



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

Twenty Five Years of Service to America's Diverse Communities

DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY – THE SHORT HISTORY OF A MOVEMENT

THIS IS THE SHORT, CAPSULE VERSION OF THE FULL DOCUMENT, LOCATED ON THE DIALOGUE'S INTERNET SITE



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY, founded in 1990 by a group of women representing a cross section of American ethnic communities, this year celebrates its **Twenty Fifth Anniversary**. For this Quarter Century mark in its history of many-faceted programming, the day's celebration reminds us of the beneficent role of long-time members of the Dialogue's corporate family and of many collaborating organizations, whose support is clearly a source, one among others, of the organization's accomplishments. In recounting the chronicle of Dialogue on Diversity's life and times, we have, perhaps quite arbitrarily, divided the twenty five years of the story into five successive parts, the quinquennia (of five years each), for short labeled here Eras.

THE OPENING ERA

The chronicle of our Dialogue commences in a review of its origins ca. 1990 through the initiatives of a group of dedicated women, concerned for the well-being of diverse and nurturing societies, in our own near environment, but also far afield. Interested in the international aspects of their concerns, the founding circle of the nascent Dialogue reached out in a series of exchange visits to women in the

swiftly evolving politics of Eastern Europe and the then increasingly porous Soviet space. It went on, over the years following, to unfold a comprehensive vision of domestic concerns – of social practice and public policy, technological advance, and economic viability.

The organization's attention, at all events, was soon drawn for the most part to economic viability and domestic policy questions in the face of the plethora of gaping needs in our home society. The roster of these pioneers in the Dialogue included women of a variety of callings and professions, and ethnicities

In November of 1991 the organization was formally set up as a not-for-profit corporation in the District of Columbia. The Dialogue's new Board of Directors wasted no time in submitting the application for recognition as a tax-exempt organization under §501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The application was approved several months later, in early 1992.

In 1992 the first of a series of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology Conferences was held, before an audience of some thirty souls, in a cramped space at the Department of Commerce. Next year we had graduated to a ballroom in the Washington Hotel, with a reception at the rooftop to follow.

THE SECOND ERA

Not long after, in Spring, 1996, the first running of a quite different program, the Public Policy series, was put before our growing Metro area audience, with visiting members from as far as Colorado and New Mexico on hand. The original venue was a capacious conference room at the Brookings Institution. Soon the public policy programs had migrated to Capitol Hill at such sites as the Cannon Caucus Room and the Rayburn Gold Room.

The evolution of these programs was accompanied by conferring AWARDS on worthy achievers in a variety of fields within the purview of the Dialogue's concerns. These were initially awards presented at the early Entrepreneurship/IT Conferences. In the late 1990s these awards were broken off from the Entrepreneurship conferences and presented as an annual self-standing program, with added kinds of recognition, most notably the Trailblazer Awards for women (later men as well) whose exploits in public- or private-sector undertakings had advanced the cause of a constructive diversity, whose acts had made a dent in the harsh surface of an ailing society, and who stood as role models for young women; and finally an International Award, conferred on a woman whose work had materially brought betterment in the comity of nations and the maintenance of peaceful relationships.

The international concerns of the Dialogue and its leadership were on display once more on the occasion of the FOURTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (for short: WCW IV), held in the late summer of 1995, with its parallel schedule of NGO Symposia, both running simultaneously at sites in Beijing, China. A Dialogue on Diversity delegation presented a seminar, titled Inter-Ethnic Dialogue on Entrepreneurship in the NGO track, dealing with the promise of a smart entrepreneurship and its curative effects for the chronic economic necrosis that damped prospects for growth and social development in large parts of the globe. Perhaps the most interesting part, at all events, was the long train of meetings and after-conferences back in the U.S. following the Beijing meetings, all assessing the content of the conference proceedings, and mapping out strategies for advancing the ambitious agenda set by the official conference, not to mention the reverberating commentaries of the numerous concerned civil society groups.

It was also during the eventful second period of the Dialogue's growth that the classic change of pace for the holidays was observed, with the Holiday Fair, dating from 1996, an occasion that was conjoined from the outset with the obligatory Children's Gift Collection. Children, all living in economically disadvantaged households, are assembled by community organizations serving their families, and brought to the Holiday Fair site. They perform dances and songs their teachers and they have prepared for the day, polish off a lunch of hot dogs and juice, and receive presents, gaily wrapped, and classed by age and gender. Santa Claus is a regular figure in the day's proceedings. For all the Christmas

trappings, The Dialogue has carefully called the occasions the “Fair”, and has referenced them to the “holidays”, so that families of other persuasions are suitably and clearly defined as welcome.

THE THIRD ERA

The advent of the newly free-standing Health Care Symposia dates from the Summer of 2000. The origins of the health care program – health had been a frequent subject in the general Public Policy Forums throughout – were much conditioned by our collaboration with the Montgomery County, Maryland Initiative for Latino Health.

The Health Care Symposia have remained consistent in their topics for exploration over the fifteen years of the series. Among their themes are, first, the state of the laws and institutional structures in which the national enterprise of health care proceeds. The health care system was under close public scrutiny since Harris Wofford, a newly elected Senator from Pennsylvania, had made the conditions of unequal access, rising costs, and other perceived flaws in the U.S. health care apparatus the principal theme of his electoral campaign, forcefully and abruptly bringing the entire complex of problems to the forefront of public discussion. Detailed and critical debate on the shape of a general health care reform immediately got underway, to issue at last in the enactment of the ACA in 2010.

A duty for “cultural competence” formed another repeated focus of attention in the symposia. Reviews of major health threats, rotating the bill of featured maladies from year to year, are an additional constant presence on the agendas.

Meanwhile the Awards evenings, then being held at the Hall of the Americas at the OAS headquarters on Constitution Avenue, had grown more opulent with the years, and had come to be studded with stellar personalities. Awards were conferred on Ambassadors, Foreign Ministers of Latin American countries, and the legendary Argentine media mogul, owner for 46 years of El Clarín, Sra. Ernestina Herrera de Noble. Still another event of interest was the visit of the renowned Swanee Hunt, formerly the U.S. Ambassador to Austria, and then and now head of the Institute for Women and Public Policy at Harvard’s Kennedy school, and a leading activist in causes of women’s condition around the world. Ambassador Hunt is a colorful and deeply influential figure in the world of public discourse, and is a member of Dialogue on Diversity’s Advisory Committee. She received the International Award for 2003.

THE FOURTH ERA

Midway in the decade of the 2000s a subtle change of emphasis was observed in the Dialogue’s programing. In the fall of 2008 ominous notes of economic decline were reaching a fortissimo and the corporate sources of funding for NGO’s were drying up. A costly annual party for 2008’s awards was not in the cards this time around. A very reduced evening for a convivial supper at Penn Quarter’s La Tasca, saw the conferring of a shorter than usual list of awards. There was the additional factor: the growingly elaborate Awards ceremonies, which no doubt offered a number of picturesque moments, clearly were drawing time and resources from the core work of the Dialogue. But the awards were by no means abolished: they were henceforth to be incorporated into the related substantive programs in Dialogue on Diversity’s yearly cycle, at this point five in number, plus the Holiday Fair.

At the same time the Public Policy Forum chief topics began to emerge as several distinct events. The related subjects found their own home in the Health Care Symposia, dating from 2000, while housing issues were dealt with in an early autumn Housing Policy Colloquium, which was discontinued around 2009 in favor of a new Women’s History Month program in the March time frame.

Still two other regular substantive programs were making their appearance as offshoots of the general Public Policy theme during this period. One of these was the Internet Data Privacy Colloquium, linked with an international observance of “Data Privacy Day”, January 28th. It may be mentioned

here that Dialogue on Diversity has more recently begun issuance of a series of occasional papers, titled Privacy Notes, with commentary on the broad range of privacy questions, of which to date ten numbers have been issued. These, like the colloquia themselves, deal with such subtopics as law enforcement and government regulation and surveillance, to social media with their enticement to the young and naïve to disclose more than prudence might well counsel, with extended treatment of the particularly vexed questions of IT adoption in the health care/medical worlds, which have given rise to problems of improper disclosure of materials from electronic medical records.

A second offshoot of the public policy topic, also having its first running in 2009, is the combined Domestic Violence Awareness and Immigration Colloquium, held annually in late October. The harms of domestic violence are at once medical and psychological, not to mention the extensive wreckage to the economic prospects of a household, but they are amenable only in part to the ordinary remedies through medical or psychiatric treatment. Instead the evil necessarily involves other parties; the causes lie in ill-adjusted interpersonal relationships within a household, and in external stresses imposed on the household through poverty, and the battering under the spate of legal disabilities. The range of sub-topics has been broadened, in the latest editions of this Colloquium, to the distinct but probably related questions of trafficking – perhaps the most shocking of the vicious practices widespread around the world, not least because of its typical exploitation of persons only little out of childhood, and at that for ugly accompaniment of sexually abusive activity. Immigration law and its enforcement practices are related to domestic violence concerns in a variety of ways, often because of the complications that arise in dealing with these incidents under the special legal constraints faced by migrants, especially the “indocumentados”. We have heard as well from economics experts on the logic of immigration, Mr. Alex Nowrasteh from the Cato Institute, for example, who recommends quite persuasively a supple and large scale schema of guest worker arrangements.

The public policy Forum itself is somewhat re-cast as a presentation focused on the questions of women’s rights under law and of their status under social norms and practices in this country and elsewhere in the world. These Forums we have considered, for example, labor markets, education, inclusive of the special STEM studies and the subsequent fortunes of women making their way in technical and scientific professions. A regular feature of these Fora has been the report of experts on the relative condition encountered by women in a variety of points on the globe – with a sharp eye trained on the pernicious practices rampant in the Middle East and elsewhere. Other presentations have retailed the histories of women’s progress, more often than not achieved after arduous struggle — progress in economic self sufficiency, and in meaningful civic roles.

THE FIFTH ERA – MODERN TIMES

The Quarter-Century mark is a time to pause and look back on the causes we have placed in the light and explored. And to recognize the legions of knowledgeable speakers who have expounded their insights on the essential topics. The most recent years have seen a more closely developing relationship with the Ana G. Mendez University System, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and having four ancillary university sites in the U.S. mainland, one in the Maryland suburban area.

The Fifth Era segment of the Dialogue’s chronicle is marked by extensive structuring of a relationship with three of its present corporate family. The first of these is the CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, the branch of the large medical insurance complex covering the Mid-Atlantic section of the eastern seaboard. In collaboration with Dr. Malcolm N. Joseph, its Medical Director. The Microsoft Corporation has also borne a key influence in the sharpening of the Dialogue’s presentations on entrepreneurship and information technology. Additionally the Microsoft staff at the Innovation & Policy Center on K Street, N.W. in Washington have been generous in providing the settings and the amenities for many of our conferences and symposia over the last five years. Again, the American

Federation of Teachers has significantly aided in the Dialogue's ventures in health care, education, and women's history.

EPILOGUE – PROSPECTS FOR THE GOOD SOCIETY

The Anniversary portion of the program for this September 21st. 2015, includes a commentary, fashioned as a view to the future, projecting the evolving course of Dialogue on Diversity over the several years to follow as we move forward past the present 25th Anniversary milestone. It is proposed to elaborate our already existing education themes. We view education as a field — already thoroughly studied, yet nevertheless in need of creative cultivation. The directions in which the work of Dialogue on Diversity is pointed are perhaps implicit in this compact review of the most recent accomplishments of the Dialogue's five substantive programs of the annual cycle, plus the always invigorating Holiday Fair.

The key issues and the topics followed like a veritable lodestar —

Health and Wellness, Domestic Security from Violence

Privacy and Information Technology

Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship, Education and Investment, Immigration