

THIS IS AMERICA

‘Who We Are’ sparks conversations about racism

Documentary addresses societal problem



From left, CTI board member Rita O'Brien Dee, Lowell City Director of Elections Greg Pappas and Lowell City Councilor Erik Gitschier at the Oct. 11 screening of "Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America." ALLEGRA BOVERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY — COURTESY COMMUNITY TEAMWORK

LOWELL >> More than 150 community leaders from Lowell and Greater Lowell municipal government, school systems, police departments, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, and elected officials joined Community Teamwork on Oct. 11 at the Showcase Cinema de Lux Lowell to watch the groundbreaking film, “Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America.”

The event also included a panel discussion with Jeffery Robinson, former ACLU deputy director, Harvard University professor, social justice advocate and founder of the Who We Are Project.

Guests were asked to sign Community Teamwork’s Racial Equity Pledge and responded enthusiastically.

After a reception in the lobby of the theater, Community Teamwork Board of Directors President Sheila Och and Vice President Aleksandra Tugbiyele welcomed the audience in two separate theaters.

Community Teamwork became inspired to organize a community screening and invite Robinson to join after first viewing the film last year, and then bringing it to their workforce of more than 550 staff members with facilitated discussions as part of the organization’s DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) initiatives.

“We are grateful to our Board of Directors for their leadership and encouragement, and to Dr. Sue Kim, Bobby Tugbiyele, UMASS Lowell School of Fine Arts and Health Sciences Board of Directors and the DEI Consortium of Lowell for their inspiration by being the first group to introduce this film to the community last winter,” said Community Teamwork CEO Karen Frederick. “Members of our leadership team went to that showing, and decided to bring this film to our staff. We had such an overwhelming response from our staff, that we decided to invite community leaders from Lowell and Greater Lowell together to view this powerful and impactful film, and hear directly from Jeffery Robinson on ways we can begin to look deeply into systemic racism in our own communities.”

The Who We Are Project founded by Robinson is an outgrowth of a talk that Robinson has been giving for over 10 years on the history of anti-Black racism and white supremacy in the United States. The talk forms the basis of the feature-length documentary. The Who We Are Project works to challenge the dominant narrative of our nation’s founding, demonstrating how slavery’s legacy has led to persistent and abiding racial inequality, and promoting education, discourse and change.

“I hope we get to a point where the narrative in the United States about our past is one that is true, not to tear ourselves down, but to reckon with where we started and how far we need to go to get to the true promises of our country,” Robinson said.

“As a community, we know we can do better and are grateful to you, our Community Leaders, for taking time out of your schedule to learn the ways we can change our organizations and communities to become more equitable for all. Our hope is to inspire continued conversations and action and look forward to continuing this important anti-racist work with you,” Frederick told the audience after the panel discussion.

Community Teamwork purchased a limited number of additional screenings which can be made available for organizations and communities to show. Dracut and Westford town leaders have already reached out to request a screening for their communities. For more information, reach out to asirois@commteam.org.