

GREATER DALLAS COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION

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Protests of City Officials Demonstrate Need for Dialogue April 14, 2001

Many Dallasites were caught off guard last week when race relations took a visible turn for the worse in our city and the divisions between us became painfully obvious. When Dr. Martin Luther King said that peace is not the absence of tension but the presence of justice, he could have been talking about Dallas. Race relations in Dallas seem at best to simmer below a façade of calm, and at worst, our tense race relations often boil over into the streets and public arenas of our city.

The protests surrounding Police Chief Terrell Bolton, County Commissioner John Wiley Price, and City Council members Miller and Blumer at Miller's home, at City Hall, and at the offices of the Dallas Morning News are clear indications of the tensions boiling over again. American public protest is an institution as old as the Boston Tea Party. Protest stirs us from our complacency and forces us to acknowledge concerns otherwise overlooked or avoided. Much of the progress in American race relations has occurred because of protest. Protest has its well-deserved place, and yet, protest alone leaves us without a way to heal the wounded state of Dallas' race relations.

Our city needs more. Picketers on opposite sides of the conflict at a recent radio station-sponsored protest at City Hall, genuinely seemed to want to discuss the issues with each other, but were separated by police and by their own anger. They settled for yelling at each other through bullhorns across the barricades questions like, "Does the fact that I'm white automatically mean I'm a racist?" "What about the white chiefs who did questionable things? Why didn't you protest them?"

These meaningful questions come from a place of personal longing that talk radio and protest do not satisfy. And yet personal experiences, shared over time, are what actually change hearts. Many in this city have understandably given up on that kind of change. The Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission believes it is still possible, and regularly calls on North Texans to engage with each other in a way that allows them to be changed by each other. We hope more will accept the invitation.

The Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission exists to improve race relations and multi-cultural understanding in North Texas. To become involved, call 214-948-0303 or go to www.dalcommunityrelations.org.