

## A Perspective: Mosaic or Melting Pot



Race continues to drive every important decision made in our region. Evidence for this fact can be found no matter which direction we may turn. Race easily explains the failure of the region to develop the stadium that may have lured the Bears from Chicago. Race is a major reason for the difficulty the Gary Airport has in becoming the third major regional airport, or for that matter, a successful mid-sized airport. Race in large part explains the significant population declines in Gary, East Chicago and Hammond and the rapid growth of suburban communities in South county. Racial considerations in large part determined where the region's major retail development would take place. It occurred along U.S. 30, instead of the more natural development along the corridor of I-80 and I-94, as this expressway enters Lake County and winds its way through Gary, Hammond and on into Illinois. Race decided where our largest hospitals, largest financial institutions are located and perhaps will decide the location of our largest educational institutions. Finally, it is fair to say that race played a significant role in the formation and founding of the very town in which this conference is taking place. I mention all this, not to rub old wounds raw, but to suggest that this is an issue which must be faced and defeated if the region is to grow and prosper. No matter where we live in the Region, race is a fact of our daily lives. Our unwillingness to confront it as a community handicaps our efforts towards revitalization and renaissance. If we are to become competitive in national and global markets, we must first learn to appreciate and respect each other. We must treat each other fairly. Even though we won't agree on everything, we must be willing to listen to each other. In other words, we must come together.

Having said that, there are strengths in the region that should be exploited. First of all, I believe we are underutilizing our academic resources. A University Consortium, comprised of Indiana University Northwest, Purdue University Calumet, Valparaiso University, St. Joseph College and Indiana Vocational Technical College, could bring together some of the finest minds in the region to foster the development of new technical and bio-technical products that could be manufactured here and exported around the world. Secondly, the Gary Airport has the potential to produce more than 100,000 jobs and attract more than a billion dollars in investment to the region. We should not waste another minute and begin focusing major region-wide developmental efforts on this diamond in the rough. This is a decision that we can make without awaiting or asking someone else's permission. Thirdly, utilizing certain provisions of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, this area can become a national and an international Telecommunications Center, with the tremendous economic development and job creating potential it represents. Another project that is

near and dear to my heart and that has the potential of bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors into our region from all over the United States and all over the world, every year, is the National Civil Rights Hall of Fame. Its potential to infuse millions of dollars into the economy of the region mandates that we proceed to construct it immediately. Finally, if this region is to take its rightful place among the greatest destinations in our country, we must immediately begin a systematic well-organized effort to attract a Professional Sports Franchise. If a small town like Greenbay can do it, then so can we.

The Region has an image problem that must be fixed if we are to achieve some of the objectives discussed at this conference. It is an image that suggests divisiveness and danger. One of the ways that we can begin to change our image is for the news media to discontinue its demonization of the city of Gary. We can't continue to paint this city with the darkest (no pun intended) colors and expect the metropolitan area to thrive, prosper and grow. Gary is our largest city in the region; Gary has the largest lakefront in the region; Gary has the largest Convention Center in the region; Gary has the largest mass-transit system in the region; Gary has the largest steel mill in the region. At some point, we must come to the realization that Gary is critical to the growth of the region. The tail cannot wag the dog - it is an unnatural state of being.

There is room for all flowers to bloom in the Calumet Region if we can make our diversity a strength instead of a weakness, an asset instead of a liability. Every community, every city, every town in this area is unique and has something to contribute to the whole. The melting pot theory has failed, because it requires some of us to subjugate our heritage and history to that of the majority. Most minorities reject this concept. A better approach would be that espoused by a man for whom I had great admiration while he was with us, Bishop Andrew Grutka. Bishop Grutka spoke of a mosaic. Made up of many small pieces of multi-colored glass anchored in cement, to form a beautiful picture. Our region has all the pieces, black, white, brown, red and yellow. Our job, yours and mine, is to bring those pieces together and create Bishop Grutka's beautiful dream of a Calumet Region Mosaic. A kaleidoscope of colors, all individual and different, but working together to form a region that teaches the rest of America how to build together, play together, worship together, educate our children together and prosper together. We are the Keepers of the Dream. We have a solemn obligation to act. If we don't, then we fail ourselves, we fail each other and most of all, we fail our children.

For God's sake, let's get ourselves together.

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