Letter to the Editor

by Valerie Rushanan, Co-chair, Bedford Embraces Diversity

A video recently shown at Bedford High School has ignited some concerns; in my opinion, the most important one is the racism some have felt at BHS. Though racism seems no more prevalent here than in most other towns, visibility is high here since we promote openness.

BHS Live, a student-run TV show of the school's morning announcements, broadcasted a student-produced video, entitled "Sh*t White People Say," as a public service announcement. BHS Live stopped the video when they realized it made some people uncomfortable.

The video's potentially offensive elements include the title's expletive, and targeting another racial group without acknowledging that not all its members are racist. There are many videos on the Internet with titles very similar to this; some people consider them humorous, and others, offensive. An email from BHS Principal Henry Turner, who spoke with the video's producer, confirmed my guess that the intent was not to offend but rather to educate students about racism by using humor.

Though I'd recommend more prudence, my overwhelming reaction was sadness that the acts of racism portrayed in the video might be based on real events at BHS. An email from Superintendent of Schools Jon Sills confirmed this. We must address these issues.

I applaud the Bedford Public Schools for openly discussing such issues. Dr. Turner said it well: "I commended the students that they were able to have a discussion about a complex topic that many people in the greater society are unwilling or unable to."

A year ago, when Mr. Sills created a task force to respond to incidents of anti-Semitism, its members discovered reports of racism and discrimination against several minority groups in Bedford. So when Bedford Embraces Diversity formed from the task force, its members decided to oppose all types of hate acts against any individual or group instead of focusing on one type or group.

Centuries of racism affect attitudes that persist; many acts of violence in the U.S. this past year confirm this horrific reality. People from different groups may be unfamiliar with the life experience of other groups, so it's difficult to understand what's offensive and why. We believe the best way to achieve a change in beliefs is to talk directly with people from other groups about differences. Stay tuned, as Bedford Embraces Diversity begins planning an educational event, with exactly those goals.