

Ethan Davis
Race and Social Justice Initiative Proposal

Reimagining Community Development

Abstract

Reacting to observations of the political climate while considering the findings of *The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina 2000-2015*, this project will evaluate multiple approaches to community development with the intention of initiating local conversations to reimagine community development. From the report published on racial disparities, it is evident that there are significantly different realities and qualities of life for white and black residents of Charleston County. I will generate a comprehensive presentation informed by key points from two main projects I will conduct this semester. The first project will provide a theoretical framework for community development, providing context to apply findings from the second project into the local Charleston County community. The second project will include A) a critical analysis of the methodology researchers have used to identify obstacles to community growth and progress, and B) two honest dialogues composed of long-term residents of Chicora, a socially and economically disadvantaged community in North Charleston, providing a unique perspective allowing historically silenced peoples to speak for themselves and articulate their own thoughts on best practices to develop their own disadvantaged and abandoned communities.

The overarching goal of my work is to gain a holistic understanding of theories on community development and the ideal way to execute community development efforts taking into consideration the lived experiences of those long-term local residents who have previously attempted and been working on these daunting tasks. This will require the questioning of methodology in how society approaches the work of developing vulnerable communities. The presentation will include recommendations that identify best practices for tools and methods to reimagine community development in multi-faceted and asset-based ways. This will be presented to Metanoia Leadership and community stakeholders (e.g. local city planners, city council representatives, etc) identified in the research process.

Description of Projects

This semester I am doing two main projects on community development, and this initiative will result in a comprehensive presentation informed by key findings from each of these projects. First, I will complete an independent study alongside political science Professor Claire Curtis who has interests in political thought, utopia and dystopia and the intersections between political philosophy and fiction. Our study will evaluate utopian community development via three strands. We will first explore theories of community development and various ways to achieve a theoretical ideal community. Second, we will investigate implications of anger, fear, and defensiveness within human convention and how these may inhibit community growth or progress. The final strand is tentative on the findings of dialogues from

the second project and will be further explained in the following paragraph. No matter the topic, it will be identified among utopian/dystopian literature to explore its complexities. The overarching goal of the independent study is to provide a foundation and theoretical framework to examine and explore community development, specifically with the intention of applying the findings into the second project.

Second, I am completing a capstone project as a senior African-American Studies major. I will be exploring the positive and negative methods that researchers have surveyed in the search for best practices for community development. Specifically, this will include a critical analysis of the methodology researchers have used to identify obstacles to community growth and progress. Alongside this epistemological evaluation I will be partnering with Metanoia, a community development corporation focused on asset-based community development, to survey long-term residents of Chicora, a socially and economically disadvantaged community in North Charleston, South Carolina. 10 consistent participants will participate in a series of two honest dialogue sessions to explore inhibitors of community growth and progress. This will provide a unique perspective as members of the community will be given a platform to speak for themselves and articulate their own thoughts on best practices of community development. The first dialogue will require participants to rank obstacles and/or inhibitors to community development. The number one obstacle and/or inhibitor identified will be placed within utopian community development theories as the third strand of my independent study. The second dialogue will revolve around identifying solutions to navigate around previously identified obstacles and/or inhibitors to community development.

Statement of Need

All funds acquired from the Race and Social Justice Initiative will be allocated to the specific research being done through my partnership with Metanoia. Each of the 10 participants will receive a \$50 honorarium upon completion of participating in all honest dialogues. In addition, \$100 will be used to cover snacks and travel expenses for said dialogues.