

WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Latest phase of Civil Rights Movement requires imaginative bridge-builders



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Just as the world once needed ghostbusters, we now need bridge-builders. These are people who can build high bridges over the troubled waters of America's race relations. Bridge-builders recognize that the legacy of our country's previous exclusionary policies during earlier years of the civil rights movement is still with us today in the form of ethnocentrism, cronyism, nepotism, institutionalism and de facto discrimination.

These "isms" tend to be exclusionary in nature, since people of color are excluded, for the most part, from the human network in which "isms" thrive and perpetuate themselves. We must seek to eradicate this type of exclusion.

The greatest challenge for bridge-builders is to devise creative and effective programs for addressing these subtle forms of exclusion.

All we need is one strong and sturdy high bridge to connect the islands of communities in Minnesota, and a few good bridge-builders to build it. Bridge-build-

ers:

1. Acknowledge they know very little about other ethnic groups. We live, for the most part, in "two societies, one black, one white . . ."

**2. Work to shed their skin of right-
eous ethnocentricity.** We all can and should celebrate our racial and ethnic diversity, but it should be viewed as just that and not as the way to the absolute truth.

3. Strive to educate themselves in earnest about other communities.

4. Realize "I don't know, I don't know." A bridge-builder knows that our ethnocentric upbringing prevents us from realizing that, at times, we are not even aware of the questions to be asked, let alone the answers. This attitude creates openness and space for us to learn from each other.

5. Are honest when discussing race. Many whites are afraid to articulate how they feel because they are afraid of being branded racist or insensitive. Many African Americans are afraid to articulate how they feel because they are afraid of being branded militant, radical, too sensitive or, even worse, non-team

players. Caveat: Honest communications will often lead to anger and frustrations. H.S. Ghandi once said, "Conflict is a way to the truth; you can't have change without conflict."

6. Are patient with other racial and ethnic groups. It will be a long haul before we have completely filtered and cleansed the intentionally polluted waters.

7. Maintain levity. To maintain our sanity on this issue, we will simply have to laugh at ourselves and at just how difficult this serious issue is.

8. Realize that the Civil Rights Movement is an American movement. Therefore, problems facing our different communities are societal problems, communal problems and, yes, your problems.

9. Appreciate, understand, and emphasize racial and cultural diversity and sensitivity in every niche of our society.

10. Recognize that the forms of discrimination and exclusion existing during CRM III are more subtle in many respects than CRM I and II and, therefore, the strategies and tactics must be somewhat different in the fight for "real" equality.

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A World of Difference is a statewide campaign to reduce racial, religious and ethnic prejudice and encourage appreciation of cultural diversity.

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