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Vol. 20 | AUG 2026



**SDARJ: MARKING A DECADE
OF ACHIEVEMENT**

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From the Editor

This issue of Black Voices celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice.

Ten years ago, a group of individuals, all committed to those values that assure equality and equity, racial and social justice for everyone, considered Michelle Alexander's request that we all must work to end the racial caste system, which continues to hold many of its citizens in bondage. The establishment of the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice was our response to Michelle's statement that *"If we want to put an end to the history of racial caste in America we must lay down our racial bribes, join hands with people of a colors who are not content to wait for change to trickle down and say to those who would stand in our way accept all of us or none"*. Ms. Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow*, spoke to the intentional and ongoing presence of oppression, denial, and racism, from enslavement, Jim Crow, to Mass Incarceration.

Racism continues to be the major barrier to healthy, productive, and loving communities, where unity rather than divisiveness is the goal and where differences and shared humanity are acknowledged and respected. Racism has been normalized and legalized, woven deceptively into programs of opportunity, but unattainable for many. It is the nation's original sin and challenges our claim to greatness. It continues to have a significant negative impact on everyone's ability to fulfill the Great American Dream. It seems unreal that many are still seeking freedom, equality, fairness, and justice more than 163 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, 237 years after the Bill of Rights was introduced, and 62 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. When will Racial Justice be a reality?

SDARJ has developed many programs and invited community adults and youth to participate in conversations and learning opportunities about the internal and intentional systemic barriers to genuine freedom and equality. During its 10-year history, SDARJ held more than sixty (60) Town Halls, where local and statewide leaders, students, previously incarcerated citizens, religious leaders, and others spoke to large audiences regarding racism. Those in attendance had the opportunity to share their concerns and make recommendations for change. Through its educational and advocacy work, SDARJ hoped to enlist the support and involvement of community residents in understanding and dismantling barriers to equal opportunities for all residents. It established a Book Club and, in collaboration with the Cinema Arts Theater, launched the Black American Film Festival to present authentic Black American stories.

The builders of SDARJ share the belief that we are all obligated to respect, care, and advocate for each other. "We the People," All of Us, are the beneficiaries of the Constitutional entitlements. We are also the gatekeepers and caretakers of the promises made for future generations.

SDARJ has been blessed with an army of volunteers, supporters, sponsors, and donors who are the genuine builders of the organization. We are grateful for and applaud their labor, efforts, financial support, advice, and advocacy on behalf of our determination "To Eliminate Racism and its Corrosive Consequences." We invite others to join SDARJ on the journey to Justice and the Beloved Community.

CHARLOTTE KING

Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Lewes, DE

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF



... Ending racism and its corrosive consequences

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The Editorial Staff is committed to producing a publication that is a truthful learning opportunity for the entire community. All are invited to lend their voices via letters to the editor, commentaries and articles of interest. Submissions are reviewed by the editorial board and may be edited for brevity and clarification. We regret we cannot return any unsolicited articles, photos or other materials.

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10TH ANNIVERSARY GALA



Saturday, October 24 | Kings Creek Country Club, Rehoboth Beach

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For more info,
registration/tickets,
or to sponsor the gala:



5:30 - 8:30 PM
(Doors open until 10pm)

Dress Code:
Cocktail Attire

Tickets:
\$135 per person

(This is SDARJ's third annual gala; the previous two events sold out. Early registration is encouraged.)

Celebrate a decade of work advancing racial justice, equality, and fair opportunity with us. The evening will feature remarks from Delaware's leading elected officials and local business leaders, live music and entertainment, a silent auction, and a formal program celebrating SDARJ's accomplishments over ten years. Special guests include speakers who will congratulate the organization and share their support for its continued mission.

"STILL ROOTED, STILL RISING"

A poem to honor the past while moving toward the future

By, Tierra D. Williams

Out of pain **SHE** began, with justice in her heart..

An Alliance, she would eventually become
From criminal advocacy, to monthly Town Halls
HER work had only just begun...

"No Justice, No Peace!" echoed in the streets
For when the community called- **SHE** came
Be it book clubs, voting, House Bills or DETR
HER work was never for fame..

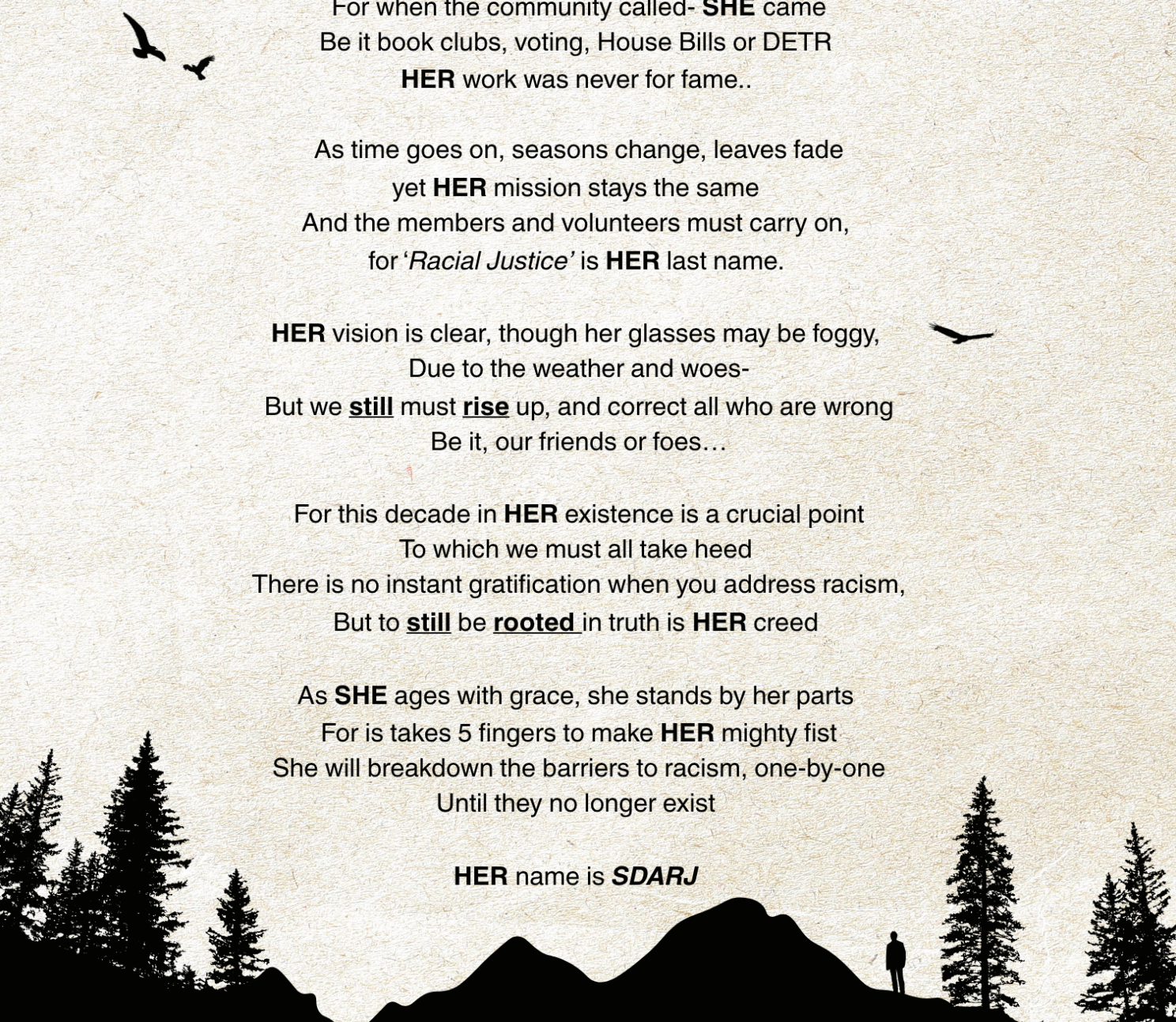
As time goes on, seasons change, leaves fade
yet **HER** mission stays the same
And the members and volunteers must carry on,
for 'Racial Justice' is **HER** last name.

HER vision is clear, though her glasses may be foggy,
Due to the weather and woes-
But we still must rise up, and correct all who are wrong
Be it, our friends or foes...

For this decade in **HER** existence is a crucial point
To which we must all take heed
There is no instant gratification when you address racism,
But to still be rooted in truth is **HER** creed

As **SHE** ages with grace, she stands by her parts
For it takes 5 fingers to make **HER** mighty fist
She will breakdown the barriers to racism, one-by-one
Until they no longer exist

HER name is **SDARJ**



The Vision that Started it All:

A Look Back at Charlotte King's Purpose, Mission, and Fulfillment of Early Dreams

BY JESSICA R. CLARK

Political figure, diplomat, activist, and former first lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, once said,

"A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves."

And so it is with Charlotte King, who founded the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice 10 years ago. Miss Charlotte, as she is affectionately called, had a vision when she reached out to many Sussex County communities to form partnerships, recruit volunteers, form committees, and petition the legislature in support of it. She did not request financial support but found, as she so eloquently comments, "God and volunteers – people from the community, businesses, churches, neighbors, allies and members -- kept the Alliance alive. As a nonprofit, we survived for 10 years totally from contributions and the generosity of local people in Sussex County – one of the largest area building companies, a Dewey brewery, restaurants, and the Alliance members – all kept us alive. Some people believe in racial justice and eliminating



racism and its corrosive consequences. The Alliance programs touch people. They like the work we're doing."

Before retirement, she served in many leadership roles, including Executive Director of Catholic Charities in Washington, D.C., Director of the Charles County, Maryland, Department of Social Services, and ultimately as head of the Maryland Social Services Administration.

After a successful 40-year career as a licensed clinical social worker and mental health therapist in New York City, Annapolis, Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, she retired to Lewes, anticipating a quiet, relaxed life.

Like most retirees, after working all their lives and identifying with their jobs, Miss Charlotte wondered what the next chap-

Continued on Next Page →

ter of her life would bring. “I moved on Monday and got a job with Delaware Guidance for Children on Wednesday.” She worked primarily with students and families at many Sussex County schools. “I had worked at clinics all over the country. This was the best clinical experience in little, old Lewes. The organization was well run with great mental health services for children and their families.”

After that, there was no stopping her. Miss Charlotte volunteered for many organizations at the state and local levels. Some leadership volunteer roles included board member and President of the League of Women Voters from 2013 to 2015, was appointed to the Delaware Commission for Women for four years, and served as a board member of the Lewes Historical Society, West Rehoboth Trust, Community Minority Liaison Committee, the ACLU of Delaware, All Saints and St. Peter’s Episcopal Churches, Beebe Healthcare, and many others. “That’s volunteerism,” she explains. She continues to serve on numerous local and state boards, including the First State Community Action Agency.

In 2025, she was inducted into the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame, alongside Valerie Biden Owens, Claire DeMatteis, and Charlotte Miller-Lacy, all women who have made a profound mark on Delaware. Yet, she is very modest, commenting, “This article is not about me.

It is about the Alliance. Many people have contributed, not just me.”

In 2015, after a group gathered to read *The New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by civil rights litigator and legal scholar Michelle Alexander, the Alliance was born. Jim Crow, the name of the American racial caste system of rigid anti-Black laws, practices, segregation, and Black racism, operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Alexander’s book addressed race-related issues specific to Black males, particularly the disproportionately large rate of imprisonment of Black men in the United States. The central premise of Alexander’s book is that mass incarceration is, metaphorically, the New Jim Crow. Sussex County members of the Unitarian Universalists, Trinity Faith Christian Center, and St. Peter’s Episcopal Church gathered to read and discuss the book. “We also read *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. This ignited a movement,” comments Miss Charlotte. “We asked, ‘What can we do?’ That’s how the Alliance began.”

Early on, the Alliance tackled systemic issues such as inconsistencies of patterns of sentencing and in the treatment of incarcerated men and women in the Delaware criminal justice system, and in education, where there was a lack of diversity in teaching. “We worked closely with the Office of Defense Services for expungements, with

the attorney general, Parole and Probation, and the Commissioner of the Delaware Department of Corrections.” During its 10-year history, SDARJ established scholarships for Black students, initiated the annual African American Film Festivals, and launched a six-week seminar program that explores learned and implicit biases and guides participants to address systemic racism. Monthly town halls were prepared, giving the community a chance to learn more about the issues from those mandated to assure equality and equity for all Delawareans. See Susan Goekler’s article in this issue. The quarterly publication, *Black Voices*, began in 2022. The newest committee, the Returning Citizens Support Committee, began in 2024. Refer to past *Black Voices* publications, all committees, and other activities on the website at sdarj.org. Join the Alliance. “The mission of the Alliance is to educate, inform, and advocate for racial justice and fair opportunity,” she explains.

Charlotte King has led with courage, commitment, and dedication to instill her vision for the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice. The organization has become a leading voice for criminal justice reform and racial equity in Delaware.

“The wondrous power of racial justice is the creation of the Beloved Community where resides all of humanity in awe of one another,” Miss Charlotte concludes.

SDARJ - The First Ten Years

BY DREW MCKAY

The enduring success of the SDARJ really shows how one person can make a difference. In January 2016, I was looking for opportunities to contribute to my community, having just concluded thirty years on the road. I talked to several people about how someone could get involved, and several said that Charlotte King was starting an organization I would be interested in. It didn't take long for me to agree that the Alliance under Charlotte's leadership was for me.

Charlotte literally came out of her hospital bed to meet with interested parties to discuss her vision for the Alliance. From the beginning, Charlotte welcomed a diverse and exceptional group of supporters with open arms. She not only welcomed them but also encouraged everyone to speak freely, suggest alternatives or new activities, and represent the Alliance in various forums. While she had a clear sense of the Alliance's mission, she believed there were many paths to its goals.

She was adamant in maintaining a non-partisan, ecumenical foundation for the Alliance – even though there were times when others wanted the Alliance to take politically easy positions. As a result, both Democrats and Republicans felt at home in the Alliance. And



leaders of both parties welcomed the Alliance's input on issues facing the State.

Charlotte wanted the Alliance to speak out consistently in the community on issues affecting racial justice. Hence, one of our first volunteers became the Alliance's virtually full-time voice in Dover's Legislative Hall. Similarly, Trinity Church provided space for monthly meetings on a wide range of topics, open to anyone interested. Those monthly meetings included one in which four local chiefs of police and the State Police Commander of Troop 7 discussed community policing and answered questions from attendees. Similarly, affordable housing was another important topic at a monthly fo-

rum whose panel included county and state housing officials and Developer Preston Schell, resulting in a plan to set aside and cap units in a new development in Lewes. Finally, at another forum, local high school students shared their perspectives and histories of attending Cape schools, which they felt was the first time anyone had shown interest in their situation.

Throughout its brief but remarkable history, the Alliance has stayed true to its mission of educating, informing, and advocating for racial justice under the steady, thoughtful hand of Charlotte King. May those of us who follow in her footsteps be as successful in pursuing its goals in the future.



Town Halls – Key to SDARJ’s Beginnings

BY SUSAN GOEKLER

Once the small group of people who completed a book study of *The New Jim Crow* embarked on exploring the situation in southern Delaware, one of their first decisions was to invite people involved with Delaware’s criminal legal system to address them – and invite others to hear what they had to say. Thus arose Town Hall meetings. Early members of that founding group included Rev Jones from Trinity Faith Christian Center

and Rev. Edwards from Friendship Baptist Church. Rev. Jones offered his church’s hall to hold meetings.

For the first few years, the town halls were held regularly on the second Tuesday evening of fall and spring months. The first year’s focus was on Delaware’s criminal/legal system. Panelists included formerly incarcerated individuals associated with The Way Home, representatives of

local and state police departments, prosecutors and public defenders, the Attorney General, a state Supreme Court justice, and the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections. An Outreach Committee, chaired by Don Peterson and including Charlotte King and Janet Orlando, planned each Town Hall. Committee members parlayed the connections they already had through their memberships in the League of Women Voters,

the ACLU, Common Cause, and political parties to gain access to government officials. Most people invited were pleased to be asked to talk about what they did and their perspectives. The invitations suggested that the audience was particularly interested in the racial-justice implications of their experiences or work. At each Town Hall, 1-3 panelists would make a presentation. Then the floor would open for questions from the audience. Audience members often asked pointed questions about the implications of their work for racial justice, sometimes prompting panelists to reconsider what they were doing and why. Following the Town Hall with police officials, some uniformed law enforcement officers attended subsequent Town Halls – not to provide security, but to hear what was being said and to learn about community concerns. SDARJ likes to take some credit for changes in attitudes and practices during local interactions between law enforcement and Black people.

For the second year, the SDARJ board and outreach committee decided to prioritize education as a focus for Town Halls. A lack of knowledge about Black history, especially local history, along with reports of Black students experiencing racial insults and disproportionate disciplinary actions, stimulated that decision. Town Hall invitees included administrators from both the Cape and Indian River School Districts, the state Department

of Public Instruction, and students from several districts who were participants in Pathways to Success. At the time, the Delaware legislature was considering a bill (HB198) to require the teaching of Black history in the social studies curriculum. Other Town Hall panelists included the bill's sponsor, Senator Lockman, and local state senator Ernie Lopez. Other Town Halls provided information about the history of Black schools and eventual desegregation in southern Delaware. We learned about Pierre duPont funding the construction of schools to educate Black students throughout Delaware, as they were excluded from the “public” schools. Those schools served students in grades 1-8. Until 1950, there was no high school for Black students in Sussex County; those wanting a high school education had to go to Dover or Wilmington. Delaware's Sussex County schools were not desegregated until 1967. HB 198 did get enacted, and a commission was established to advise on curriculum. Progress has been made, but local Black history is still sorely lacking.

After two years of Town Hall series dedicated to a single system, the Town Halls addressed a variety of topics. Some memorable discussions included a Schell Brothers representative addressing affordable housing and Charito Calvachi-Mateyko and others expounding on restorative justice. Aimee Wiest led a Black history lesson using

music while accompanying on the piano.

When Calvin Jackson joined the Outreach Committee, he started preparing introductory videos to start the Town Halls. For each, he sought music and images that set the stage for the evening's topic. Trinity Faith Christian Center staff generously allowed SDARJ to use its AV system and provided the technical help needed. Mr. Jackson had retired as Communications Director for the National Institutes of Health and had also served as a TV producer (receiving an Emmy for his work!). His work with the committee became essential when COVID made in-person gatherings impossible.

The switch to ZOOM for Town Halls expanded the audience to over 100, including some from out of state. It also facilitated presentations by a larger variety of voices. Most ZOOM Town Halls had a recorded music-and-video introduction; most presentations were live. Because Town Halls used webinar technology (rather than meeting technology), questions could be typed in for the panelists. Memorable topics included Black Wall Street, a two-part series on reparations, the reverse Underground Railroad, gun control, and the Milford 11's confrontation with school segregation. When SDARJ President Charlotte King's home

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was vandalized, a Town Hall, including the Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Lewes Mayor, Police Chiefs, and religious leaders, was quickly convened to consider how to prevent and respond to such violations. For two successive years, SDARJ's December Town Hall was a Kwanzaa celebration. The format encouraged collaboration with other organizations, including a joint Town Hall with C.A.M.P. Rehoboth and a Town Hall featuring Black fraternities and sororities – their history and their relevance today. Once

SDARJ's legislative committee became active, it presented an annual Town Hall outlining SDARJ's legislative priorities for the upcoming session of the Delaware Legislature. Because of copyright licensing rules, recorded SDARJ ZOOM Town Halls were posted for 1 month and then removed from the publicly available website.

When restrictions on public gatherings were lifted, SDARJ continued to host Town Halls via Zoom for a while. It increased the flexibility of topics, but the sense of community generated with in-person Town Halls dissi-

pated. Members expected content to be accessible online and expressed a desire to gather in person as well. Locations in Sussex County that can effectively host hybrid meetings are limited and often costly to rent. In the past couple of years, SDARJ has hosted some hybrid Town Halls and others that were in-person only.

For information on future Town Halls, scan the QR or visit sdarj.org or join to access the weekly updates.



Dear friends,

Today, I would like to join our community as we celebrate ten years of the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice—ten years of faithful commitment to the work of building a more just, equitable, and beloved community. The vision of their founder, Charlotte King, has been a God-send to our community and has produced a rich harvest!

For a decade, the Alliance has helped educate our region about the history and continuing realities of racial injustice, fostering understanding that can lead to meaningful change. Through conversations, programs, partnerships, and advocacy, it has enriched the cultural life of Southern Delaware by bringing people of different backgrounds together in mutual respect and collaboration.

The Alliance has been a persistent voice for justice, addressing inequities within the criminal justice system and advocating for reforms that uphold the dignity and worth of every person. It has worked alongside other organizations and community leaders to challenge the structures and systems that perpetuate racism, while encouraging all of us to imagine and create a more equitable future.

Most importantly, the Alliance has invested in the next generation, seeking to ensure that our children will inherit a community marked not by division and prejudice, but by opportunity, understanding, and hope.

The work of reconciliation is both challenging and sacred! As we all celebrate this milestone, we give thanks for everyone

who has contributed their time, wisdom, courage, and perseverance to this work. We all know we still have much work to do! May we all look forward in the hope that the years ahead will bring renewed energy, deeper partnerships, and continued progress toward a society where justice, reconciliation, and human dignity flourish for all.

Congratulations on ten years of service, leadership, and transformative work in Southern Delaware. May God continue to build on this excellent foundation! May God bless you with many more years of success as you strive to strengthen the very fabric of our communities with justice and compassion.

The Reverend Jeffrey Austin Ross
Rector, Saint Peter's Church
Lewes, DE

SDARJ Book & Film Discussions

The Book Group – and indeed SDARJ itself – grew out of discussions of *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, hosted by St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Lewes in 2015. This series was followed by a similar series in 2016 hosted by Unitarian-Universalists of Southern Delaware. A question arose out of those meetings: "What can we do?" And SDARJ was born.

The Book Group was organized in 2017 by Dr. Aimee Wiest. After Dr. Wiest passed, a volunteer committee took over selecting titles and leading discussions.

The mission of this group and activity has always been in support of the larger mission of SDARJ, to educate and engage people with the issues and culture of Black people in America – in the hope of reducing racism and its corrosive effects.

Meetings have always been held at Lewes Public Library (except during covid lockdowns, when they were continued by Zoom), and have always been open to the public. While In-Person meetings are again available, the Zoom option has been maintained, and the group regularly

draws participants who are not local – some from as far away as Georgia and New York. It is estimated that the total attendance for these meetings exceeds 1,650 people.

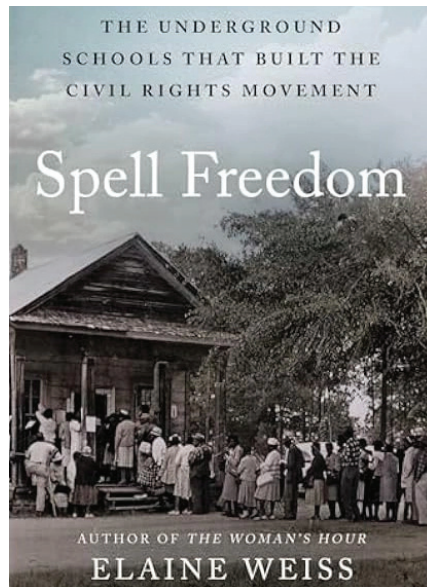
The group usually has 11 meetings per year, though some years had 12 meetings, for a total of 105 meetings. Over that period, we have read more than 86 books and viewed 24 films. In recent years, when complementary books and films were available, we have both read and watched offerings. Our upcoming discussions are listed below.



AUGUST 25 | 6PM

Is That Black Enough For You?: History and Craft of African-American Cinema (Film)

Directed by Elvis Mitchell



SEPTEMBER 22 | 6PM

Spell Freedom: The Underground Schools That Built the Civil Rights Movement

by Elaine Weiss



OCTOBER 27 | 6PM

Descendant (Film)

Directed by Margaret Brown

John Dickinson Plantation

BY GWENDOLYN MILLER, CHAIR | SDARJ COMMUNITY PARTNER



Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs | delaware.gov

Reconstructed log dwelling at the John Dickinson Plantation, showing the type of housing once used by enslaved people, tenants, and indentured servants. The mansion can be seen in the background.

The Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice (SDARJ) Community Partners' work with the John Dickinson Plantation (JDP) and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) represents a high-impact model of community-informed public history, interpretive accountability, and institutional change. Grounded in the national *Addressing the Silences* initiative, the partnership confronts historical omissions by embedding fuller, more accurate accounts of the past within public history institutions.

A central focus of this collaboration has been the **development, refinement, and amplification of enslaved narratives**, addressing longstanding historical silences by centering the lived experiences of enslaved, free,

and indentured Black individuals. SDARJ and JDP have worked together to create and strengthen interpretive content—including audio narratives—that draws from archival research, oral histories, and community knowledge, with particular attention to themes such as family separation, resilience, labor, agency, and the human consequences of enslavement. This ongoing work demonstrates scholarly rigor and ethical care by refining language, strengthening historical accuracy, and ensuring that interpretation honors the lived experiences of those whose stories were previously marginalized. These narratives move the interpretation beyond institutional or architectural history and toward a more ethically

grounded, human-centered understanding of the past.

Equally important is SDARJ's contribution to **institutional and systemic change** within the museum context. Guided by the ICSC framework, the partnership has moved beyond consultation toward shared decision-making, helping identify barriers to inclusion and co-create solutions such as community-driven programming processes. This reflects SDARJ's broader importance: the organization does not simply advise. Still, it actively helps reshape how institutions interpret history, engage communities, and embed equity and inclusion in both narrative and practice.

The **September 18, 2024, Town Hall** marked a pivotal public milestone, introducing the partnership and establishing a model for community engagement that emphasizes transparency, dialogue, and collective ownership of historical storytelling. Building on this foundation, the **upcoming Town Hall presentation on September 22, 2026**, represents a continuation of this work—providing an opportunity to share progress, highlight ongoing narrative development, and reaffirm the partnership's commitment to accountability and community voice.

The collaboration's national significance is reflected in its

inclusion in the **ICSC Addressing the Silences Toolkit**, a resource developed from a national cohort of museums and community partners working to confront historical omissions, build reciprocal relationships, and co-create more inclusive public narratives. Within that toolkit, the SDARJ-JDP partnership functions as a concrete model of how a local community partnership can generate broader institutional learning: it shows how community outreach can identify barriers, how shared decision-making can produce durable systems change, and how historically silenced stories can be incorporat-

ed into public interpretation with greater care and accountability. In this way, the work extends beyond Delaware by offering cultural institutions a practical, replicable framework for addressing exclusion, strengthening public trust, and advancing more equitable historical storytelling—source: International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, *Addressing the Silences*.

Taken together, the SDARJ-JDP partnership demonstrates how community expertise can transform public history from a static presentation of the past into a more accountable, in-

clusive, and evidence-informed practice. Its impact lies not in a single program or narrative revision, but in the convergence of community engagement, institutional learning, and interpretive repair: SDARJ has helped JDP strengthen the accuracy and humanity of its storytelling, create more meaningful avenues for public participation, and model practices that other cultural institutions can adapt. The result is a partnership that advances both local change and broader field-wide learning about how museums can confront historical silence with rigor, care, and shared responsibility.



Justice, In Their Own Words

Reflections from SDARJ Scholarship Recipients

SUBMITTED BY GLORIA HO

Black Voices strives to center, honor, and amplify the voices that are often ignored, minimized, or left out of a larger conversation. For our 10-year anniversary issue, we asked past and current SDARJ schol-

arship recipients to reflect on what justice means to them and what change they hope to see in the world.

Their voices serve as a reminder of why this platform matters.

When the younger generation speaks on justice, they imagine a better world and challenge us to help build it. We highlighted three of our young voices.

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"Justice is the principle that morality and ethicality govern our actions as a society, and when they are not represented, there are consequences. However, beyond using laws to judge a person as "guilty" or "not guilty," justice to me is the act of standing up for those who may be unable to stand up for themselves. It is providing for others, not for personal gain, because our lives are no more important than others'. This is directly relevant to our current society and to areas that need change to promote justice.

A change I would like to see in our world is the addressing of economic inequality among marginalized groups. We must provide stronger and more genuine support to all people experiencing financial and/or housing insecurity, not only in the short term but also in the long term. Another change I would like to see is stronger accountability being held in both the healthcare and education fields, with an emphasis on supporting BIPOC to ensure voices are being heard, concerns are being addressed, and appropriate resources are being provided for every individual."

Uriella Newcomb | Laurel, DE
University of Delaware



"To me, justice is the freedom to exist without having to prove your worth. It is the ability to walk through the world knowing your voice matters, your story belongs, and your dreams are just as worthy as anyone else's. As a young Black woman and writer, I have learned that words can be both mirrors and windows—mirrors that help us see ourselves reflected with dignity and windows that allow others to understand lives beyond their own.

The change I want to see is a world where young Black girls are not taught to shrink themselves, but are encouraged to take up space, speak boldly, and dream without limits. I want to see communities where opportunity is not determined by zip code, race, or circumstance, but by a person's passion and potential. Justice, to me, is planting seeds of equity today so future generations can grow in places where they are nourished, celebrated, and free. Through my writing, I hope to continue telling stories that challenge, heal, and remind people that every voice carries the power to create change."

Ayreonna Hudson | Milford, DE
Delaware State University

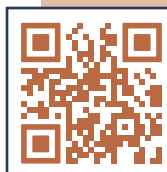


"In today's day and age, feeling like you have an impact on the world can be hard. If you can't take part in gatherings and demonstrations, you can still make an impact on those around you.

Justice extends beyond racial and political topics, reaching into everyday interactions with others. It's about being mindful of your words, showing courtesy, respect, and sensitivity to others' situations.

A change I'd like to see in the world is more acceptance. No matter one's political, racial, sexual, or religious background, humans can all agree on one thing, and this is love."

Iris Harris | Millsboro, DE
Sussex Central High School



**Learn more
about SDARJ's
scholarship
program:**

Events and Excursions Committee

BY SHARON BERNSTEIN, CHAIR

The Events and Excursions committee supports the vision and mission of the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice by providing programs to inform, educate, and advocate for racial justice, equality, and fair opportunity.

They include the following examples:

Dialogue Toward Ending Racism is a six-week series of two-hour sessions offered in person or online. Trained co-facilitators provide guidelines to help create a safe environment for honest and sometimes difficult sharing of stories about ethnic backgrounds, the influence of upbringing, and personal lived experience with racism. Readings and videos about the inequities in our society help stimulate conversation about the impact of these differences.

The **Western Sussex County Tour** is best described in a quote from the guide pamphlet. The tour is “an opportunity to uncover the often-overlooked stories of Black America in Delaware—stories of resilience, achievement, and struggle—while reflecting on the triumphs and injustices that have shaped our shared history. By visiting these sites, we honor the past, recognize the ongoing fight for racial justice, and inspire action toward a more equitable future.”

Our annual **Dr. Martin Luther King Celebration** is a sell-out event. Youth and adult performers honor Dr. King’s life and his contributions through song, dance, speeches, and drama. This past January’s theme was *Supporting Our Youth, Defending Our History*. All the proceeds benefited the Charlotte King Scholarship Program.

The October **Difference Makers Gala** is our major fundraising event of the year. We accomplish this through sponsorships, an online auction, and the sale of 160 seats for an evening of fun, entertainment, good food, and the chance to mingle with a diverse group of people who support our mission. In this 10th anniversary year, we will celebrate a decade of making a difference and our commitment to growing in the next decade.

The thread that runs through all these programs is an invitation to challenge the power that our history has over our beliefs and actions. We must continue to shed light on false narratives that limit what is possible and have the curiosity to scrutinize what we would rather keep in darkness. Engaging outside our normal cohort exposes us to an undiscovered richness within a community that honors our shared humanity.

Committee Members:

Alisha Armstrong
Sandy Baynard
Kris Chew
Ruth Cohen
Maria Cordonnier
Linda Defeo
Dorothy Dobbyn
Jen Epler
Robin Fisher
Pat Garchinsky
Sharon Bernstein (chair)

Dialogue Toward Ending Racism: Seven Years of Changing Sussex County, One Conversation at a Time

BY JOSEPH LAWSON

In 2019, SDARJ brought Sussex County something it had never quite seen: a structured, frank, and completely free conversation about racism. The program began as Dialogue to End Racism, a nationally recognized YWCA curriculum. SDARJ obtained permission to use it, then adapted it for the realities of Southern Delaware and gave it a new name — Dialogue Toward Ending Racism, or DTER.

Over seven years, 29 sessions, and 200-plus participants, DTER has grown into a six-week seminar that examines the origins of racism, why it persists, and what people can do about it right here in Sussex County. The curriculum draws on the work of Milton Delaware Bryan Stevenson, whose book *Just Mercy* and movies have made him an internationally recognized fighter for social justice. Heather McGee, whose book *"The Sum of Us"* reframes racial equity as a gain for everyone; Ibram Kendi, who popularized the term "anti-racism"; and many others. This is not a lecture. It is a safe space — carefully facilitated — where people

talk honestly and often leave changed.

The course is free. Free is not an accident. It is a philosophy. SDARJ believes the work of understanding racism cannot carry a price tag if we are serious about reaching the full



community. That commitment is sustained entirely by volunteers: more than 20 instructors over the years — including Calvin Jackson, Joe Lawson, Carol Worcheck, Dr. Marlene Saunders, Karen Lewé, Robin Fisher, Kate Cauley, and Susan Goekler, who helped rewrite the curriculum. Instructors donate more than 400 hours cumulatively every year. It is, as they will

tell you, a labor of love.

When COVID arrived, DTER pivoted to Zoom rather than pause. When the pandemic receded, SDARJ kept the virtual option. Today, the program meets in person at the Lewes Library, and one session runs online. DTER has also taken learning on the road: four sold-out bus tours have carried participants to western Sussex — to Seaford's shuttered DuPont plant, Laurel, Georgetown, Frankford, and Bridgeville — connecting eastern Sussex residents to a part of their county many had never explored.

DTER alums are woven into the fabric of Southern Delaware activism — pastors, organizers, and community leaders who trace at least part of their commitment to those six sessions. Led by Rob-in Fisher, who served on Laurel's City Council for more than 20 years, and coordinated with tireless dedication by Kay Hubbard, DTER remains one of SDARJ's most powerful contributions to this region: turning distrust into understanding, one conversation at a time.



“We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about – survival and growth.”

– Audre Lorde



NASA astronaut Mae Jemison waits as her suit technician, Sharon McDougale, performs a unpressurized and pressurized leak check on her spacesuit, 1992 / NASA, Wikimedia Commons

“A Darker Perspective”: The Power of Representation:

Addressing why Black Voices in leadership, media, education, and culture matter.

Power to the People

“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.” The words of the first Black Woman to touch the stars, Dr. Mae Jemison, were spoken in 2009, almost two decades ago, and they still ring true today. Be it *Brown v. Board of Education*, the

15th and 19th Amendments, the *National Association for Black Journalists*, or the *CROWN Act of 2023*, Black Americans have fought to reclaim and maintain our personal and political power.

Black Voices Magazine, created in 2022, has been a platform for almost 5 years to speak out

against negative stereotypes and ideologies concerning the Black community. Instead, displays the accomplishments of those in our community. At a time when black voices weren’t at the forefront of any newspaper, radio station, or magazine, the Alliance found a way to be represented and respected.

Excellence in Education

“Separate but Equal.” A phrase that has never truly been fulfilled. Despite it all, Black men, women, and children have educated themselves, created schools and Universities, and demanded equality. The Lewes Integration from 1961-1963 was sparked when the Allen and Daisey families were fed up with their children walking miles every day to access education.

Fast forward to the present: we have women like Dr. Doris Person, who recently retired after 35 years of involvement with the Cape Henlopen School District, spending her final years as principal at Rehoboth Elementary School. Although she may not be the first Black principal in Delaware’s history, she made her mark by fighting for rigorous, classical education for African American students despite low resources. As an advocate for excellence, she encouraged not only Black students but every student to live up to that standard.

Dr. Person stated, *“When students can see themselves in their teachers, leaders, books, and lessons, they are more likely to believe that they belong, that their voices matter, and that their dreams are possible. Representation helps all students learn from one another and builds a stronger school community where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.”*

Research scholars Gloris Ladson-Billings, James Banks, and Christopher Emdin and others have shown that when students see themselves reflected in their teachers, curriculum, and school community, they experience a stronger sense of belonging, greater engagement, and improved academic outcomes. Representation helps students envision what is possible while helping all students develop a deeper understanding of one another and the world around them.”

Marian Wright Edelman says, *“You can’t be what you don’t see.”*

Melanin in the Media

Despite the first news broadcast airing in 1940 on an NBC affiliate, it wasn’t until 1978, on ABC World News Tonight, that we saw the first Black co-anchor, Max Robinson. Further down the line, it wasn’t until Brian Busby hit the scene in 1988 that we would experience the first degreed African American Male Chief Meteorologist at a major TV station. Those doors they opened led only to greatness.

Paul Williams is currently the Chief Meteorologist for Coast TV in Delaware, but Mississippi is where he got his start. Known as one of the most prominent Black broadcast Meteorologists in the market, he’s also credited as being the first long-term Black Meteorologist in Jackson, MS, covering major

disasters like Hurricane Katrina.

When asked his perspective on the importance of diversity in the Newsroom, he didn’t hesitate. *“Representation matters because our frame of reference shapes how we see the world. Imagine a box with four different colors. One side is green, another is blue, another is red, and another is yellow. If all you’ve ever seen is the green side, you might honestly believe the entire box is green. Not because you’re wrong, but because that’s the only perspective you’ve been given.”*

He goes on to say, *“The challenge is that the box was never just green. That’s why representation matters. It isn’t simply about having different faces in the room; it’s about having different perspectives, experiences, cultures, and approaches to understanding the world. Representation allows us to see the entire box instead of just one side of it.”*

Paul ends on this note, *“Communities are not monolithic. They are made up of people with different backgrounds, traditions, beliefs, and experiences. The media has a responsibility to reflect that reality. When only one perspective is consistently presented, the public receives an incomplete picture. But when multiple voices are included, the story becomes richer, more accurate, and more meaningful.”*

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African Americans in Authority

Shirley Chisholm once said, *“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”* That mantra has moved melanated people for decades to find a way to be seen, heard, and respected. It wasn’t until 1970 that we saw the first Black woman elected to the Delaware General Assembly, Henrietta R. Johnson, and in 2024 Lisa Blunt Rochester became the first Black person and first woman to represent Delaware in the U.S. Senate.

It has been because of those accomplishments that many have had the opportunity to represent their respective towns, boroughs, and states— including Councilwoman Trina Brown-Hicks. Sworn in this past June as the newest member of the Lewes City Council, she was asked to share her thoughts on why Leadership should speak for everyone.

“It is important to have Black Representatives in leadership roles, because the Black, Brown, African American, and Native American communities should have someone they can identify with, someone who they feel may have similar experiences who can relate to that experience and really feel as though their successes, failures, and

concerns are heard, embraced, and acted upon. These experiences aren’t just one dimensional; it’s generational.”

Colored & Cultured

Whether it was Carter G. Woodson implementing Negro History Week in 1926, or the men and women of the Harlem Renaissance going into the 1930’s, Black culture has been copied and criticized at the same time, all whilst captivating American culture.

In Delaware, it’s been no different. In 2015, Delaware’s first Black Male Poet Laureates were Nnamdi Chukwocha and Albert Mills, known as the “Twin Poets”, or Clifford Brown, a Delaware native and highly influential jazz trumpeter and composer; talent is all around. When it comes to representations, SDARJ was featured in a local piece titled “Black Lives Matter vs Blue Lives Matter: 2020 Recap” and in a “Black History Month: 2025 Series” aired by WMDT 47ABC, both of which received AP Chesapeake Broadcasting Association Awards. This shows how putting our culture on display should be recognized and respected.

And that’s not all. SDARJ Founder and President Charlotte King just received the 2026 Community Appreciation and Recognition Award from the Lewes African Ameri-

can Heritage Commission. She wanted to add this into the conversation: *“American society is not ‘White’. Blues, jazz, music, it’s such an integral part of America! When people think of us, they don’t see success; they see savagery, and we have to change that. We are America; we built it, and we did it until ‘death do us part,’ and that should be acknowledged.”*

Dark, but not Despair

The term “dark” has always been associated with something depressing, sinister, or grim. At times, it can also refer to keeping something secretive, hidden, or obscure. More often than not, negative labels and stereotypes are placed on the Black community, and reframing it takes back our power. “Dark” can be seen as protective, creative, magical, resilient, or bold.

After all, life begins in the dark, and the stars can only be seen amongst the darkness. The galaxy is filled with wonder and darkness, just like our people. As we continue to push forward and inspire the next generation, we remember the words of Dr. Mae Jemison, the woman who reached beyond the stars, *“The future never just happened; it was created.”*

Tierra D. Williams
SDARJ Board Member

Delaware Creates a Permanent African American Heritage Commission

In a vote with zero opposition in either chamber, the General Assembly affirms that Black history is Delaware's history.

In a moment of rare and genuine bipartisan unity, the Delaware General Assembly passed Senate Bill 330, establishing the Delaware African American Heritage and Culture Commission — a permanent, state-funded body dedicated to preserving, celebrating, and sharing the rich history and contributions of Black Delawareans.

What does this mean in everyday terms? Imagine a permanent statewide team — appointed, funded, and empowered by law — whose specific job is to make sure that African American history, culture, art, and heritage

are honored, taught, and protected in Delaware. The Commission will work to identify and preserve historical sites, support cultural programming, and ensure that Black Delaware's story is told fully and accurately for generations to come.

The bill passed the Senate on June 11, 2026, with a vote of 19 to 0. It then cleared the House on June 25, 2026, with an overwhelming vote of 38 to 0. Not a single legislator voted against it in either chamber. That is not a common thing in today's political climate, and it speaks to the moral clarity of this legislation.

The bipartisan sponsorship was broad and deep. In Sussex County, Republican Senators Eric Buckson, Gerald Hocker, David

Lawson, Brian Pettyjohn, Bryant Richardson, and David Wilson all signed on as co-sponsors. So did Democratic Senator Russ Huxtable of Lewes. On the House side, Rep. Alonna Berry, who represents parts of Sussex County, was among the co-sponsors.

Senator Marie Pinkney (D), the bill's lead Senate sponsor, and Representative Nnamdi Chukwuocha (D) led the charge in the House. Their work, and the work of more than 30 co-sponsors across both parties, made this possible.



Read full article
& how Sussex
County Legislators
voted on HB444

What SDARJ has meant to me

As the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice approaches its 10th year, let us in Sussex County, Delaware, as the first in the state, be grateful and thankful to founder Charlotte King, as well as all members, for their ambitious and critical vision to “to eliminate racism and its corrosive consequences”, thus leading to a more positive impact on our communities at large.

The moving spirits behind diverse topics (such as social

justice and voting rights) that are often discussed in town hall sessions have brought together a broad and strong body of community champions for this cause.

Furthermore, the opportunities given to scholarship recipients, as well as the sponsorship of the Friday evening program, help keep Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy alive.

Therefore, I look forward with great anticipation to the con-

tinued, comprehensive, and rich community engagement of The Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice. I speak of the above with the hope that all of us in every community continue to be led, in part, by the resourceful inspiration of The Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice, fostering character in the next generation, seeking opportunity, and inspiring each one to take their rightful place in America.

Sincerely,
William W. (Bill) Collick



Addressing Injustices in the Criminal/Legal System

The Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice (SDARJ) arose from a book study group after reading *The New Jim Crow* by Michele Alexander. Alarmed at the racial injustices revealed, the newly formed SDARJ focused its attention on what was happening in Delaware. The entire first year of town halls focused on various aspects of Delaware's criminal/legal systems. The rest of this article discusses some small ways SDARJ has helped make the system more just.

At one Town Hall, audience members challenged local police chiefs about the treatment people in Sussex County had received from local police. During subsequent Town Halls on many related topics, uniformed police officers were in attendance, not for security or by request of SDARJ, but because they wanted to hear from the community and consider implications for their work. Many local police departments became more

thoughtful about racial profiling. Troop 7 appointed SDARJ's chair as honorary policy chief for one year. Some became more attuned to hate crimes and treatment during arrests. Governor Carney appointed several SDARJ members to various committees working on police accountability reform. And police accountability boards have been set up in many jurisdictions.

One SDARJ project, inspired by insights into issues in Delaware's criminal justice system, was to organize four expungement clinics for juveniles. SDARJ arranged locations, recruited volunteers and affected individuals, enrolled attendees, and served food to attendees. The Office of Defense Services provided attorneys' services. SDARJ did not keep a count of how many expungements this project facilitated. Still, for those with criminal records cleared of juvenile offenses, it was a relief and opened doors for them, including opportunities for further

education. When the Delaware legislature passed a bill providing automatic expungement for certain offenses, SDARJ discontinued its clinics. In some small way, SDARJ's work might have inspired the passage of that bill. Unfortunately, since then, implementation has not always happened as SDARJ hoped.

On many occasions, SDARJ's leader, Charlotte King, received requests for help from individuals who felt wronged by Delaware's criminal justice system and experienced unfair treatment and/or missed opportunities to acclimate to the community (both during and after incarceration). She helped where she could and realized that SDARJ needed a more organized way to provide this support. In August of 2024, SDARJ created the Returning Citizens Support Committee (RCSC). A recent Maryland transplant to Delaware, Melvin Mitch-

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Conversations That Change Communities

Dialogue Toward Ending Racism (DTER) is an educational program of the Alliance that has been offered twice yearly for the past 7 years. Based on a program of YWCA-Delaware, the curriculum focuses on improving Sussex County residents' awareness of the history of racism and its manifestations today.

Over 200 individuals have completed the 6-week program. They spend 2 hours each week with a group of neighbors, frankly examining their own biases, discussing incidents of subtle or vicious racism, and learning more about systemic racism against Black people. The group learns ways to quash racist talk and motivates people to become more active in fighting racism. Trained volunteer Facilitators lead these discussions.

Most of the time, the groups are racially diverse. Individuals tend to bond quickly, and they often form lasting friendships.

Many DTER participants go on to make significant changes in our county. DTER alum, along with several Alliance activists, founded the non-profit Speak Out Against Hate (SOAH). Individuals who completed DTER have become active with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Indivisible, the League of Women Voters, social justice groups in their faith communities, and political campaigns. Several DTER folks have put together 3 narrated bus tours (so far) of the western part of Sussex County to showcase its beauty and the dispari-

ty in resources compared to the coastal area.

DTER is advocating for racial justice, one person at a time. The ripple effect of these 12 dialogues per year cannot be overstated. Family dynamics get better. People speak up when they see or hear examples of racial injustice. Voters pay closer attention to elections. We share books, see each other at films, work together on events, and come out stronger from the lessons and relationships of DTER.

While we believe that one day racism will end, for now, DTER will continue to refine its curriculum to encourage antiracism in Sussex County, Delaware.

Robin Fisher, DTER Chairperson
Kay Hubbard, DTER Chairperson



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ell, agreed to chair this group, with a history of involvement in prison ministry. He commented, “The committee will research and report issues in the life cycle of the entire prison system and advocate for change – from intake, sentencing, and incarceration; to returning to society; and effecting and/or supporting change through legislation.”

Since its founding, SDARJ’s Returning Citizens Support Committee has accomplished the following:

- Established statewide partnerships with organizations with like-minded goals. (See *Black Voices*, Volume 12, August 2024.)
 - Created a page on the SDARJ website for imprisoned individuals, their families, or friends to request support upon release.
 - Established the Returning Citizens Support Committee Corner in quarterly publications of *Black Voices* and served as guest editors of an issue devoted to Criminal/legal system issues, soliciting articles from directly affected people.
 - In conjunction with partnerships, several committee members advocated for bills before the Delaware legislature. Two of those bills have become law.
- *Compassionate Release allows sentence reduction for*

inmates with good behavior who are 60 years old or more and have served 15 or more years, or under 60 and have served 25 or more years, or who have a serious or debilitating medical condition. Individual inmates may apply directly to the sentencing court rather than go through the Board of Pardons. Before the passage of the bill, requests for a reduction of sentence had to go to that Board and be made by the Department of Corrections. Senate Bill 10 became effective on January 10, 2026.

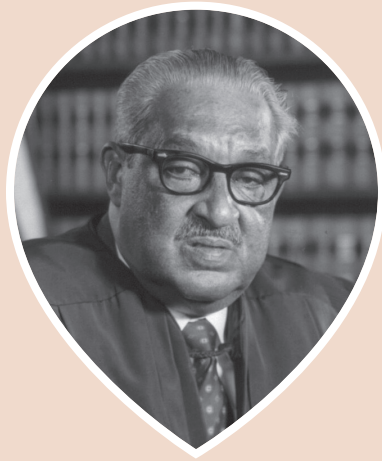
- *Probation Reform that became effective on December 28, 2025. (See Black Voices, Volume 17, November 2025.)*
- Submitted a White Paper to the newly elected Governor Matt Meyer and his transition team that outlined executive actions he could take that did not require legislative action. (See *Black Voices*, Volume 14, February 2025)
 - By attending a Department of Corrections-sponsored Citizens Academy at Sussex Correctional Institution, four RCSC members got the Department’s perspective on its programs, raised questions based on reports from returning citizens, and became acquainted with Corrections officials.
 - Solicited funds, purchased helpful items, and assembled 200 dignity backpacks for recently released returning

citizens. Working with The Way Home, Probation and Parole officers, and First State Community Action Agency, over 100 have been distributed and received with appreciation by people who left prison with nothing.

- Organized a reentry simulation for about 100 people during which they experienced the frustrations and barriers people often face upon release from prison. Getting an ID can be a challenge without papers, and without an ID, a person cannot get a job, housing, a driver’s license, a loan, etc.
- Based on outreach, RCSC chairperson Melvin Mitchell made in advocating for returning citizens, Governor Matt Meyer appointed him to the Governor’s Judicial Nominating Committee.

Although current members of RCSC are proud of what has been accomplished in two short years, they know that needs remain great and that the committee has only scratched the surface in making Delaware’s criminal/legal system fairer and more effective at returning people to productive lives.

The RCSC corner in each issue of *Black Voices* documents needs and suggests opportunities. If this work interests you, please reach out to RCSC’s current chair, Andrew Oxendine, who can be reached through info@sdarj.org.



“Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.”

— Thurgood Marshall



The Southern Delaware Alliance For Racial Justice

... Ending Racism And Its Corrosive Consequences

LET'S STOP RACISM FOR GOOD

IN SOUTHERN DELAWARE

JOIN SDARJ FOR LESS THAN 11¢ A DAY.

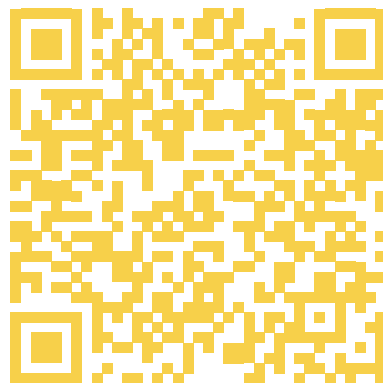


Your SDARJ membership will put you on the front line in the fight for racial justice and social equality for all...and your dues dollars will support critical programs and benefits, including quarterly issues of this magazine, *Black Voices*, plus:

- High School Student Scholarships
- Training on how to challenge racism
- Monthly Town Hall Meetings
- Book and Film Discussion Groups
- Weekly News Digests
- Youth Academic Achievement Awards
- Ongoing Legislative Advocacy

EASY WAYS TO JOIN SDARJ »

① Scan with a mobile device:



② Join online at sdarj.org

③ Send a check for \$40 made out to "SDARJ Membership" with your email address to SDARJ, PO BOX 306, Lewes, DE 19958