



# Pathways to Racial Healing in the American South: A Community Philanthropy Strategy

On April 7th and 8th, 2011 the Clinton School's Center on Community Philanthropy hosted the first summit in a three year journey entitled, "Pathways to Racial Healing and Equity in the American South: A Community Philanthropy Strategy."

Dr. Charlotte Williams, Assistant Professor and Director of the Center on Community Philanthropy, used the center's power of convening to bring together more than 120 local stakeholders and decision makers to learn about and discuss race and equity as it relates to structural racism in our society.

The keynote speaker, and the Center's "Scholar in Residence", was Dr. David Williams, Harvard University's Florence and Laura Norman professor of Public Health. He is internationally recognized as a leading social scientist focused on social influences on health. His research has enhanced understanding of the ways in which racial discrimination, socioeconomic status and religious involvement can affect physical and mental health.

Through his expertise on race and discrimination in the United States, Dr. David Williams was not only able to depict the problems we face surrounding race and equity, but also explain what can be done to productively address structural racism.



From left to right: Clinton School Dean James L. "Skip" Rutherford; Assistant Professor and Director of the Center on Community Philanthropy, Dr. Charlotte Williams; and Race & Equity Scholar, Dr. David Williams

## Harrison, Arkansas: A Case Study in Racial Healing



Carolyn Cline, Patty Methvin, and Layne Wheeler Ragsdale are residents of Harrison who have also been promoting racial healing and community building. They facilitate the Harrison Community Taskforce on Race Relations, whose mission is to "respond to an inaccurate, negative image, namely that Harrison is a racist community."

The Taskforce engages Harrison's residents by framing the conversation as an economic and moral issue and it hopes to alter race relations by intentionally change people's perceptions about Harrison. They have relied on local time, talent, and treasure to enact a variety of media techniques to achieve altering the image of Harrison by redefining the social norms regarding race.

Harrison residents have used include news interviews, community meetings, and even an independent film called *Banished*, addressing communities that experienced black flight.

Harrison is transforming from a 'sundown community' to a place where there is racial healing on the horizon.

## Promoting Racial Healing through Community Philanthropy

Dr. David Williams used various studies to show that while we communicate a strong commitment to racial equity, these changes in attitude are not resulting in changes in our social reality. This is defined as the principle-implementation gap: while our social norms have changed regarding what individual prejudices are socially acceptable, as a society we are not yet willing to implement policy that will alter our systems to produce racial equitable results.

Ultimately, Dr. David Williams suggests that to create meaningful change we must raise awareness and create political will to do the right thing and charges the Center on Community Philanthropy as an important leader in this process.



The following suggestions will be utilized by the Center on Community Philanthropy as it engages community leaders and institutions in addressing issues of race and equity:

1. Raising awareness of the deeply embedded, subtle forms of prejudice
2. Promoting interracial contact and creating a ‘safe context’ for this meaningful contact
3. Convening relevant stakeholders and experts to redefine race in American culture and society
4. Educating leadership to create the political will to dismantle structural racism

## Facing Race through Community Conversations



Clinton School students, Kate Cawvey, Derrick Rainey, Hilary Trudell, and Ryan Williams, sought to engage in the conversation to achieve change through their partnership with Philips Community College of the University of Arkansas. PCCUA has been engaging faculty and staff in activities and trainings on class and race in an effort to eliminate institutional barriers to educational opportunities.

In fall 2010, PCCUA invited the Clinton School students to develop a structure to enact a small-group dialogue-to-action project addressing the issue of race. The Clinton School students created a collaborative model to engage a core group of PCCUA faculty and staff in crafting a curriculum. By relying on the local wisdom and insight of the core group at PCCUA, the Clinton School team was able to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the college.

In the process of this curriculum creation the students facilitated various options with the core group and modeled productive communication skills, which ultimately empowered the core group to develop new skills and knowledge to conversations on race in with other PCCUA faculty and staff, students, and the Helena-West Helena community.

## What is Structural Racism?

UALR Chancellor Joel Anderson, Attorney Griffin Stockley, and Dr. David Williams participated in a discussion panel entitled, *What is Structural Racism?*. Each panelist presented information and fielded questions that explained how structural racism is present in many of the systems that we are a part of.



Attorney Stockley defined structural racism as a system of hierarchy and inequity that results in the “normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal—that routinely advantages whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color”. Dr. David Williams presented on inequity in housing opportunities and quality of healthcare, and Dr. Anderson spoke of education and institutional biases, as well as the efforts needed to begin to address structural racism.

Each panelist expressed a need to further explain structural racism to the public and not to confuse the symptoms of structural racism with the causes of structural racism.

## Participant Perspectives on Structural Racism

During the summit, participants broke into groups to reflect on structural racism and discuss their own experiences.

- Summit attendees identified experiences in their own lives and in their communities that perpetuated racism.
- There was a consensus that communities needed to make racism a top issue so that it can't be ignored and so progress can be a priority, especially since structural racism is largely subconscious and unintentional.
- There was recognition that whites and people of color relate to structural racism differently. Varied views were expressed on how each group should interact with systems to advance progress in race and equity.
- Participants expressed a deep concern with how race is discussed and framed by different stakeholders. Participants expressed divergent views about what language, tactics and expectations should be used.
- Further, participants recognized that many current conversations about race do not include all voices that hold a stake in making change; more established leaders should be present in conversations about structural racism to increase the likelihood that change will occur at all levels.



## Save the Date - March 29th & 30th, 2012 - Race & Equity Convening

The Center on Community Philanthropy is pleased to announce its forthcoming race and equity convening.

The featured presenter for this convening is

### **Professor John A. Powell**

Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University  
Gregory H. Williams Chair in Civil Rights & Civil Liberties at the Moritz College of Law

Professor Powell has been internationally recognized as an authority in the areas of civil rights and civil liberties and a wide range of issues including race, structural racism, ethnicity, housing, poverty, and democracy.

**This is a free convening and the public is invited to attend.**

**Pre-registration will begin on January 9, 2012 and conclude on March 9, 2012.**

For more information, contact Sam O'Bryant at  
[sobryant@clintonschool.uasys.edu](mailto:sobryant@clintonschool.uasys.edu) or 501-683-5204.



Center on Community Philanthropy  
Sturgis Hall  
1200 President Clinton Avenue  
Little Rock, AR 72201

501-683-5656 (office)  
501-683-5219 (fax)

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