



"Charitable Giving: A Conversation Worth Having"

By Betsy Nelson

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In late April, I attended a provocative discussion I never really thought I would hear in Baltimore: It was on the subject of race.

The event was the first in a yearlong series sponsored by the [Open Society Institute-Baltimore](#) called "Talking about Race." The highly successful event drew an extremely diverse audience to the Maryland Institute College of Art for a screening of the HBO documentary "The Black List: Volume II" and a discussion with the filmmakers afterward.

It was clear from the crowd of blacks and whites, young and old, affluent and not, that our city is hungry to talk about an issue that rarely is discussed easily in Baltimore.

For too long, race has been a taboo topic. But on the national stage, that is changing with the election of our first African-American president. And locally, the Open Society Institute-Baltimore believes our majority African-American city could benefit from a similar intelligent, honest conversation.

It's not entirely surprising that it would take an organization like OSI-Baltimore, which prides itself on "audacious thinking," to initiate this conversation. As Diana Morris, director of OSI-Baltimore, explains, "Many of the issues our foundation tackles - such as untreated drug addiction, over reliance on incarceration, and obstacles that impede the city's youth from succeeding in school - are tinged by race. But we also believe that racism explains why some of those intractable issues persist."

Earlier this year, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder publicly noted that our country is "a nation of cowards" when it comes to addressing and resolving prevalent racial issues and tensions and stated that, "We, average Americans, simply do not talk enough with each other about race."

Why is it such a difficult conversation to have? I'm not entirely sure, but I'm glad one local organization isn't afraid to start us off in Baltimore. How we talk about race - or why we don't talk about it - is as important as any other social issue with which we wrestle.

Many of the problems on which OSI and other nonprofit organizations focus have been shaped by racial discrimination. As OSI's Diana Morris notes, "The more we all become skilled and comfortable talking about race, the better able we will be to address the practices and policies that perpetuate inequity. And that will help us become a more tolerant, just and civil society."

The next event in the series will be at 7 p.m., June 4, and will feature journalist Gwen Ifill of PBS's "The NewsHour" and noted civil rights lawyer Sherrilyn A. Ifill, a member of OSI-Baltimore's board of directors. The two cousins will lead a discussion entitled, "[Talking](#)

[About Race Now: How to Build Success Without Forgetting the Struggle.](#) at the central branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library.

The free event is open to all. More events are planned for the fall.

I don't want to miss any of the community conversation and invite you to join me.

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