



NOT IN OUR TOWN – MCLEAN COUNTY

“Not in Our Town” is a national effort to combat discrimination and hate crimes, bringing communities together on common ground.

The original story begins in 1992-93 in Billings, Montana, where a series of hate crimes against Jewish, African-American and Native Americans families brought the community together, under the slogan, “Not In Our Town.” The local newspaper, the *Billings Gazette*, published a full-page illustration of a menorah, asking families to put it in their window, after a Jewish family had their window smashed with a cinder block when they displayed a menorah. Over 14,000 families responded and the Billings community came together.

This half-hour program, *Not In Our Town*, was shown nationally on PBS in December 1995. Leading up to the showing, a show was previewed in Bloomington-Normal, with panel discussions of both adults and youth. In January 1996, the Bloomington City Council turned down, 6-1, expansion of the city’s human relations code to include gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered individuals. More panels and discussions followed this. The Bloomington Police Department began using the video as a training tool.

In the summer of 1996, when African-American churches were being burnt in the South, a “Not In Our Town – No Racism” march was held, drawing a large and diverse coalition. A group from this march went south to help rebuild a church and people signed a “no racism” pledge. Mayor Jesse Smart stepped up police patrols around African-American churches, to prevent a repeat of what was then happening in Southern states. A sign, with the universal red slash through the word “racism,” became the local Not In Our Town logo. City vehicles and residents put stickers with it on their vehicles and doors. Bloomington and then Normal unveiled highway signs at the community’s entrance with this “not in our town” message. A march was held from the IWU to the ISU campus in 1997. Bloomington-Normal was featured in 1998’s *Not In Our Town II* broadcast on PBS. Annual events were held for a number of years, often including panel discussions, an annual march and a diversity fair.

Special events were held at various times. When Normal and then Bloomington did expand their human relations ordinances to include gays, lesbians and transgendered people, Not In Our Town sponsored forums. When East Peoria’s Matt Hale came to town with his white supremacist message, an alternative “diversity gathering” was held in downtown Bloomington. When Rev. Fred Phelps and his Westboro Baptist Church came to protest with anti-gay messages outside local churches, a community response was formulated. In 2006, Bloomington-Normal hosted the first (and only) national gathering of Not In Our Town communities. An on-going effort is an annual voluntary out-reach in area schools, where junior and high school students are asked to sign “no discrimination” pledges, and primary school students, “no bullying” pledges.

What has this meant for McLean County? Some would say that it is only a superficial “feel good” effort, and that discrimination still exists. No one with Not In Our Town would deny discrimination’s continued existence; what Not In Our Town has accomplished is a standard that the community aspires to live up to and it has created numerous opportunities for local people to not only dialogue, but also celebrate and affirm our community’s diversity. On Sept. 21, 2011, *Not in Our Town III*, will telecast on PBS.

NOT IN OUR TOWN nationally can be reached through the production company, The Working Group, P.O. Box 70232 Oakland, CA 94612 Phone: (510) 268-9675 www.niot.org

LOCAL CLASSROOM RESOURCES

McLean County Not In Our Town: Local Not In Our Town participants can be available to come speak to classes or to preview any of the 3 *Not In Our Town* videos; contact Mike Matejka at 309-827-3934, who will check with local participants for availability. Not In Our Town McLean County is on facebook.

Bloomington Human Relations Commission is at Bloomington City Hall, 109 E. Olive St, Bloomington, Ernestine Jackson, director, 309-434-2215
<http://www.cityblm.org/page.asp?show=section&id=3058&menuid=3058>

Normal Human Relations Commission is at Normal City Hall, 100 E. Phoenix St., Normal, Jose Garibay, director, 309-454-9519 <http://www.normal.org/Gov/HR/index.asp>

Minority Business Directory: The City of Bloomington Human Relations Commission maintains a minority business directory, available at
http://themixonline.net/MinorityBusinessDirectory_2006.htm?menuid=3104

McLean County Historical Society's main exhibit theme is "Encounter on the Prairie, about how people intersected from diverse backgrounds in McLean County; they have a variety of historical programs available about human relations. Visit them at 200 N Main St., downtown Bloomington, 309-827-0428, or visit www.mchistory.org

McLean County Diversity Project: this effort brings together diverse junior high and high school students to build human relations. See <http://mcleancountydiversity.org/> or contact Jeff Schwartz, PO Box 58, Downs, IL 61736.

The Advocacy Council for Human Rights is a local effort supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in the community; they have an office at 313 N. Main St., Bloomington, 309-827-2437, <http://achr-il.com/>

Illinois People's Action is a faith-based community organizing effort; also affiliated is **Latinos United for Change**; 510 E Washington #309, Bloomington 827-9627 <http://illinoispeoplesaction.org/>

Minority & Police Partnership works to bridge gaps between the police and the community; contact them via either the City's or Town's human relations commissions or visit them on facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Minority-and-Police-Partnership/143987708979694>

The **Bloomington-Normal NAACP** can be reached at P.O. Box 925, Normal, IL 61761,
<http://www.illinoisnaacp.org/bloomingtonnormal/>

The **McLean County India Association** brings together the South Asian community, it can be reached at P.O. Box 375, Bloomington, IL 61702-0375, or through <http://www.ourmcia.org/index.html>

The Immigration Project serves downstate Illinois from Bloomington, 510 E. Washington St., Suite 318, P.O. Box 3065, Bloomington, IL 61702-3065, <http://www.immigrationproject.org/main.html>

100 Black Men of Central Illinois is a community advocacy organization, PO Box 5170, Bloomington, IL 61702, www.bmci.org, YWCA of McLean County is a local service organization that offers multicultural leadership programs, 1201 N Hershey Road, Bloomington, 662-0461,
<http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djI0K7OZG&b=62423>