  - Start younger rather than wait and dealing with it later in life
  - Any age
  - Create an environment for younger generations they'd want to come back to
- Bring the effort back to BC → initiation outside of comfort zone
- Keep talking – further our understanding
- Reach out into schools
  - Break down segregation in schools
  - Reduce number of school districts
  - School curriculum needs to dig deeper – they are lying to us!
- Desegregation of neighborhoods – diversity training
- What part of Battle Creek are we proud of?
- White people can't afford to check out – but we have the privilege to do so
- Provide opportunities to change power structures
- Privilege/oppression/critical consciousness education
- How do we make this attractive?
  - Value in unity/humanness
  - The oneness
  - Human connection
- Continuing education on race/ethnicity → KCC, Enquirer, Shopper → continuing conversation
- Focus on similarities
- Resources available from communities
- Stop stereotyping
- Keep talking and listening
- Have experiences that will debunk your stereotype
- Education
- Remove the blinders
- Stop making decisions based on fear and scarcity
- Courage
- Acknowledge inequality
- Educate
- As a community, set expectations on individual and system behaviors
- Exposure and education
- Protect our children against the pain of racism
- Race = economics = opportunity

Attendees were then asked to answer the following question: “Based on your group conversation, what needs our immediate attention going forward?” Each group then chose the group’s top two responses, wrote the responses on separate post-it notes and placed the post-it notes on an easel in the front of the room. Representatives from Project 20/20 then reviewed the responses, identified themes and reported those themes to all attendees.

**Top three themes identified: 1) Get out of our comfort zones, 2) Education in schools/community and 3) Communication/dialogue**

All responses from post-it notes:

- Get out of our comfort zones
- More opportunities to have an open dialogue that’s inclusive – candid open dialogue, listen with an open mind to each other, not one right method, what’s my responsibility, are there consequences of dodging our responsibility
- Address institutionalized racism – such as is perpetuated by the very separate school districts
- Selling the benefits of these difficult conversations – relationship building, seeing people as human
- Education: What are the priorities (personal communication), Peace Jam – other avenues for personal discussion
- Education and research – looking at history/racism, learning about others, set the example for others
- Create the intentional relational opportunities for small groups to come together and discuss diversity issues
- Engage schools, businesses and churches to create diversity statements (mission) and put diversity teams in place. This is something that is sustainable.
- Make a commitment to make eye contact, personal contact; not ignoring our community members due to conscious fear
- Leadership to help people find a new way to live
- We need to unify our community around issues; listen, engage youth participation to: create an environment where we can communicate around jobs for our young people, sports, volunteering and music to reduce barriers. Note: all four of these cross barriers of race.
- Allow leadership to rise as it did in our history. Sojourner Truth came here because Battle Creek has a tradition of acceptance of new ideas. Embrace our heritage and allow us to move forward.
- Keep talking: economics and race, training youth to handle racism, how do we get more people (different) in the room
- Providing space for conversations on race in the Enquirer, Shopper, etc.
- Communication (about options, resources)
- Dialogue on racism-open effects of racism
- Use kids to help parents change – mixers among middle schools and high schools (incentives)

- Events with an international (multi-cultural) outlook. For example, a pot luck to bring other cultures together and learn together.
- We realize as a community that race does affect outcomes and not addressing that fact places future generations at risk of continued poor outcomes such as – health disparities, achievement gaps in education, career attainment, etc.
- Make a commitment as a group to promote diversity, take a stand and carryout the message (intentional self-introspect)

***Compilation of Additional Notes (in no particular order)***

- We need cross-cultural mentoring of each other.
- We need social equality to impart a heightened civilized society to all groups → through education and opportunities for advancement of all peoples.
- To bring about change, how do we reach the people not in this room who may be more steeped in racial mistrust and hatred
- Set the example that everyone is equal (this comment was from the high school member of our group)
- Education, expanding horizons. Job opportunities to combat poverty and economic hardships.
- Need for social services, support, etc. – example of Tha Par (translating driver’s test into Burmese), volunteering across lines
- Communication: talk is essential. We need to revitalize people along with buildings
- Cross-cultural sharing: bringing diverse groups together
- We lost the Burmese Am. Initiative Fiduciary status, the decision was made 7 weeks ago
- Listen with an open mind to each other
- Promoting events more
- More organizations to have a dialogue that’s inclusive
- Not one right method
- Candid open dialogue
- Enquirer articles to educate people about race, stories of bridging differences
- More community engagement
- Big event to bring community organizations
- Church sharing service
- Find ways to get out of the comfort zones
- Leadership to bring people together
- Intentional self-introspection
- It’s ok to make mistakes
- Know your responsibility to the issue