

DAILY TIMES

How to reach racial equity? Webinar explores issue

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Ifeoma Aduba

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How to move towards racial equity was the topic of discussion in a session held by the Foundation for Delaware County Wednesday.

The foundation featured the "Taking Action for Racial Justice" session as one of its quarterly webinars in the "Learn" series and spotlighted Ifeoma Aduba from the Mudita Collective, who's also worked in executive roles with A Woman's Place in Bucks County and at the Liberty Hill Foundation in Los Angeles, Calif. In Delaware County, Aduba has served as the interim executive director for the Domestic Abuse Project in Delaware County and is facilitating a Racial Equity Task Force for the Foundation for Delaware County.

"(This) is a program that's overdue from us," Katie Kenyon, community development coordinator for The Foundation for Delaware County, said. "It's an overdue conversation within the broader non-profit community and in many of our individual organizations. Where we're really good at seeing and responding and we're less strong in challenging and undoing the harms within the systems we work in ... It's overdue in Delaware County as a whole ... Our goal today is to provide a launch point for our conversation together around racism, injustice and a vision for equity throughout Delaware County."

In facilitating the session, Aduba shared some of her own experiences, including having a racial epithet hurled at her on the school bus at the age of 7 in Doylestown and having a police officer come up to her as a 13-year-old waiting for her mom at the end of her

bakery shift and tell her people like her in the streets made other people uncomfortable and that he'd arrest her if she was still there when he came back. At Mount Holyoke College, she said she was pulled over because she "looked suspicious" and was told "her kind" wasn't smart enough to go to a school like that.

"I very firmly believe that our path forward as individuals, as organizations and as a community is through conversation," Aduba said. "We have to bravely speak up, listen, respectfully engage, make mistakes, offer grace and learn both independently and together."

She said one of her goals during the presentation was for the viewers to acknowledge the existence of inequities and to recognize the opportunities that are ahead, impacts that can be made and actions that can be taken.

Some of the factors adding to the inequity that Aduba included that in 2013, the median net worth of white households was \$141,900 compared to \$11,000 for Black households and schools with 90 percent or more white students spend \$733 more per student than schools with 90 percent or more students of color.

She said that after the Civil War, only 30,000 Blacks owned land compared to 4 million who did not because of an 1865 federal law rescinding the promise of 40 acres for former slaves. Sharecropping, Aduba explained, legally obligated former slaves to rent land from their former masters, buy materials from that master at higher prices and sell their crops solely to that master at lower prices.

She also explained that the war on drugs, starting in 1971 and continuing today, targets Black and brown communities despite comparable rates of use and sales across racial lines and that Black families are 10 times as likely to have a family member in prison and more likely to fall into hunger because of incarceration.

The gap between the hourly pay of Blacks and white went from \$3.55 an hour in 1979 to \$6.73 an hour in 2016, Aduba said.

"The legacy of racism is complex and deeply personal," Aduba said. "The harmful effects of that history live in our institutions, in our polices and our practices and in each of us. What's become clear over time is that true change has not been achieved."

She said the goal is to transform systems and organizations so that they fit all people, with a prioritization on humanity.

"We as people need the ability to work with the dignity of having our histories acknowledged and our life experience valued," Aduba explained. "People want to be able to bring their whole selves to their work. When we're looking at racial equity, what we're really striving for is everybody having that opportunity to be their whole self."

She encouraged asking questions when making decisions, such as "Are all racial groups who will be affected by this decision at the table?," "How will the decision be perceived by each group?" and "Does the decision worsen or ignore existing inequities?"

Aduba said these conversations must be ongoing and the work must continue.

Quoting Isabel Wilkerson, she said, "Many people may rightly say, 'I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.' And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stressed cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands."

The "Taking Action for Racial Justice" webinar can be viewed on the YouTube page for the Foundation for Delaware County.