

**Unknown**

**From:** Chandler Davidson

**Sent:** Friday, June 27, 1997 9:26 AM

**To:** billie carr

**Subject:** dialogue on race

Billie,

A few thoughts on a dialogue on race:

- 1) What do you hope to accomplish? Will one meeting (or two or three) have much affect on what you want to accomplish? Or, as Dialogue Racism assumes, is it necessary to have a several-week series of meetings, e.g., 9 or 10 weeks in order to really get to the heart of the issue?
- 2) How honest do you want people to be in this dialogue? Will the dialogue consist only of people who by and large agree at the beginning on the answers to the problems of race in America? If so, the conversation will be pretty tame and easy to control. But if people already agree, why have a dialogue? On the other hand, if they disagree-if, for example, you have liberals and conservatives in the same room (or even liberals who disagree sharply)-things may get hot and heavy. And, if there is not some method to keep things civil, it could explode into anger and vituperation, and have just the opposite effect from that intended.
- 3) Do you want to focus on one or a few questions during each session (assuming there is more than one session)?
- 4) Will there be someone who leads the discussion and keeps things in some semblance of control?
- 5) Do you want to limit the size, say, by issuing invitations? Or will this be open to the public?
- 6) Do you want to allow the press in? If so, this may very well inhibit honest dialogue.
- 7) Will whites (or blacks or yellows or browns, for that matter) be encouraged to say only those things that they think are acceptable to the black majority, or will people be encouraged to say things they really feel, even if "politically incorrect"?
- 8) Is this just for Democrats?

I am sending you by snail mail a copy of an op-ed by Randall Kennedy in the wake of Bill Clinton's call for a national dialogue on race. Randy is a friend of mine, a black Harvard Law prof, who I would describe as liberal; but he is insistent that if a genuine dialogue is to occur, people must be encouraged to be honest and not just parrot what they think is the acceptable political line. I tend to agree. But we are both academics, who are committed to generating controversy (albeit, we hope, for the long-term goal of obtaining some kind of national consensus about race). You, by contrast, are concerned with trying to build a multi-racial consensus among Democrats in the here and now. So you may want less "honesty" and less diversity of opinion than Randy is calling for.

These are just questions I thought would help you focus on your goals and on a good strategy for achieving them. I hope they help.

Chandler

Chandler Davidson  
Department of Sociology, MS 28  
Rice University  
6100 South Main Street  
Houston, TX 77005-1892

(713) 527-8101 x3490 (Office)  
(713) 285-5296 (FAX)  
(713) 669-0521 (Home)

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**Unknown**

**From:** Chandler Davidson  
**Sent:** Monday, September 15, 1997 9:35 AM  
**To:** mamahattie@msn.com  
**Subject:** Habitat for Humanity

Billie,

I had lunch Friday with a Rice student, Kevin Murphy, who has been active in Habitat for Humanity. He brought along the Rev. Michael Shirl who heads up HH here in Houston and is planning for a big international HH "do" next June where a lot of houses will be put up quickly. The Jimmy Carters will be here too.

Anyway, I told him about our dialogue in Oct. He said he would be able to speak at it briefly to describe HH, if we were interested.

Cheers,

Chandler

Chandler Davidson  
Professor of Sociology and Political Science  
Department of Sociology, MS 28  
Rice University  
6100 South Main Street  
Houston, TX 77005-1892

(713) 527-8101 x3490 (Office)  
(713) 285-5296 (FAX)  
(713) 669-0521 (Home)

**BILLIE CARR**

**From:** Chandler Davidson  
**Sent:** Saturday, October 11, 1997 8:07 PM  
**To:** (Recipient list suppressed)  
**Cc:** mamahattie@msn.com  
**Subject:**

Dear Jon, Leah, Sheffy, Ellen, and Allegra,

You expressed an interest in helping out with the Dialogue on Race which the Harris County Democrats are sponsoring on the Rice campus next Saturday, Oct. 18, in response to President Clinton's call for a national dialogue.

Thanks very much. I can really use your help! I am chair of the program committee and also the moderator, and there are things that students can do to make it go smoothly.

The event begins in Herring Hall 124 at 9 a.m. and lasts till noon. Democrats from many different precincts across Houston have been invited (and anybody else is welcome), and our hope is to get a genuinely good mix of race, ethnicity, gender, and viewpoints. I have no idea how many will turn up-I would guess somewhere between 40 and 200.

The format is this: After a brief welcome by S.A. president Daryl Shorter and a few remarks by me, from 9 to 12 persons from all walks of life (non-experts, except in the sense of being concerned citizens) will give brief, 3-minute speeches, in which they will say what they think or feel about race in America. I have no idea what they will say. I have encouraged them to be creative and to speak from the heart. Among them will be a couple of Rice students, at least. Then the audience will break into small groups and discuss the ideas they have heard-or anything else they have on their mind on the subject of race-for about 30 minutes. The groups will be encouraged to think of projects (e.g., working at Habitat for Humanity, etc.) they can do together over the next several weeks or months in order to get to know each other better and develop on-going conversations and friendships.

Then each group will report back to the re-assembled audience for about 20 minutes total. And that will be it. The moving force behind this event is Billie Carr, a legendary leader of Harris County Democrats and long-time member of the Democratic National Committee (she was elected, as I recollect, in 1972, the same year she taught a young, wet-behind-the-ears lawyer from Arkansas how to organize precincts in East Texas for George McGovern. The fellow's name was Bill Clinton. She and I agreed when we hatched up this meeting that more than talk was needed to bring people together; we needed to get people involved in group projects to help make a better community.

I am told that a number of groups around town that deal with racial issues or work in the community will have tables to set up outside Herring Hall to showcase their organizations.

You can be very useful doing the following things:

- 1) Putting up some small hand-made signs pointing to Herring Hall to help off-campus people find their way.
- 2) Helping direct and set up the tables outside Herring Hall.
- 3) Handing out programs to people as they enter the auditorium. This is especially important, because there will be numbers on the back of each program. People will choose their discussion group by the number on the program. This is to ensure that people don't end up in a group composed of people they came with. We are eager to have people make new acquaintances.
- 4) Making signs with the group numbers on them, to hold up when it comes time to form groups so that people can easily find their group.
- 5) Welcoming people to Rice and answering questions about rest rooms, phones, etc.
- 6) Other things that I haven't even thought of yet.
- 7) Things you can think of that would make the dialogue go more smoothly.

Would you please indicate that you can help me out next Saturday by responding to this e-mail? If you cannot help, could you locate a substitute in YDs who could do the job instead? Five students are the minimum I think would be needed.

Also, we probably need to meet sometime this coming week to firm up our plans and work out a division of labor. Can you meet Wed., Thurs., or Friday afternoon or evening? Please let me know which are possible for you.

Sincerely,

Chandler Davidson

P.S. It goes without saying that you are welcome to stay and take part for the whole three hours. (And bring friends if you wish!) If you do, you will have a chance to meet some neat Democratic party activists who know a lot about the nuts and bolts of party organization, from the precinct up.

P.P.S. Thanks a whole bunch once more!

Chandler Davidson  
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