

Negroes, Whites Hold 'Dialogues'

Group Aims To Stem Racial Polarization In Harford

BY EDNA GOLDBERG
[Bel Air Bureau of The Sun]

Bel Air, June 28—"This was the first time I participated socially in a racially mixed group, and examined issues from a black man's viewpoint," said a white, middle class Harford county housewife.

"I learned to trust the white people in my group. I expect to see more of them socially, but that's only a small group . . . and this is a slow county," said a Negro housewife who has worked as a domestic for white employers.

"Concerned Citizens"

Both the white housewife—a former New Yorker—and the Negro housewife—a Harford county native—have been participants in separate interracial dialogues.

The dialogues are the main

element in a local attempt by "concerned citizens" to "increase communication across racial lines" through seven-week series of social get-togethers in homes, churches and meeting halls.

The whole thing began quietly in April, 1968, after the death of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mrs. Mary Woodward, a white woman who lives in Bel Air, and Ms. Maurine McKinley, a Negro from Havre de Grace, resolved to do something to stem the "mounting polarization of the two races."

"We had a limited objective," said Mrs. McKinley earlier this week. "We wanted to break down the barriers to intercommunication. This was not to be an action group."

"I suddenly realized the lack of communication," said Mrs.

Woodward, "when a black person told me that whites can never be trusted."

Mrs. Woodward, a local artist, who has taught art to integrated classes explained that she had met many Negroes. "But it was always the cocktail party kind of conversation . . . no real rapport."

The two women, who had met a community action group, became the nucleus of an initial group of 12. Labeling themselves "The Dirty Dozen," the biracial unit met for weekly talk sessions.

Determined to widen the circle, they discussed various methods of involving small groups. "We selected the dialogue technique," Mrs. Wood-

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Hold 'Dialogues' To Stem Racial Polarization

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ward explained, "after considering and discarding all kinds of ideas."

The technique is used, Mrs. Woodward said, to motivate participants to reveal their prejudices, and, by understanding them, to abandon them.

The groups, consisting of 8 to 10 persons, are urged by dialogue leaders—who have all received formal training—to reveal their subconscious feelings through skits, records and words.

"It gave me a better insight as to why whites do what they do," one Negro teacher said today.

"I've met some charming people of the Negro race whom I would not have met socially," noted a northern liberal.

Others said they had joined local fair housing groups as a direct result of their experience.

"It's difficult to measure something so intangible," mused Arthur Woodward, one of the original dozen and now a member of the group's steering committee. "Hopefully, they will go on to talk with others after the initial seven weeks, but you can't have all winners."

The dialogues will resume this fall, Mr. Woodward noted, after summer picnics are held to recruit new members.