

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Commissioners; Roy Widdus; Jeff Stryker

FROM: Harlon L. Dalton

RE: Jeff Stryker's Memo of August 3

DATE: August 6, 1992

Just a brief response to the comments directed at me.

1. I do not understand why Jeff's memo is so vituperative and personal. As he himself observes, I referred to him only in passing in my December memo.
2. I do not think it is wise for Jeff to raise the issue of how "handsomely" he was compensated.
3. Jeff accuses me of exhibiting "joking condescension." I assure you, my memo was no joke, nor is there anything funny about my -- our -- effort to be responsible Commissioners rather than a mere backdrop for a runaway staff. As for condescension, Jeff's memo is self-discrediting on that score.
4. I am not sure what prompted Jeff's claim that I made a "not-so-thinly veiled charge of racism. I assume it was my statement that Roy would not treat any other Commissioner as disdainfully as he treated me. Knowing what I now know about Roy's interactions with others, I am certainly willing to back off on that prediction.

Nevertheless, I would like to take up Jeff's invitation to talk about racism, because I think his memo -- in particular its snotty, biting tone -- reveals much about race relations in America. Clearly, Jeff is determined to take me down a peg. Whatever his grievances with me (the only specific in the memo is unreturned phone calls¹), I am sure that he has felt similarly slighted by others of you. The difference is that he feels entitled to take me on. It is not because he is "no longer on the payroll," nor because of personal

1. Although I am not stellar at returning phone calls (as many of you know), in this particular case my unresponsiveness reflected my pique at being presented with one fait accompli after another. Jeff says that I "was consulted about the report whenever [I] would deign to pick up the phone." Leaving the sarcasm to the side, that is true only if "consulted" means "be informed about decisions that have already been made."

animosity.² Jeff understands that it would be inappropriate to lay into say, Diane Ahrens or Don Goldman, even though they have been critical of the way the health care workers report was handled. It is, however, "o.k." for Jeff to lay into me, thanks to "white skin privilege."

It does not matter that I am a Commissioner, a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard, a graduate of Yale Law School, a tenured professor at Yale, a member of the bar for 18 years, 44 years old, whatever. No matter what my credentials, experience, status or title, Jeff will always feel deep in his bones that he is my equal, my peer, if not my better. Why? Because he is white and I am not.

I am not suggesting that this is conscious; indeed, I am sure that it is not. Doubtless Jeff believes that he has "just cause" for firing off his salvo and that he would do the same with the rest of you if circumstances warranted. But that is what makes dealing with racism (meaning, in this context, an ingrained sense of privilege and superiority based on race) so hard to address.

Don't take my word for it. Ask one of your Black or Latino friends. Just describe the general scenario. Tell them you want them to be brutally honest, that you are looking for a reality check and will not be hurt by whatever they say. Then ask whether my assessment resonates with their experience. I promise you the conversation will be illuminating.

HLD/jzt

2. Though you could hardly tell it from the memo, Jeff actually likes me.