



Baltimore Sister Cities
Esprit de Corps
 MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
For volunteers, committee members, and leaders



Raising the Curtain on Race

By Karen Leggett

Co-Chair, Baltimore Luxor Alexandria Sister City Committee



Baltimore’s rich history includes waves of immigration but also years of racial injustice right up to the present day. BSC, Inc., presented a Zoom webinar on August 25 as its contribution to the global conversation on race and ethnicity in Baltimore City.

Teresa Leslie, Vice Chair of the Baltimore Rotterdam Sister City Committee, initiated the Raising the Curtain on Race presentations based on her experiences in the Dutch Caribbean. Slavery provided the labor for the colonial system. Racism became part of our institutions, with institutional racism embedded as normal practice within our society, leading to discrimination in criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education. “Racism: ignore it and it won’t go away. It will only fester,” Teresa concluded.

COMMUNICATIVITY!



Tharwat Abouraya
 BSC, President

It’s hard to imagine we have been working from home for more than six months now. No matter how you slice it, six months is a long time.

I was actually struck by an ad from 1918 for the American company Bell Telephone during the flu pandemic. The ad touted a new technology - the telephone - and how it could keep people in touch. It sounds very much like what we are doing today with virtual conferencing.



Continued: **Raising the Curtain on Race**

Diana Zilberman, BSC Education Champion, spoke of her roots in Romania, describing many examples of white privilege: never being followed closely in a shop, having no difficulty hailing a taxi, people generally pleased to have her as a new neighbor. Teaching mostly black students in Baltimore as an immigrant, Diana “earned her students’ trust only after we started talking about race.”



Geri Byrd, Mayor’s Office representative and BSC Vice President, brought the issues home to Baltimore with John Wesley, public information officer for the Mayor’s Office of Equity and Civil Rights. Geri experienced growing up in one neighborhood and attending school in another, requiring daily code switching: “In school, I was Geraldine. At home I was Geri. But I was always myself.” She also explained the practice of redlining, which originated in Baltimore but became a nationwide practice of color-coding city maps to determine loan eligibility, with the lowest-ranked neighborhoods outlined in red and nearly always communities of color. Maps of Baltimore show an L for white neighborhoods and what came to be known as the Black butterfly covering the city’s African American neighborhoods. As John explained it, “You could take a house down in the Inner Harbor that was dilapidated and put \$250,000 into it...because you could sell it for \$500,000....But you can’t do that over in Park Heights. You know, there you are getting into the butterfly.”

In response to an audience question, “Is there a Black vision for America?” Theresa said, “Equity,” to which Geri added, “I think everybody wants the same. I think that the good thing about having conversations like this and having forums like this is to understand that we’re more the same than we are different.”

The webinar may be viewed on [YouTube](#). Race and diversity reading lists have been compiled [here](#). BSC is open to suggestions for additional webinars and discussions on these topics.

Continued: **COMMUNICATIVITY!**

I admit it is nice to see people face to face even on a screen, but some days I feel like I am spending half of my time clicking the mute button on and off. This too shall pass, but regardless, this experience is going to have a profound impact on all future workplaces and social interactions. I do believe, however, that there are more bright spots and bits of good news than there have been for quite a while: I think we are closer to the other side of the crisis every day.

The BSC virtual meetings have helped maintain and strengthen our BSC community: we felt connected, we built friendships, we collaborated. The most important thing in these meetings are the substantive discussions, with members following up with each other afterward on specific topics of particular interest. We are creating closer relationships with peers and colleagues. I certainly hope these digital conversations will continue beyond the pandemic.

*Communicativity is my own word that has to do with community. Specifically, it refers to the intensity with which the chapters and friends communicate and engage with each other. As such, its effect is seen/measured in the activation of the community. More deeply, it goes to the organization’s impact, the degree to which the association makes the community it serves greater than the sum of its parts.

Arella Liu

Treasurer
Baltimore-Xiamen



Arella joined the Baltimore-Xiamen Committee in January 2008. Since then she has managed or served on almost every sub-committee (Business, Education, Culture) and on the Development/Fund-

Continued: Arella Liu

Raising Team. In 2014 she was elected Treasurer and has managed the committee's finances during a period of rapid growth that included a large 30th anniversary delegation from China in 2015, 6 annual CHINA Town Hall events, 4 annual Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month celebrations, and Youth Ambassador Program trips to China in 2018 and 2019. As a result of her careful stewardship, committee funds have more than tripled since 2014.

As a seasoned and bi-lingual committee officer, Arella has also been an invaluable resource in managing the committee and in developing important connections with both local and Chinese organizations. In 2016 she was instrumental in bringing Exelon's Asian American Resource Group on board as a corporate sponsor and member. In 2017 she initiated a relationship with the Shanghai People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries as well as the national-level association that led to the first Youth Ambassador's Program trip in 2018.

Outside of Sister Cities, Arella is a finance professional. Arella also loves traveling and has been to many places around the world. She views traveling to a different country to experience a new culture, meet new people, and try different cuisines as another way of broadening her perspective of the world.

Virtual Exchange Opportunities

By **Karen Leggett**, Co-chair BLASCC



The BSC Education Committee is sharing information and seeking to reinvigorate or initiate digital exchanges between students in Baltimore and BSC Sister Cities. Programs are planned for K-12 and higher education students.

- Baltimore Gbarnga Sister City Committee (BGSCC) is building a relationship between Morgan State University and Bimbo Community College in Liberia as well as a possible digital bridge between Morgan State and a campus in Accra, Ghana. Luana Kind says BGSCC is also

interested in initiating digital programming in early childhood education.

- Marlieke Vandentillaar and Rachel Sengers say Baltimore Rotterdam Sister City Committee (BRSCC) is hoping to repeat a 2017 hybrid exchange program led by Kathie diStefano, an American-born, Rotterdam-based teaching artist who creates interactive workshops dealing with trash and recycling. BRSCC has worked with Benjamin Franklin High School at Masonville Cove (Baltimore), Bard High School Early College Baltimore and Lakeland Elementary/Middle School (Baltimore). BRSCC is seeking grant funding to plan hybrid or all-virtual exchanges for 13-14 year olds.



Lakeland students enjoying 'stroomwaffels', an internationally famous Dutch cookie.



- Baltimore Luxor Alexandria Sister City Committee has facilitated live online discussions between 5th and 6th graders at schools in Baltimore, Arlington, VA, and Alexandria, Egypt. Children have shared essays, self-portraits, letters and poems. The pandemic forced teachers to concentrate on regular curriculum but efforts to revive the cross-cultural programming will begin again in 2021, with support from the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (library) in Egypt.

Committee members will be considering different platforms for future virtual exchanges. BSC Education Champion Diana Zilberman will be creating a bank of information about existing projects and templates for teachers who might be

Continued: Virtual Exchange

interested in short or long term exchange projects. “Synchronous exchange (live conversation) provides excitement,” noted Diana, “while asynchronous exchange provides time for reflection and steps to prepare for a fruitful live event.”

Any committee interested in initiating virtual exchanges or participating in these discussions should contact Diana Zilberman educationchampion@baltimoresistercities.org. The next BSC Education Committee meeting – virtually of course – is October 22 at 6pm.

2020 Census

Every Baltimore resident must be counted in the 2020 Census to ensure that we get our fair share of federal funds for essential programs that cover health care, education, housing, economic development, and transportation. To complete your own census form go to [202Census.gov](https://202census.gov). For census information from the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs go to <https://mima.baltimorecity.gov/census2020/language>.

Check out upcoming events supported and organized by our member committees at <https://baltimoresistercities.org/events/>.

The World Trade Center Institute is sponsoring a [Women Spanning the Globe Conference](#) on Tuesday, September 29. BSC Committees may attend at the WTCI member rate.

SHARE WIDELY TO ALL YOUR NETWORK



Support Baltimore Sister Cities when you buy on Amazon



Baltimore Sister Cities is a registered charity with the AmazonSmile program.

Support Baltimore Sister Cities by making your Amazon purchases at smile.amazon.com :

- On your first visit to <http://smile.amazon.com> , login and designate Baltimore Sister Cities Inc as your charity.
- After that, each time you buy something at Amazon: start each shopping session at <http://smile.amazon.com> (instead of at amazon.com) and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases to BSC.
- See <https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=201365360> for detailed instructions.

We encourage you to let all committee members and friends know about this program.

Holiday season is coming soon and this is a great — and easy — way to support BSC when you shop.

