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David R. Bowen

Nate Ruffin

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Reader
Editorial Board

Seminar on race did little to help Jackson tensions

There is always a market for racial snake oil salesmen in Jackson's present climate of racial tension, and we were recently visited by two.

Under the auspices of a well-meaning local group called Jackson 2000, spending your tax dollars through the Mississippi Humanities Council and private money from a half-dozen leading Mississippi corporations, these guests conducted a recent seminar with the disarming title, "Building Community Through Better Race Relations."

Who could be against that? Well, almost anybody, if you heard what they said. A few quotes from the political tract they passed out to the 90 or so participants at the Cabot Lodge conference and their spoken remarks may help you get the picture:

■ The purpose (of race) is to determine who will have access to power and who will not. . . . No matter how many categories of race are established, only two count — "white" and "non-white."

■ Racism is a white responsibility. . . . Whites are the oppressors.

■ People classified as "nonwhite" came to accept the "white" view of the world and "white" values.

■ You can never be free of racism. You will always be a recovering racist. . . . You will die a racist.

Actually building wall

If you think this sounds like the usual far-left pseudo-intellectual gobbledegook currently in vogue on many of our college campuses and among tax-exempt foundations and government agencies, you would be correct.

Claiming to improve race relations, people like this are actually building a wall between the races. They believe racial hostility is eternal, and the original sin is being white. Of the Jackson City Council, they said, "Blacks are in power now, but the white folks will try to get power back."

Hey, the City Council's food fights are bad enough already without people like this encouraging them. Most of us hope we can overcome our racial frictions by working together for common goals without the presumption that it's all a power grab by one race or the other.

The pair who brought this message of racial strife are a white minister from a black neighborhood in greater Atlanta and a black woman who is an elder in his church.

I had hoped Jackson's business co-sponsors — Union Planters, Deposit Guaranty, Trustmark, *The Clarion-Ledger*, Cabot Lodge, Bank of Mississippi — might provide some moderating influence, but they apparently had no voice in the program's content.

After trying to establish the historical inevitability of racism, our visitors then offered the most simplistic of solutions: "Have an active listening encounter with someone in the 'other' racial category on the subject of race."

Let's discuss real issues

Many of us have been doing that for years. They said they had never seen a biracial group such as ours. They might be surprised to know that biracial groups meet in Jackson fairly frequently. Many of them, like this one, make no progress because they address the problems of race from only one perspective — the politically correct left, i.e., white racism is the culprit.

What Jackson truly needs is a conference where real issues are discussed and more than one point of view is represented. (I'll be happy to organize one if somebody will put up the money.) Such a meeting would address areas that generate severe racial frictions and are real barriers to progress, such as power sharing, job discrimination, discipline and progress in public schools, social discrimination, unmarried childbearing, affirmative action, crime, culture and, yes, even old-fashioned racial prejudice, on both sides.

But don't wait for any of the usual suspects to sponsor such a seminar. It would imply that finding a way for blacks and whites to live together is so complex there is no one target for blame and no one simple solution, such as, "talk to a member of another race" or "love your neighbor." That is something the simplifiers are not prepared to accept.

David Bowen is a member of *The Clarion-Ledger's* Reader Editorial Board. He is a former congressman who represented Mississippi's 2nd Congressional District as a Democrat. He now is a writer and a consultant and lives in Jackson.

Dunagin's People

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Even though race seminar 'bombed' keep trying

I have been out of Jackson for just a short while and I miss the open and candid discussions that are held about race relations.

Recently, there was a seminar held by a minister and an associate, a black female.

The speaker and his assistant were supposed to bring a message that revolved around the theme, "Building Community Through Better Race Relations."

Although I did not attend, I talked to participants who were black, white and Hispanic.

Jackson 2000 was the chief sponsor and was joined by several businesses (DGNB, Trustmark, *The Clarion-Ledger*, Cabot Lodge and Bank of Mississippi).

When the session was over, participants were very disappointed.

I also read comments in *The Clarion-Ledger* from David Bowen ("Seminar on race did little to help Jackson tensions," April 7).

After reading the paper and listening to the others' opinions, there appears a great possibility that the seminar "bombed out."

No matter how many times you fail, the name of the game should be progress.

Race relations will continue to be cyclical, and power is one of the ultimate struggles that will always be.

However, the more often we share "bread" at the table, the more we have opportunity for progress. Love is the key, and I dare the naysayer to try it.

To the leaders: Keep the seminars rolling and don't worry about the bad reviews. You need the feedback — good and bad.

Nate Ruffin
Arlington, Va.