

After the “Beer Summit” – What Have We Learned?

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Well, just because you don't think about race as an issue doesn't mean the race issue no longer exists.

Although some might think we are “post racial” because we have an African American president, the truth is, we are not. Race and race relations are still issues that affects us all.

So what good did the “Beer Summit” do? It offered the opportunity for civil conversation about these difficult and sensitive issues and, as reported by those attending, a chance to plan future steps which they and we can all take together.

The good news is that we can have this conversation anywhere, not just in the White House. We can talk to each other in our schools, our workplaces, and in our communities with respect for our individuality and for our differences.

For New Jerseyans living in the nation's most diverse state, demographics are overtaking the conventional image of who we are.

In a short time – less than 30 years – we will be a society with no clear majority. We'll be a majority of “minorities,” a true polyglot of different races, ethnicities, genders, cultures and religions.

Call it a “Beer Summit,” “Soda Summit,” or a “Coffee Summit.” Even a cool glass of water together can serve as the vehicle to initiate a respectful and illuminating conversation with neighbors, friends and co-workers about our differences and, most importantly, our commonalities.

The root of the conversation we should all be having is our common desire for respect, to live together in peace, to care for our families, and to create a legacy of better communities for future generations of children and grandchildren.

Talking together is the best Summit of all.

Diane Schwartz, President & CEO, American Conference on Diversity