



MINI-NEWSLETTER

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DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

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Welcome to the February Mini-Newsletter from *Dialogue on Diversity*, which brings our readers, a week or two late, to be sure, the best of wishes for Valentine's Day, edifying thoughts upon Abe's and George's natal days, and nervous lucubrations upon the brave sallies of their contemporary successor beginning the perilous voyage into unknown waters

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IN MEMORIAM . . . REFLECTIONS ON ROSCOE A. SWANN

Friends of the Dialogue were saddened by the death on February 5th of Roscoe A. Swann, a colleague in the cause, a bottomlessly witty and engaging figure, a generous contributor of new concepts in diversity and of every encouragement along the way as the Dialogue grew and deepened its message, that of a joyful and constructive voice of diversity, in our city and hemisphere.

Mr. Swann had been a colonel, a real one, and in that capacity had fulfilled a train of diplomatic assignments, all with that sly combine of suavity and shrewdness that moved mountains and welded friendships. He was introduced to the Dialogue in the early 1990s, when he was Amtrak's director of supplier diversity, a post in which he came to be a key figure among those executives in many industries and with leaders in civil society and public life whose concerns rendered supplier



diversity a guiding ideal in American industrial practice -- his name was the gold currency in these circles, everywhere about the metropolitan area and much beyond. Dialogue on Diversity's programming was then, as for the most part it remains now, directed to women's interests, particularly women's entrepreneurship. Meetings of the team of Dialogue planners customarily afternoons for tea and planning, and often Roscoe was among the group. He delighted, years later, in recalling how it was that one of the ladies remarked, out of a kind of curiosity, pointing out Roscoe, he is the only man in a roomful of ladies, does he quite belong? Ms. Caballero, the Dialogue's president, quickly replied, Oh this is Mr.

Swann, he's just one of the girls. He was in. The anecdote illustrates not only his irrepressible humor, but also the remarkable faculty that lay at the essence of Roscoe: he found himself very soon a working part of any group he came to be part of, united in a confidence and empathy that carried all before it. But he is most memorably recalled by us for his perennial role at the annual Holiday Fair celebrations, where he brought a disparate group of old and young, of diverse ethnicities, classes, and professions. to a common rapt attention, fascinated by the growing rapport between Roscoe and the children. He led them in songs -- some of his, most of their choosing. When they insisted on Jingle Bell Rock alongside the conventional tune of similar name, Roscoe dutifully led the choir, adding as a sonorous coda the obligatory classical version, sung in his rich tenor with great vim.

He delighted in regaling his young charges with tales of endless train rides around the North American continent (echoes of his Amtrak days) and with detailed accounts of the times he and his crew, many Christmas Eves, poring over their radar screens, all trained on the north, carefully traced the progress of Santa Claus and his sleigh down from the North Pole and across the continents and oceans delivering the fine things to children everywhere. After a rendition of Santa Claus is coming to Town, Roscoe looked very seriously down at his audience and reminded them of the part about the list -- the List, he reiterated in a stage whisper -- which Santa was making and checking twice, all filled with the notes about the naughty and nice, and he told them in a quiet voice. Now I'm sure you've all been nice this year. But maybe some of you have sometime, in some way, done some things that may have been a little bit naughty . . . well, Santa knows about all of those things. And that could be a problem. But listen, I agree on something: he would forget about all those naughty



things, and mark them out of the book, if we would all just sing a rousing chorus of Jingle Bells, once more. Now how about it? And with sighs of relief the entire assembly launched into a spirited rendering of the old classic. Roscoe, with every light-hearted touch, had brought to the children the chief lesson of Christmas, the entry of forgiveness into the world. The interplay with Santa himself was the piece de resistance of the day: once Roscoe, with Santa at his side, presided over a Washington style press conference, the children posing questions to Santa. Roscoe fielded the questions and relayed them to Santa, suitably edited for clarity, at once intimating the answers: How old are you, one boy asked. The MC, responding by way of background commentary, allowed as how a figure like Santa was, in truth, ageless. Ageless, replied Santa. How do you get down very narrow chimneys? a very young girl queried. Well, Roscoe observed, in the manner of the Greek chorus somberly advising the players, all the things about Santa have always been carried off with certain kinds of xxxMr. Swann calls on next young questionerxxxxx magic. Magic, answered Santa.

The Holiday fairs in years ahead, in their eternal recurrence, will never be quite the same. Now, with Roscoe Swann gone, without the joy, without the masterful and measurelessly gracious repartee of the MC with his young charges. He died in his seventy second year. The ancient wisdom is apt. The good, it was said, even when they die, are still young. Some measure of grace, humor, and decency have gone out of the world with his passing. It may be that many friends, those who had caught in the encounter some glimmer of his spirit, will be moved, by their own new inspiration, as if by recompense for our loss, to enlarge the quantum of grace and humor and decency in the world.

PUBLIC POLICY FORUM, 2009

The sprawling Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill, in its finely appointed Gold Room, once again for 2009, hosts Dialogue on Diversity's 2009 Public Policy Forum, the fifteenth edition of this principal, but no longer sole, policy exercise among the Dialogue's cycle of presentations -- now joined by special programs on Health Care in May and the Housing Issues Colloquium in early Fall. The Dialogue's policy program series in fact got off to an earlier than usual start this year with the Internet Privacy symposium presented at the Stewart Mott House January 27 (for a report on that program see last month's newsletter). A few sentiments from the introductory allocution written for the 2009 Forum —

With the title A Bracing Climate: New Breezes on the Potomac, the Dialogue's Forum sets us down in the midst of a veritable whirlwind of initiatives, on nearly every front possible in a remarkably agitated civic scene. A fresh Administration has entered the lists, packed with figures of extraordinary intellectual credentials, and at once with a deep-layered experience of the politics of Washington and the world beyond, while the newly elected 111th Congress has arrived on the Potomac in full force, with estimable forces of ancient experience and perennial political philosophies — the ballast for a ship of state in scarcely charted seas — and an enlivening contingent of new arrivals who may well approach the legislative tasks with fresh images of proper civic order and even notions of striking up a dialogue of amity with their fellow neophytes.

The country is challenged — as we really do not need reminding — on a number of fronts in this unsettled year. From the economic slowdown and the fitful attempts to find remedies, to the still far from resolved predicaments of the immigrants, most from Latin countries, who are our economically hard-pressed neighbors and at once the targets of anti-immigrant sentiment in many quarters of domestic society. In the meantime the chronic deficiencies of the country's education system present a new set

of marching orders to our Latino and other diverse population groupings as we strive to set the youngest generation off on a better prepared basis than that of their parents.

Our public policy concerns mirror this list of the difficulties confronting our society and its civic order. The Dialogue's Forum topics range from the information technology revolution, and the benefits its novel capabilities promise to confer on the now economically disadvantaged swaths of the U.S. population, to the dangers into which the country's industry and commerce are drifting, to education policies, which cry out for reform of -- and heavy investment in -- the schooling of the very young, and finally to the painful immigration situation.

The Dialogue's public policy programs regularly assemble knowledgeable and creative figures from the non-profit world of think tanks and civil society organizations, concerned professional organizations, the business and academic worlds, and, not least, members of the Congress and executives of governmental agencies. Both guests and speakers, therefore, form a group of hearers eager for the give and take of ideas diffused to a broad, receptive, and thoughtful audience.

TO THE CONTRARY – WHUT PANEL

We were invited to be one of the contributing voices in a recent panel organized by PBS television Station WHUT at Washington's Howard University. Along with Ma. Cristina Caballero of Dialogue on Diversity were D.C. Congressional Delegate (perhaps soon to be Representative) Eleanor Holmes Norton, Irene Natividad, and Dr. Fay Coleman. The topic for this edition of the periodic *To The Contrary* talk show was Health Care: Problem for Women as Small for the administrative savings available Entrepreneurs. Rising medical costs have put a fearsome squeeze on businesses in affording health insurance for their employees, and small enterprises are finding the costs prohibitive in many cases. Unless the owner wants to subsidize health coverage for employees with her own funds – not often, to be sure, the case – the coverage has to be ended – which places employees in an untenable position. The expedients to be had are not promising – borrowing from friends, skimping on preventive measures and on pills for treatment when illness strikes, delaying physician's visits when symptoms should be prompting action. All spell disaster for employees -- and if they fall sick, for their employer as well. If the employee is burdened with the infamous "pre-existing condition", then the case is harder by an order of magnitude. The situation is acutely exacerbated in these bleak days by the depth and severity of the economic slowdown striking the U.S. and countries around the world. The best bet in the small enterprise setting seems to be to sign up, for the administrative savings available, with health maintenance organizations as providers. Banding together in a combine with other small firms may again achieve administrative simplification and concomitant cost savings at the insurance company end of the system. These are a few of the larger ideas emerging from the interactive discussion among panel and audience. The upshot of the expert's discourse may well come down to a cry for swift action in these latter days by the federal government in finally establishing a more general system of health care, with accompanying steps to reduce certain of the reducible costs – one example: the large dollop of funding in the recent money bill destined for medical information technology -- whose adoption and interoperability promises very substantial increases in accuracy and speed, and a significant streamlining of testing and other medical procedures themselves.

Note: the coming Health Care Symposium, to be presented by your Dialogue on May 14th in Washington will deal with some of these cost reduction issues, and will treat in extenso the economics and technology of the pharmaceutical industry, another node of high costs in the medical picture.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH —

International Women's Day

International Women's Day is observed in countries around the world on March 8. It has been marked and observed as a combination Mothers Day, Valentine's Day, and celebration of women's influence as a political and economic force. Sometimes one or another of these facets of the occasion is emphasized, and through the history of the Day's observance a variety of causes and purposes have been served.

International Women's Day traces its origins to the agitations in the early 1900s of women factory employees, mostly in New York City's garment industry. The first observation of a special day is supposed to have been in 1909. The celebration gained impetus in 1911 as part of the bitter reaction to the Triangle Shirt Waist fire in New York City's lower east side, in which scores of young, mostly Jewish immigrant women were killed. It was a cry of labor for a radical improvement in working conditions. The day was closely associated in those early years with socialist political movements, both in the U.S. and in Europe, and was often coupled with women's opposition to the meatgrinder war then raging on the Continent. Word of the movement was circulated widely – women in Russia were aware of the day, and when the act of a courageous band of them, gathered to fast in protest of war and Tsar, beginning on February 23 (March 8th in the new calendar, shortly to be adopted) coincided with the abdication of Nicholas II, the Tsar, the initial fasting day was fixed for the celebration of women's day – at any rate that is one of the stories. In the early 1920s Russian women petitioned the gentleman appearing then to be in charge in the premises, Mr. Lenin, for recognition of the Day in the Soviet calendar. This was done, although no one got the day off. It was viewed as an occasion of importance, honoring not only women of one's kinship circle, but, among others, women school teachers, women office and factory workers, and the plentiful lady friends; and from 1965 on one did indeed get the day off. Its association during all this period with the apparatus of Soviet power made it highly suspect elsewhere in the world, and with the dissolution of Soviet hegemony and influence around 1990 the day was shunned as an emblem of a hateful period and its celebration banned in some of the former satellite countries. It has continued, at all events, as a major occasion in post-Soviet Russia. It has at the same time been revived and recalled to its American origins in the U.S. and dozens of other countries around the globe.

Since in the U.S. we do have Mothers Day and Valentine's Day, and, if one looks carefully, a fitfully observed Secretary's Day, the March 8 Women's Day has never gained a real momentum in popular consciousness. Its chief purpose in our society, therefore, is turned back to the original rationale, the righting of the historic slights visited on women, a memorial of past sorrows and past victories in the cause, and a practical pressing for specific improvements in laws and business practices and social arrangements that place women at a disadvantage in coping with a society difficult enough to navigate at best.

The Women's Day celebrations in the U.S. and Europe are marked with colloquia, conferences, receptions, and like gatherings for study and conversation on these essential issues of civic and economic life. Dialogue on Diversity takes satisfaction in calling its friends' attention to the occasion of Women's Day, March 8th, since our own purpose, one that actuates us in our programs the year round, is to converse and study and place in motion initiatives of advocacy on the political and economic concerns that are the cause of women,

a cause that has remained, in whatever altered form, a motivating force in the 100 years since the Day's founding.

We congratulate you and urge you forward on this happy

International Women's Day

In the aftermath of the great day, one can glean from reports in the press the character of the observances around the world. A very few:

Jordan Times: this English language paper published in Jordan, while admitting that due recognition of the entitlements and privileges and interests of women have had a long way to go in the Middle Eastern countries, and have not gotten to a quite satisfactory state of accomplishment in Jordan, let alone the less generously governed realms of that quarter of the globe, they have indeed seen progress, both in business organizations and in civic life, with women not infrequently holding posts of some consequence in the civil administration of the municipalities and the kingdom. It worries, however, that from time to time the placement of women in high posts may be for show and not for real. One must look at the cases with a skeptical eye.

Our good friend Swanee Hunt, former Ambassador to Austria and Director of the Women and Public Policy Institute in the Kennedy School at Harvard, reminds us of a remarkable celebration of the Day in Monrovia, Liberia, where the hopes for a reconstruction of the physically and politically devastated country have seemed to center on the sole, small figure of its skilled and dynamic President, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. At a great international colloquium held in the capital the struggles of women, along with the rest of the much anguished population, and the lot of the women of other countries, all suffering some degree of deprivation and disadvantage, were minutely examined and the deficiencies of their condition recognized. Attendance numbered some 800 persons, among them the Haitian-born Governor General of Canada, representing Queen Elizabeth II, and no small number of African and Asian civic figures of note. Aisha, the daughter of the Libyan ruler, Col. Qaddafi, **a tall, blond, plainspoken person with a wry and challenging message – if men made the world, it is women that made the men.** The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and Hillary Clinton, the American Secretary of State, appeared remotely with messages of common feeling and intention. For all the success and éclat of the colloquium on International Women's Day, things return to the humdrum on Monday morning, and the fact is that prospective, committed donor governments have not come through with grants that might have given Liberia's population a boost on the long way back and up. Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf, for all her charisma, cannot command the electric power to flow in the capital. People of good will should urge their public authorities to lend the miniscule amounts that would make majuscule differences in this unhappy place.

Here again, the Day is one of grim seriousness concerning the economic and political state of women – it is far from the Mothers Day/Valentine's day mode that has marked the Day in other places and times.

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THE WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS —

SIGNING CEREMONY OF EXECUTIVE ORDER AT THE WHITE HOUSE

Ms. Caballero, President of the Dialogue, noted in a recent message to the Board and Advisory Committee —

. . . An invitation has been extended to me as President of Dialogue on Diversity to attend the signing ceremonies for an Executive Order representing an early and serious outreach of the new Administration to women. The ceremonies, scheduled as part of Women's History Month, now in progress, will take place Wednesday, March 11, 2009 at the White House as the President affixes his signature to the document creating a new advisory body, The White House Council on Women and Girls.

The invitation for this very happy occasion constitutes an honor for the Dialogue, as we join, for this formal launch of the new Council, with President Obama and representatives of the principal organizations that have distinguished themselves in the causes of women in contemporary America.

March 11, 2009

It was announced at the signing proceedings themselves that the Council will be chaired by Ms. Valerie Jarrett, a long-time confidant of the President, that its Executive Director is the Director for Public Liaison at the White House, Ms. Tchen, and that it will number among its members representatives of interested cabinet-level agencies and members of Congress who have taken the lead on women's issues. The constitution of the body, along with one's sense of the unswerving seriousness of the new Administration, may afford reasonable hope that it will be an active and influential rather than a merely ornamental entity.