

Berkshire County NAACP Social Justice Action Committee Report

January 2020 rev.

Businesses Against Bigotry Campaign

Our Open To All? Conversation was held at the branch General Meeting on January 8, 2020. In mid-December, prior to the start of Christmas/New Year activities, we reached out through e-mail to personal contacts at a range of local organizations to help us publicize the event. We followed up with these same contacts on January 2nd, as well as posting fliers in public places. Jake McCandless, Superintendent of the Pittsfield Public Schools, was helpful in enlisting staff and students at Taconic and PHS to attend and be prepared to speak.

The publicity paid off. Our 60 cards with guiding questions were not adequate for the size of the audience who attended. We had seven guests from the business community: three from Greylock Credit Union, two from Jan Perry Realty, and one each from Hotel on North and Downtown Pittsfield who served as a panel of listeners. Will Singleton did an effective job creating a “conversation” between the speakers and panel of listeners and ensuring that all who wished had opportunity to express their views. Taconic teacher of African-American Studies, Jamal Ahamad, led off the conversation by sharing the responses to our guiding questions that members of his class had prepared in writing. By the time he finished, a line had formed at the microphone; there were so many speakers that time ran out for the wrap up in which we had hoped to solicit “next steps.”

We expect to continue work on identifying and prioritizing some follow-up in consultation and collaboration with community members who participated.

Police Profiling in Adams

The SJAC in tandem with the Redress Committee has met with the Town Administrator (TA), two Select Board members, and the Town Counsel and started the conversation about police profiling in the town of Adams, MA after a young woman of color was followed, stopped, and told she was trespassing while parked at her White father's place of business, and then told to let the officer see what was in her glove box and console.

A frank and civil conversation included the incident cited and others between POC and police, whether the police department keeps statistics on the numbers of POC that are stopped, whether there are any efforts in the area of community policing, and the need to improve efforts to help POC in Adams feel safe in their community.

The TA acknowledged that the upcoming retirements of the police chief and lieutenant are opportunities to look more closely at these issues. The TA also welcomed our team sending along the same NAACP-generated questions (from Shirley Edgerton) that were sent to Mayor Tom Bernard when he was hiring a new police chief (which the TA now has received). The next step is a meeting with the same principals plus the current police chief to continue the dialogue.

Social Justice Action Committee

Drew Herzig, co-chair

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