



Michigan Roundtable for Diversity & Inclusion
Declaration of Intent
Race, Residence & Regional Cooperation
Truth & Reconciliation Commission
June, 2010

Preamble

This nation was established on the promise of equality and opportunity. Delivering on this promise for all people is an ongoing struggle. We all share a linked fate. As we fulfill this promise, we all benefit. When any individual or group is denied equality and opportunity, we all suffer. Having the courage to examine and understand our history can help build a more just society. Truth provides the foundation for reconciliation. Reconciliation provides the foundation for hope and the promise of a supportive and inclusive future.

The contemporary challenge: Detroit is the most segregated region in the country.

Detroit is the most segregated of the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas. The 2000 US census provides a mirror of our social reality. Two of every three communities in Metro Detroit are more than 90 percent white; one of three is more than 95 percent white. On the other extreme, Inkster is 67 percent black; Detroit, 81 percent; and Highland Park, 93 percent. This is not simply a problem of the past. In the 1990s, more than half (53 percent) of all white Detroiters left the city. Only one in 10 Detroit residents is a non-Hispanic white. Sterling Heights (111,743) and Warren (124,936) both have more white residents than Detroit (99,921).

Racism casts a long shadow over the experiences of all of Southeast Michigan.

Today's regional segregation by city and township is no accident. Residential and social segregation are the direct consequence of countless individual choices made in the context of identifiable institutional structures, unavoidably tinged by the effects of race, racial tension and racism. Many practices consciously and unconsciously have oppressed a large segment of the population. We continue to live with these legacies; the legacies produced, for example, by the crowds that gathered outside the home of Dr. Ossian Sweet, the hands that constructed the Wailing Wall near 8 Mile and Wyoming, and the racial conflicts and unrest that boiled to the surface in 1943 and 1967. These practices resulted in crimes against the body, crimes against property, the collusion of public and private institutions in preventing access and opportunity to all people, and numerous conspiracies of silence.

We still feel the effects of these troubled times.

If problems are not addressed, they fester. Social structures and racial hierarchies reproduce themselves over time. Historically, blacks were limited to a few Detroit neighborhoods, such as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. White neighborhood associations fought aggressively to prevent black families from moving into their communities. These private acts of discrimination were reinforced by government policies such as redlining and discriminatory lending policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), as well as the refusal to locate public housing near areas of opportunity. Sadly, when racial segregation inside the city could no longer be maintained, similar social forces reproduced identical

patterns of segregation at a regional level. Suburban governments have taken the place of the neighborhood associations. Exclusionary zoning and failures to provide affordable housing have taken the place of historic fights to prevent the siting of public housing in traditionally white neighborhoods. The results, however, are the same. Metro Detroit remains the most segregated region in the country.

Racial Segregation is also the segregation of opportunity and hope for the future.

Decades of social science research illustrate how racial segregation embodies a deeper institutional segregation of opportunity. Without doubt, racial disparities have had a disproportionate effect on the regions African- American population, but they have also limited the quality of life for all our citizens. We share a linked fate. The geographic fracturing of Metro Detroit is also a fracturing of hope for the future. Many young people with the opportunity to do so choose to leave the region and move to other more diverse metro areas. Despair and a lack of hope in the future fill the lives of many who stay. The failure to build a just and inclusive community greatly diminishes our collective potential, as well as our regional promise. A brighter tomorrow can only be built upon a willingness to confront these difficulties with a shared commitment to both truth and reconciliation.

An inclusive and prosperous future can only be ensured by an inquiry into and understanding of the structural dynamics of racial segregation, past and present.

Too often, stories are told focusing on individuals and not institutions. While it is true that individual Detroiters formed neighborhood associations that organized to prevent blacks from purchasing homes, it is also true that public officials and community leaders helped shape and perpetuate these same patterns of oppression and exclusion. All important institutions in the community should pause and reflect on the role that they knowingly and unknowingly played in this process. The failure to understand the deeper structural dynamics of racism has cultivated the mistaken belief that these problems are only problems of the past. They are not. These institutional histories carry forward and define the patterns of behavior that exist today and will be projected into the future if not addressed now.

The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, inspired by the process that took place in South Africa, will allow us to develop an appropriate understanding of past injustices and to envision constructive remedies to create a new regional culture of fairness, equal opportunity and improved prosperity.

Working to understand the dynamics of individual and structural racism can permit us to better understand our past, while creating opportunities to build a more just tomorrow. All important institutional stakeholders must be part of this self-reflective process. Understanding the institutional role of race in our past and now can permit us to collectively re-imagine our future. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission that shepherds this process will allow the region to constructively engage the problems, division, and bitterness related to past and present patterns of segregation. Truth provides the foundation for reconciliation. Reconciliation provides the foundation for hope and the promise of a better future, enabling Metro Detroit to realize a fuller potential, the construction of a viable, inclusive region to educate, to work and to live in for this and future generations.

We, the undersigned, commit ourselves to work diligently and honestly with the people and institutions of Metro Detroit to carry out this project with integrity, promoting truth, understanding, and the hope for a future providing opportunity for all.