

Days of Dialogue Facing Racism and Bigotry

Co-hosted by Feel The Bern Democratic Club San Fernando Valley and the Northeast Valley Poor People's Campaign

Fire Station 87, 10124 Balboa Boulevard, Granada Hills.

October 22, 2023

Demographics:

-10 participants

-3 Male

-7 Female

-2 White

-8 multiracial (including Latina, Asian, and Indigenous)

-Age: All over 40

Overview:

A broad array of participants--business owners, healers, community activists, a project manager for a social justice organization and an attorney--joined this Dialogue on Facing Racism and Bigotry in Los Angeles with the goal of encouraging racial healing after a political controversy caused lasting outrage.

The focus: a leaked secret recording of racist and disparaging comments by Los Angeles City Councilmembers including President Nury Martinez, Kevin De Leon and Gil Cedillo along with

the county's top labor leader Ron Herrera. Like old-time segregationists working on a backroom deal, they strategized on how to gain more political power for Latinos through redistricting, while disenfranchising African American voters. They thought nobody else would hear their crude, profane and derogatory comments. Martinez, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, denigrated Oaxacans as short and ugly. She likened the young, black son of a fellow councilmember to a misbehaving, "little monkey." She insulted Jews and Armenians, including members of the city council. She called a gay councilmember, a "little bitch." De Leon, Cedillo and Herrera made their own negative comments or agreed silently with Martinez. The remarks, never intended to be made public, provoked a firestorm. President Biden, and many, many others demanded resignations. Martinez, Cedillo and Herrera are gone. De Leon refused. Still divisive, he remains on the city council, and recently made the runoff that could allow him to keep that position.

Participants listened to excerpts of that leaked recording and received a guidebook prepared specifically for this Days of Dialogue before four facilitators the discussions.

Highlights of those conversations:

- "The City Council members heard on that tape do not own our city. They think they do. They talk like they do. Their comments were beyond racist. They were egregious..."

- “We put trust in our politicians not to be racist. These comments felt like a betrayal. Individual racism is harder to track than systemic racism...”
- “Because of the scarcity mentality, people are fighting for the limited crumbs that have fallen off the table...”
- “The power structure helps these people erase others so they can advance...”
- “They have this idea that that Brown political power requires Black erasure...”

The focus on the leaked recording provoked a much broader discussion about the presence of racism in Los Angeles, and its negative impact. An interesting observation compared racism within the Black/Asian/Latino/Indigenous communities, often based on appearance. For example, Nury Martinez has immigrant parents from Mexico, yet she put down immigrant Oaxacans as short and ugly. This dialogue emphasized topics related to racism and included the effects of poverty, the dehumanization of people experiencing homelessness and inadequate public education.

Importantly, participants also offered solutions.

Facilitators asked each group the same questions from the guidebook prepared specifically for this dialogue. For example, question 12: What actions do you believe are appropriate to take to overcome institutional racism in city government? Some responses: “electing city councilmembers committed to building coalitions across racial and ethnic lines and to making positive change happen...; “demanding outcomes-based accountability...,” “a ballot measure to require ranked choice voting...,” “removing money from politics...” “exploring how to repair the

damage caused by the recordings...,” “developing a restorative process...,” and “promoting things that unite us rather than escalate the divisions.”

Facilitators Feedback:

In response to the disturbing audio, participants felt outrage, sadness, fear, anxiety, hope, engaged, awake or aware. Some knew much more than others about implicit bias and resulting behavior. Many wanted to learn more. All were committed to participating in social change.

The guidebook specific to this dialogue provided a wealth of information and resources. The section on “Racial Injustice and Racial Healing” launched insights that went well beyond broken-record complaints about the problem of racism. The graphics offered another method of prompting unique discussions. The questions were especially effective at eliciting creative and varied responses including solutions.

Recommendations:

Going forward, dialogues must keep the spotlight on strategies that prevent or fight racism. Returning often to these topics will benefit our participants and our city.

