



## HISTORY ON THE RACE2EQUITY PROJECT



### **Ward Connerly and Prop 2**

The need for such an initiative arose in the spring of 2006, when Ward Connerly began his campaign for a constitutional ban on affirmative action in Michigan. Many feared that Connerly's Proposal 2, or the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative as it was named, threatened to undo any progress that had been made since the Civil Rights Movement toward addressing inequalities of opportunity.

To educate voters about the proposal itself, the consequences of its passage, and the value of affirmative action, the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion joined forces with One United Michigan, a collaboration of 220 faith and community organizations. The coalition asked religious leaders to conduct affirmative action faith and worship services, set up affirmative action committees, and provide their members with educational literature.

When Election Day came Proposal 2 passed with an overwhelming majority, a disheartening outcome for those organizations dedicated to overcoming social and racial inequities.



### **Bridging the congregational divide**

The result, however, sparked a new determination and a new direction for the Roundtable, especially in terms of dialogue. In January 2007, the Roundtable convened its interfaith leadership to begin dialogue and the creation of a collaboration called Bridging the Congregational Divide (BCD). BCD's mission statement became: "We are deeply committed to achieving equal opportunity, inclusion

and justice for all. Therefore, we will organize and act against all forms of racial exclusion, bigotry and injustice."

BCD's first major event took place in the summer of 2007 at the Plymouth United Church of Christ and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. During the two-day conference, over 75 congregational leaders met to address race relations and discuss racial inequities. The participants also had a chance to see and be moved by the PBS series *Race: the Power of an Illusion* ([www.pbs.org/race](http://www.pbs.org/race)). The ideas in the film sparked new dialogue about the ways BCD could have an impact in educating the broader community, not only about Proposal 2, but also about the history of institutional racism in the policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and about events such as the 1967 Uprising.

### **Opportunity for all conference**

The Roundtable commissioned the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State





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University to create a report entitled “Opportunity For All Inequity, Linked Fate and Social Justice in Detroit and Michigan and the “Opportunity For All” Conference followed in January of 2009 at the Wright Museum.

Dr. John A. Powell, the executive director of the Kirwan Institute, delivered the keynote speech about differences in opportunity afforded to whites and blacks in Detroit and the process of recognizing and reconciling with that history. Over 350 community leaders, organizers, and committed citizens gathered in workshops to delve into subjects such as race in real estate, wealth disparities, white privilege, and collective transition. One goal of the conference was to establish an action plan for regional equity.

### **The Exhibit, Mock Trial and Milliken v. Bradley**

The Housing Project: Truth & Justice became the three-phase project to get such an action plan underway. Following the Bridges framework, the first phase was a Mock Trial regarding the discriminatory practices of the FHA from the 1930s to the 1960s. As an “ending,” it was to address metro Detroit’s history of housing and race and the consequent disparity in wealth accumulation between blacks and whites.



The event, We Don’t Want Them: Race & Housing on Trial, took place over two days in October of 2009 in three parts: an exhibit, the mock trial, and a conference. The exhibit stood on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD). Still traveling around the region, the exhibit’s historic documents and photographs displayed on banners, panels, and a timeline follow the history of housing in Metro Detroit from 1900 to 1968 and show how those past practices and prejudices have shaped the challenges and inequities that exist today.



This history of housing discrimination was also the focus of the mock trial the next day at Wayne State University Law School. Specifically, the trial focused on the FHA’s use of “redlining” and racially restrictive covenants that kept neighborhoods from integrating. While an actual judge (Victoria Roberts of the United States District Court) and practicing attorneys handled the case, the plaintiff Marvin Miller was a fictional character to represent the real stories of black autoworkers in Detroit who were denied mortgages or restricted to black neighborhoods. The jury, chosen from the audience, decided in favor of Marvin Miller



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and awarded him an imaginary \$250,000.



**The Mock Trial** was also followed in October of 2010 by a reenactment of *Milliken v. Bradley*, the 1974 United States Supreme Court case that dealt with the planned desegregation busing of public school students in Detroit. Taking place at Thomas M. Cooley Law School, “From Redlining to White Flight: The History of Housing Segregation and the Importance of Regionalism” also featured the housing exhibit and a panel discussion led by former civil rights attorney

Nathaniel Jones, who argued the original case as NAACP general counsel. The reenactment served as a way to connect youth to the law and history surrounding housing discrimination. About 100 students attended from high schools all around the area. A variety of judges, attorneys, and law professors also participated.

### **Housing Project Partnership**

Phase II of the Housing Project began under a new title of *Race, Residence & Regionalism: The Past & the Future of Metro Detroit* with the formation of the Housing Project Partnership (HPP). The HPP was made up of many different community sectors all interested in regional equity, including representatives from government, business, non-profits, the faith community, regional groups, grassroots organizations, and the media.

The goal of the HPP was to oversee the Roundtable’s work on regional equity over a period of two years. The aim of this collaboration was threefold: to help people understand the structural racism which caused segregated housing in Metro Detroit, to set up a truth commission to expose these housing practices, and to put recommendations from the truth and reconciliation process into action.



Similar commissions in South Africa and Greensboro, North Carolina inspired the idea for the Metropolitan Detroit Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In addition, the International Center for Transitional Justice ([www.ictj.org](http://www.ictj.org)) was key in shaping the ideology behind the Truth Commission as a theory of change that would feature in the Roundtable’s Declaration of Intent in June of 2010 and the Partnership’s Mandate in April 2011.

The next step for the HPP and the Roundtable was to choose a Selection Panel that would be in charge of considering commissioner nominations from July to October in 2011. Public nominations were welcome from any resident of Metro Detroit or the immediate area. The Panel was made up of representatives from a broad range of interests in order to reflect the diversity of the region and select the nominees who would serve the community best.



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### **Race2Equity Conference and Truth Commission Seating**

On November 4th and 5th, 2011 at Cobo Convention Center, the Roundtable held its Race2Equity Conference to kick off the Race2Equity Project: Examining Race, Place & Opportunity in Metro Detroit. The conference lasted two days because it served two purposes: to seat the Truth



Commission on the first day, and then to invite community members to discuss structural racism and its impact on the second. Four hundred fifty guests from around the world attended both days. Naomi Tutu, the daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, delivered the keynote speech on November 4th before the commissioners. Tutu grew up in apartheid South Africa and had experience leading Truth and Reconciliation Workshops. Judge Linda Parker then swore in the Commissioners, marking the beginning of their collective journey toward truth and reconciliation.

The third and final phase of the Race2Equity project will be Regional Action. Using the recommendations of the Truth Commission, the Roundtable will join with stakeholders throughout Metro Detroit in turning the vision of regional equity into a reality.