Resolving Intergroup Conflicts in New York City

New York State Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

August 1994

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Letter of Transmittal

New York State Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Members of the Commission
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Cruz Reynoso, *Vice Chairperson*
Carl A. Anderson
Arthur A. Fletcher
Robert P. George
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Charles Pei Wang

Mary K. Mathews, *Staff Director*

Howard Beach in 1986, Bensonhurst in 1989, Crown Heights in 1991—these are just three of the New York City neighborhoods that took their places in the national landscape of urban violence and ethnic tensions in recent years. Our Advisory Committee assumed that they stood as background in your reasoning when you decided to visit New York City this year, having already held major hearings on the disturbances that rocked neighborhoods from Mount Pleasant in Washington, D.C., to South Central in Los Angeles.

Last summer, in the year marking the 25th anniversary of the release of the Kerner Commission Report, the study by the President's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, we began organizing an all-day public meeting. We were briefed on your plans to come to New York City in 1994, and to avoid any duplication of effort, we chose to focus on ethnic tensions—but only from the perspective of those who had been working on teams striving to resolve intergroup conflicts and to foster harmony.

All 20 panelists at our November 9, 1993, public meeting came from the private or nonprofit sector. Yet we were fortunate at the outset to hear a message of welcome and encouragement from Governor Mario M. Cuomo and a review of the activities of the New York State Division of Human Rights from the division's head, Commissioner Margarita Rosa. At the time, Commissioner Rosa was completing plans for a conference the next month somewhat similar to our meeting.

Before hearing our panelists, we thanked our hosts and cosponsors, Chemical Bank and the bank's Committee on Racial Harmony. We also saluted the tension-reduction efforts of three very different agencies: the New York Times Company Foundation, whose efforts included initiating an innovative museum project in Crown Heights that three panelists were to describe later; the New York Civil Rights Coalition, which has continued the struggle for school integration and equal opportunity throughout the city's five boroughs; and the Inter-Relations Collaborative, which has researched case studies of team efforts in New York and around the U.S.

Our panels started with two avowed feminists who are influential members of an African American-Jewish American women's dialogue group of 9 years and who seem unflinching in exchanging views. There was a team made up of a Latino activist, whose neighborhood organization in Brooklyn is replicating its bridge-building efforts in other boroughs and in

Massachusetts, and his partner, a Hasidic rabbi representing over 125 Hasidic schools, synagogues, and charitable institutions in Williamsburg. We also heard from other black and Jewish clergymen who are civil rights veterans and from black and Jewish teenagers.

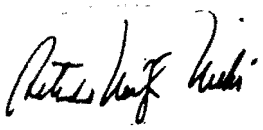
Two neighbors, one black, one Korean, described how they averted a potential confrontation between a local Korean merchant and his supporters and several blacks, including outside activists, threatening a demonstration against the merchant. Despite having approached two separate organizations, we were less successful in arranging for a trio depicting how members of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths work together; however, a disciple of Islam described problems faced by many Muslims in American society.

These were only some of the individuals who gave up a day to share their experiences in struggling to surmount barriers between different communities. It was heartening to learn how stereotypes were often overcome, some team members were profoundly touched, and genuine understanding was reached by many residents of communities in conflict.

But we also ended the day with a performance perhaps unique in the annals of Commission and Advisory Committee events. "Dr. Laz and the CURE," a troupe of black and Hasidic musicians, singers, and break dancers, retold their message, this time in music and song. As panelists, four CURE members had earlier been informative, even inspiring; then, in ensemble, they exuded great charm and spirit engaging us and showing how youths in Crown Heights and elsewhere could have been touched by Project CURE's message of respect and love.

This report, with its findings and recommendations, was unanimously adopted during the Advisory Committee's public meeting of February 16, 1994. It reminded us that just over 25 years ago, John V. Lindsay, then mayor of New York City and vice chair of the Kerner Commission, warned in the Kerner Commission report that America was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."[1] Since then, New York mayoral elections have been affected by racial and religious tensions, and the challenges have only become more complex with the growth in the diversity of communities. But fortunately, our report verifies that many New Yorkers will dedicate time and energy to strengthen the ties that unite Americans. We trust that our report may prove of value to you as you proceed toward your own hearings in New York City.

Sincerely,



Setsuko M. Nishi, Ph.D., *Chairperson*
New York State Advisory Committee

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1 U.S. Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 1.

New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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Acknowledgments

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. . . [T]he antipathy [blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans] feel toward one another nearly equals the resentment they collectively feel toward whites.

Steven A. Holmes
Reporting a national survey
New York Times
March 3, 1994

Communication, all across the Nation!
Let's all sit down and have a conversation.
Understanding—I listen to you, you listen to me.
We can work things out in harmony!

Dr. Laz and the CURE,
Crown Heights rap group
New York Times
December 30, 1992

Background

In June 1982, almost 12 years ago, the Office of the Governor of the State of New York, in conjunction with the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, convened a conference at the World Trade Center in Manhattan, focusing on the growth of racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry in the Empire State. At the time, many were disturbed by incidents in the early 1980s such as the racially motivated murder of six black men in upstate New York and the assault on three black men and the slaying of one of them by a group of white youths in the Gravesend section of Brooklyn, plus cross-burnings, the desecration of religious property, firebombings, and the like.[1]

While many of the bias incidents and criminal acts in the State then involved white assailants and minority victims, in the intervening years the phenomenon of conflicts between members of different racial and religious minority communities began to emerge. Thus, an all-day public meeting was organized by the Advisory Committee in order to hear from individuals and representatives of nonprofit agencies, who in teamlike fashion had been working to reduce urban tensions sparked by conflicts between or among minority groups.

Over two dozen guest speakers plus audience participants addressed the Advisory Committee on November 9, 1993, on the theme "Resolving Intergroup Conflicts in New York City." Prior to the guest presentations, representatives of several agencies or institutions were saluted for their efforts to reduce tensions, including Chemical Bank, the host for the event, and Chemical Bank's Committee on Racial Harmony. A message from Governor Mario M. Cuomo was delivered by New

1 See New York State Advisory Committee, *Bigotry and Violence in New York State,* March 1983, p. 1.

York State Division of Human Rights Commissioner Margarita Rosa, who added her own views.

Chairperson Setsuko M. Nishi, a member during the Advisory Committee's 1982 conference, opened the meeting by recognizing four fellow Advisory Committee members, M.D. Taracido, who also served on the Committee in 1982, and Ellis Arnstein, Ghazi Y. Khankan, and Cecile C. Weich, all of whom had helped to plan local details in 1993. Participating as well were new members Barbara E. Ahner, Tamar P. Halpern, Joan B. Johnson, Junius A. Kellogg, and Paul D.Q. Nguyen, and continuing member Juan Padilla. Dr. Nishi then introduced Commission Vice Chairperson Charles Pei Wang, Acting Staff Director Bobby D. Doctor, Acting General Counsel Lawrence Glick, and other Commission attorneys and staff.

Doctor, Glick, and the other staff had traveled from Washington for background in preparation for the agency's own 3 days of hearings to be held by the national Commission in New York City in 1994. Those hearings were to be the fourth in a series of investigations into urban tensions, which began in Washington, D.C. in 1992, and continued in Chicago and Los Angeles.

Part I. Saluting Private Initiatives

Advisory Committee Chairperson Setsuko Nishi then introduced the host and cosponsors of the day's meeting on resolving intergroup conflict—John Leonard, Chemical Bank's vice president for community relations, and Arthur Barnes and Robert Sherman, the cochairpersons of the bank's Committee on Racial Harmony. Nishi pointed out that she had served on the Advisory Committee for more than two decades, but "I cannot remember when we have enjoyed such generous hospitality and help for a public meeting."[1]

Chemical Bank's Committee on Racial Harmony

John Leonard, Chemical Bank Vice President for Community Relations

John Leonard replied that his colleagues and he were delighted to host the meeting, especially because Chemical Bank's Committee on Racial Harmony and his office had started a program 6 months earlier called "Racial Harmony and Diversity." That program involved awards, grants, and sponsorship of special events. He reported that 227 applications for awards and grants had been received and that the recipients were soon to be announced.

Leonard then posed the question: "Why is the third largest bank in the United States getting involved in this?" As a member of Chemical Bank's Community Development Group, he was accompanied by Gregory King and Richard Jackson of that unit whom he described as "Street Bankers" whose lives are dedicated to community work, and he explained that:

> When we see that community upset and disturbed, especially as we are trying to renovate units of housing, support job training programs, and promote our Neighborhood Affordable Mortgage, it does affect us greatly when bias and hate threaten to destroy our best efforts. We decided that this critical issue is something we should address.[2]

The Racial Harmony and Diversity Program should continue for at least the next several years, continued Leonard. To guide the Bank's Community Development Group in carrying out the program, an outside panel of 14 members was appointed to the Committee on Racial Harmony. Some were present for the meeting including Eda Hastick representing her husband Roy Hastick, executive director of the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce; Herbert Johnson, executive director of the Catholic Interracial Council; and the cochairpersons, Barnes and Sherman, whom Nishi had introduced earlier. Leonard asked Barnes to comment.

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1 Setsuko M. Nishi, Ph.D., testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Nishi's statement and most other statements in this report are from the transcript of the Nov. 9, 1993, public meeting, p. 5 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript.) The transcript and corrections provided by some speakers and panelists are available in the Eastern Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Other information and statements are from documents cited in the text and/or in footnotes; many of the documents are from national media sources widely available to the general public.

2 John Leonard, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 10.

Arthur Barnes, Cochairperson, Chemical Bank Committee on Racial Harmony

Arthur Barnes said he was pleased to cochair the panel, adding that Chemical Bank was the only bank he knew of that would try to come to grips with the problems being addressed. He noted that a year and a half earlier Chemical Bank completed a 3-year program dealing with the problem of substance abuse for which grants were made to organizations addressing that problem. Chemical Bank was now tackling racial violence and ethnic tensions and would be awarding grants to organizations combating those problems on November 22, 1993.

Saluting his fellow racial harmony committee members including Taracido of the Advisory Committee and Haskell Lazere of the State division of human rights, Barnes cited Commission Vice Chairperson Wang, Advisory Committee member Kellogg, and New York Coalition for Civil Rights Executive Director Michael Meyers, who also were present, as having "long been warriors in this fight against bigotry, prejudice, and violence." He concluded by noting that New York City "is great because of its diversity [with] 174 languages spoken here. And, if we are to progress, if we are to grow and develop, then we are going to have to get along."[3]

New York Times Company Foundation

Nishi then acknowledged the presence of Arthur Gelb, the former cultural editor, metropolitan editor, and managing editor of the *New York Times*. Now president of the New York Times Company Foundation, Gelb helped to launch and support a project involving three institutions in Crown Heights that have been working with residents in tracing the roots of the people who settled there. The foundation obtained the support of other foundations for this effort, which Gelb described as aimed at "building communion among the diverse populations making their homes in Crown Heights."[4] A December 1992, *New York Newsday* article credited the New York Tolerance Committee, organized by Gelb's foundation, as having conceived the project; the Tolerance Committee's membership has included former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, Dance Theater of Harlem vice chairperson Della Baeza, Ford Foundation president Franklin Thomas, and other notables.[5]

Nishi said that a team of three speakers would describe that project in detail, but, as a member of the faculty of the City University of New York (CUNY), she was pleased to point out that Gelb's foundation was also suppporting efforts to foster racial harmony among students of the campus of City College of New York, CUNY's flagship for undergraduate students.

New York Civil Rights Coalition

Michael Meyers, New York Civil Rights Coalition Executive Director

Michael Meyers, an attorney and head of the New York Civil Rights Coalition who had first been mentioned by Barnes, was reintroduced by Nishi. Meyers thanked both the Advisory Committee and Chemical Bank for "their recognition of the purposeful efforts of the New York Civil Rights Coalition in seeking intergroup harmony in the protection of civil rights for all." He observed that:

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3 Arthur Barnes, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 12.

4 See also, "Brooklyn Museums to Explore Crown Heights Roots," *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 1993, p. 26.

5 Merle English, "Project Instills Respect; Three Cultural Institutions Spread Message in Heights," *New York Newsday*, Dec. 23, 1992.

Through the years members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights have kept pounding away in a constructive fashion against the myths and the booby traps of half-steps towards equality. In the all-important area of changing public sentiment through the presentation of facts, the study of problems, and the presentation of possible new remedies, the Commission and the State Advisory Committees have played a dominant and treasured role.[6]

Chemical Bank, too, has taken the courageous action of calling attention to the unfinished business of promoting harmony and is, itself, investing in people and in institutions who are making a difference. Then, regarding the coalition, Meyers stated that:

> If lack of understanding, snap group judgments, and plain and ugly prejudice are the markings of a divided society, then the pursuit of knowledge, truth, equality, justice and fairness are the hallmarks of social progress. This is the credo of the New York Civil Rights Coalition.[7]

He said that the coalition has sought to use democratic freedoms to clarify values and to engage people, particularly youths, in reexamining what makes people both unique and also dependent upon each other. Through public education and a semester-long course, "Unlearning Stereotypes," multiracial teams of volunteers teach tolerance in 45 classrooms at 37 high schools in all five boroughs and at two junior high schools in Manhattan. The teams critically examine the crude stereotypes and myths about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation with the aim of convincing blacks, whites, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, people with disabilities, and members of every religion or ethnicity that "the vitality of our city, State, and Nation, depends upon a pluralistic, egalitarian, and free society, where no person is deprived of the opportunity or the means of achievement and of greatness."[8]

Positive social change is possible, continued Meyers, and the teams find it among their students from week to week. They also find it among the professional teachers who, after observing the coalition's volunteers engage students in candid discussions, became transformed as educators. He pointed out, however, that while the distinctiveness of different cultures and the unique contributions of individuals were celebrated:

> we need always to be mindful of the common bonds of our humanity. Indeed, we are, as the venerable [former NAACP executive director] Roy Wilkins once said, "one in the family of humans." In this connection, there is only one race, the human race, to which we all belong.[9]

Meyers stressed that the responsible voices in each community must be heard and multiplied in order to remove all barriers—psychological, social, and legal—to full equality for everyone. With that, he greeted the Commission and its Advisory Committee and Chemical Bank and its Committee on Racial Harmony, and thanked them for their "stellar steadying work. You are showing and paving the way for your admirers, and, yes, your disciples to recruit scores, hundreds and thousands of others to join in and to cooperate in the effort at community organization and renewal."[10]

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6 Michael Meyers, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 15 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript). Meyers, like all other speakers and panelists, was given the opportunity to review and correct the transcript. Many such corrections are reflected in this report.

7 Meyers Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 16.

8 Meyers Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 16.

9 Meyers Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 17.

Inter-Relations Collaborative

Grace Yun, Ph.D., Inter-Relations Collaborative Director

Recognizing the final organization for its recent research on reducing racial and ethnic tensions, Nishi introduced Grace Yun, the director of the Inter-Relations Collaborative, who spearheaded the Collaborative's national survey of such effort including some case studies in New York City. Yun also expressed gratitude for the recognition given to the Collaborative. She stated that the Collaborative was aware that urban intergroup relations in the 1990s have become:

> immensely more complex than the black-white dialogue of the 1960s. We also note, in addition to better understanding the dynamics of majority-minority relations, the importance of understanding the intricacies of minority-minority relations. The Inter-Relations Collaborative, a research, education, and policy-oriented group, therefore, maintains its specialized focus on the development of minority intergroup relations.[11]

Observing that the Los Angeles disturbances of 1992 following the Rodney King verdict propelled the issue of minority intergroup relations into the national consciousness, Yun pointed out that "the preexisting circumstances giving rise to the explosion in Los Angeles, have not been unique to that city."[12] She reported that minority conflicts have occurred between Korean Americans and African Americans in New York City, African Americans and Hispanics in Los Angeles, Latinos and Asian Indians in Jersey City, and African Americans and Arab Americans in San Francisco.

The Collaborative undertook exploratory research in the Nation's major gateway cities, including New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The research focused on sources of intergroup conflict but also documented instances of urban intergroup cooperation. According to Yun, the Collaborative itself has proven to be one example of minority intergroup cooperation as it is cosponsored by the Asian American Federation of New York, Associated Black Charities, the Hispanic Federation of New York City, and Minority Rights Group (USA), Inc.

Over the past few decades, the gateway cities have been transformed into what Yun called "global cities." Major migrations from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean have added not only numbers but also great diversity to urban populations, particularly in large metropolitan areas. In 1990, 55 percent of all New York City residents were of African, Hispanic, or Asian descent; in Los Angeles, the figure was 60 percent.

Increasing immigration, however, has occurred during a time of declining urban economies, primarily due to the dismantling of national urban programs over the past decade, said Yun. As a result, Asians, blacks, and Latinos have increasingly viewed each other as economic competitors, and this has affected the ways in which they have been interacting with each other. Faced with rapidly deteriorating conditions, particularly in the inner cities, minorities, when feeling sufficiently disempowered, have displayed symptoms of internalized oppression, blindly striking out at one another. Unchecked, minority conflicts have escalated into violent incidents.[13]

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11 Grace Yun, Ph.D., corrections to draft section attached to Yun's letter to Tino Calabia, Feb. 11, 1994, p. 6 (hereafter cited as Attachment to Yun Letter). The draft section, which was corrected by Yun, reflected both her prepared statement and her brief testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993.

12 Ibid.

13 Attachment to Yun Letter, p. 7.

Despite a climate ripe for intergroup conflict, Yun continued, the Collaborative found that many blacks, Latinos, and Asians have surmounted the usual tensions to carry forward unified efforts in many spheres of urban life. Fundamental to the success of these collaborative efforts has been the political awareness that it is better for minorities to work together to improve conditions for all groups in cities than for them to work apart. One such cooperative effort was initiated by Edna Baskin, president of Concerned Community Adults, and Daok Lee Pak, an interpreter for the U.S. District Courts, who would be afternoon panelists. Their work and similar efforts have been documented in the Collaborative's recently issued report, *Intergroup Cooperation in Cities: African, Asian, and Hispanic American Communities.*[14]

Yun pointed out that the Collaborative's data show that until there was a "major reimplementation of national urban programs and a revitalization of substantial resources from both the public and private sectors," the social conditions in U.S. cities will not be sufficiently addressed, and "minority intergroup relations will remain tenuous." At the same time, its onsite investigation indicated that "collaborative efforts, when proactively implemented can successfully diffuse tensions before they reach the crisis point."[15]

She concluded by explaining that during the Collaborative's second year, or educational development phase, its research data have been used to develop an interactive, relations-building program to improve relations among blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans in diverse educational, work, and community settings. Yun indicated that the Collaborative was embarking on its implementation phase, introducing its proactive interrelations program, which was expected to reproduce successful interethnic models and strategies in selected communities still experiencing tensions.

Less than 4 months after the Advisory Committee's meeting, a *New York Times* article reported some findings published in *Taking America's Pulse,* a national survey commissioned by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Among the negative findings were those suggesting that "the antipathy [that black, Hispanic, and Asian American] minorities feel toward one another nearly equals the resentment they collectively feel toward whites. . . . In many cases, the survey determined that minorities held more negative views of other minorities than do whites."[16] At the same time, the survey "did unearth evidence of positive views of America's big ethnic and racial groups," and even yielded "some signs of improvement" over a similar survey taken in 1978.[17]

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14 The 82-page, 1993 IRC report, *Intergroup Cooperation in Cities: African, Asian, and Hispanic American Communities,* is available from: IRC, P.O. Box 6280, Hamden, Connecticut 06517, for $20 which includes postage and handling.

15 Attachment to Yun Letter, p. 8.

16 Steven A. Holmes, "Survey Finds Minorities Resent One Another Almost as Much as They Do Whites," *New York Times,* Mar. 3, 1994, p. B–8 (hereafter cited as "Survey Finds Minorities Resent One Another . . . "). See also, Lynne Duke, "Blacks, Asians, Latinos Cite Prejudice by Whites for Limited Opportunity," *Washington Post,* Mar. 3, 1994, p. A–9, reporting on the same survey.

17 "Survey Finds Minorities Resent One Another. . . ."

Part II. Messages From New York State

Governor Mario M. Cuomo

Nishi introduced Commissioner Margarita Rosa, head of the New York State Division of Human Rights, who delivered the remarks of New York State Governor Mario Cuomo. The Governor commended the Advisory Committee and congratulated John Leonard, Arthur Barnes, Robert Sherman, Arthur Gelb, Michael Meyers, and Grace Yun for their efforts to promote intergroup cooperation. He described them as "shining examples of the excellent work being done in New York State to prevent hostility and conflict in our neighborhoods."[1]

The Governor noted that the meeting came at an especially significant time, because elections with highly charged racial overtones, a recent neo-Nazi rally in Auburn, charges of police recklessness against minorities, and a new outbreak of skinhead violence have frightened many and troubled everyone. He stated that difficulties between groups in the complex society of America were not new. For more than 200 years, people of different colors, creeds, and nationalities have gathered together under one flag.

America, "this assembled diversity," has produced the most successful experience in democracy in world history, continued the Governor, but by no means has perfect harmony been achieved. He pointed to startling failures:

> We began our life as a new experiment in a democracy that would be a unique bastion of freedom, and yet slavery was allowed to exist for almost 100 years. Waves of immigration were met with bias and xenophobia. And in perhaps one of our ugliest moments this century, during World War II, Japanese Americans were interned out of a paranoid fear that they would forget their loyalty to their new homes.[2]
>
> So there have been occasions and periods when our differences of race, religion, and ethnicity have produced ugly alienation instead of harmony. And today we are challenged by an additional difference—the difference between the people who have and the people who have not. The fear of falling from one group into another makes it more likely for one to resent his neighbor, especially if his skin is a different color, if he speaks a different language, or if he worships a different God.[3]

The perception of these differences produced tensions, frustration, and even angry eruptions such as occurred in Crown Heights and Los Angeles. Since the media were more likely to highlight the bad or the sensational and rarely the good, at times it has seemed that all hope was lost, according to the Governor. However, the Advisory Committee's meeting offered the opportunity to provide hope to the leadership and a chance to see what some of the projects and programs have accomplished and what can be learned from their success and their mistakes.

The Governor reported that his administration has been trying to increase those successes. For the past 5 years, he has introduced antibias crime legislation, but, since it has been stalled in the State Senate, he urged the meeting participants to join him in pressing for the bill. To improve the quality of life, he has introduced the "New" New York Program

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1 Mario M. Cuomo, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 21 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

2 Cuomo Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 22.

3 Ibid.

aimed at making the State's economy stronger by creating jobs for the unemployed, developing housing for the homeless, building the infrastructure, and providing conditions that encourage work, investment, and entrepreneurship.

The key was to make long-term investments for the future, said the Governor, who believed that many of the meeting participants would agree.

> We will succeed by working together all of us, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, you and I. Striving, achieving, understanding that as great as we are, we have not even begun to approach our full potential. By realizing that only together, sharing one another's pain, working for one another's benefit, learning to love and live together, can the American dream be fully realized. Thank you.[4]

Margarita Rosa, State Human Rights Division Commissioner

State human rights division commissioner Margarita Rosa then shared her own comments, thanking the meeting organizers for recognizing the efforts of individuals and groups who were working together to resolve and prevent intergroup conflict.[5] Having worked in human and civil rights enforcement for most of her professional life, Rosa noted that occasions such as the Advisory Committee's meeting take on a special significance.

> . . . [O]ur work is constantly bringing us face-to-face with the barriers to equal opportunity that have been contrived over time to maintain the status quo and to avoid diversifying the places where people live and where they work and play. Those barriers often give rise to intergroup tensions and conflicts, which can and . . . sometimes do erupt in violent confrontations.
>
> So, when we take the time and the trouble to recognize the positive community building efforts that are taking place around us. . ., we take a step toward the ideal that civil rights enforcement has sought to achieve. We take a step toward creating a social climate in which all of us— irrespective of our gender or our race, religion, color, age, national origin, or sexual orientation—can fulfill our potential as members of a human family working together for the common good.[6]

Rosa stressed that what was essential to the fulfillment of that ideal would be ensuring that all have the opportunity, unobstructed by artificial and unlawful barriers, to live, work, and play where each wishes, and where their capacity and ability to perform allows them. She believed that ultimately it would be the removal of those barriers that would permit people to work together across racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic lines to build communities in which diversity was a source of strength rather than a catalyst for strife.

She said that people find it daunting to deal with the challenges presented by diversity, and dealing with those challenges can be formidable. Consequently, she found it interesting to learn how the efforts of Meyer's New York Civil Rights Coalition were helping people in schools in setting aside stereotypes, because time has shown that using stereotypes was convenient or a way of simplifying things that were actually complex. She commented that:

> It can be a very easy copout that lets us assume that we know characteristics of groups, that we lump a bunch of people together under those

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4 Cuomo Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 24.

5 Margarita Rosa, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 24 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript). Upon her recommendation, Rosa's prepared statement has been adapted for corrections in the Hearing Transcript. Like the Hearing Transcript, Rosa's prepared statement is available in the Eastern Regional Office.

6 Rosa Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 25.

characteristics, congratulate ourselves for knowing something about the individual members of the group and move on from there without doing all of the groundwork that needs to be done. [Her own experience was] that when it comes to respecting and appreciating diversity, there is no substitute for human contact, and I expect that the efforts [described in the Advisory Committee's meeting] will support that proposition.

In the absence of actual contact, the temptation is to fill the void in our knowledge with ignorance, speculation, and stereotypes. Instead of bothering to learn about other cultures or lifestyles, we rely on characterizations of them that lump all members of a particular group together. The problem is that the shortcuts that stereotypes provide us shortchange not only those who are stereotyped but those who do the stereotyping. To rely on stereotypes . . . is to choose ignorance over knowledge.

For some, that which is different and unfamiliar is avoided at all costs or viewed with suspicion and sometimes feared. These are the kinds of emotions that have been causing violence when neighborhoods begin to be desegregated or [that lead] to harassment in the workplace when the workplace begins to become more diverse. If it's allowed to go unchecked, suspicion and fear can breed hatred and can sometimes find expression in violence.[7]

Society's interest was in fostering unity, understanding, and harmony. For this reason, the State division of human rights was taking part in the meeting, noted Rosa. She reported that her division has "dedicated significant resources" to promoting cultural awareness both inside and outside the workplace. Since the workplace is a microcosm of the larger community, it has been influenced by what was happening in the community. Thus, intergroup rivalries and competition can find their way into the workplace, and they pose challenges to workers and managers alike.

Since Rosa became commissioner in 1990, the division has conducted cultural awareness training for the division itself and in other workplaces, recognizing the contributions of diverse groups that comprise the work force. Since 1988, through its crisis prevention unit, the division has conducted cultural awareness training and training in mediation and conflict resolution in schools and in individual communities throughout the State. It has also trained police recruits and veteran officers in about 60 police departments, mostly outside the New York City area.[8]

Rosa also reported that a group of volunteers has organized as The Human Rights Players, and through them the division has enhanced both its outreach and educational functions. They have performed in churches, schools, and workplaces throughout the State. In collaboration with the State division for youth, the division of human rights has solicited municipal schools for information on their efforts at promoting respect and appreciation for diversity, and Rosa said that the information received from the schools was impressive.

The most outstanding school programs identified by the process received awards and special recognition from Governor Cuomo and his wife, Matilda Cuomo. Moreover, the success of that initiative served as a model for a conference being cosponsored by the aforementioned State divisions, other State agencies, and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Commission and Institute for Non-Violence. Similar to the Advisory Committee's meeting, this conference was to take place at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, showcasing programs from throughout the State which were selected from among a number of entrants for models of promoting positive intergroup relations.[9]

Rosa observed that:

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7 Rosa Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 26–27.

8 Rosa Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 28–29.

9 Rosa Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 29–30.

The similarities between the focus of the [Advisory Committee's public meeting] and our conference in December [1993] are striking. The commonality in the themes suggest more than just that great minds think alike or that there's cross-pollination within the civil rights community. It suggests that more of us are recognizing the need to focus on and to learn from what's working rather than becoming consumed and depressed with our failure and the solutions that have eluded us.

In conclusion, intergroup rivalries and competitions . . . pose a challenge, and they are going to go on for a long time. Our dwindling resources don't help matters, but, to quote history and a great American leader whom we often hear quoted, Martin Luther King, Jr.: "We must somehow learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we are all going to perish as fools." Those words are as true now, as they were when first uttered. Those of us who are policymakers must also be mindful of other words by Dr. King, that "True peace is not only the absence of tension but the presence of justice."[10]

10 Rosa Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 30–31.

Part III. Panel One

Upon introducing the first panel of the afternoon session, Committee Chairperson Nishi said that some additional panelists had been added at the last moment. But she began with the originally announced speakers.

African American-Jewish American Women's Dialogue

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Writer-Editor

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a writer and former editor of *Ms. Magazine,* started with a chronology of her African American-Jewish American dialogue group, describing it as "a very tiny model of what we believe can be happening all over this country, if one recognizes that change is made in small increments and very much on a personal level."[1] It began with Harriet Michel, who was president of the New York Urban League at the time, and Pogrebin when they were part of a larger black-Jewish coalition made up of men and women.

That coalition included about 120 members, of whom some 60 might attend meetings at any one time. Pogrebin said that the group had formed in 1984 in response to the so-called "Hymie Town" remark made about New York City by Rev. Jesse Jackson. His remark became a tinderbox in the Jewish community. At the same time, a rebuttal advertisement in the *New York Times* headlined "Jews Against Jackson" became a tinderbox in the black community, Pogrebin explained. To dampen the sparks, Haskell Lazere, publisher Wilburt Tatum of the *Amsterdam News,* rabbis and ministers from both communities, and people in business, the arts, education, politics, and law, and other professionals joined together to talk about issues that were becoming volatile.

Members from the outset, Michel and Pogrebin realized after several months that there were distinct limitations to what could be accomplished by a group that size and one that was dominated by the high-powered men at the meetings, said Pogrebin, adding that "I'm as fond of men as the next person, married to one, and the mother of one." However, men were not always comfortable with intimacy, especially in terms of the dynamics of group dialogue. Instead, "Often they spend more time on posturing, negotiating masculinity and carrying on about how smart they are, how able they are, how accomplished they are, and how wonderful they are, than on the issue at hand."

Consequently, Michel and Pogrebin began to react negatively to black or Jewish males who engaged in such posturing, and after one meeting:

> we came up to each other and said what we really need is a healthy dose of feminist dialogue utilizing the consciousness-raising model of the seventies which had been predicated on the notion that the personal is political, that, before you grapple with the difficult issues, you first establish a human relationship, a foundation of mutual understanding. You deal with the things you have in common, and you speak very, very personally.[2]

The two then began assembling a group which was admittedly an elitist group and consciously not a grassroots group. Other women leaders were brought in because the organizers believed that, if successful, they

1 Letty C. Pogrebin, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9., 1993, transcript, p. 35 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

2 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 36–37.

could model intergroup relations in a more broadly influential way, since they were choosing people with a measure of visibility in each community. Michel and Pogrebin enjoyed access to the media, and Michel approached Bernice Powell of the Coalition of 100 Black Women and the late Marguerite Ross Barnett, who was then vice chancellor of the City University of New York. Pogrebin recruited Jacqueline Levine, then president of the National Jewish Community Relations Council, and Marilyn Braveman, formerly the director of education and urban affairs of the American Jewish Committee.

With that, the new group had three Jewish women and three African American women, and, Pogrebin added:

> we were afraid that we would tear each other's hair out. Everything was extremely controversial in 1984. Everything was a sensitive, volatile issue. So we decided we needed a mediator. We had a friend in common, Donna Shalala, who was then president of Hunter College and who understood our objectives. We asked her to participate as a kind of neutral [party], to keep us from coming to blows and also because, as we kidded her, she was neither black nor Jewish, but could pass for either.[3]

The group immediately adopted specific rules of engagement that have been honored even up to the present, including an agreement that "we would never slam out of the room, no matter what was said," explained Pogrebin. Members were there to hear each other's truths, and so they acknowledged that they expected to hear "a lot of painful things from each other in the service of absolute honesty." They believed that they would not progress "unless we could come to this safe space where each side could say what we really felt about the other group and about the perceptions and the treatment of ourselves."

They also decided that their "communication styles—whatever they were—were going to have to be acceptable to each other." One member might become "angry and loud," and another member might be "a more placid type," but each was expected to tolerate the other's idiosyncracies and stay focused on the content of the message. The group first reviewed what members had in common. As "admitted and proud feminists, we were able to say we had in common a lot of issues basic to the struggle against sexism: we supported equal opportunity for women, reproductive freedom, and an end to violence against [females]."[4] All members appreciated the phenomenon of sexual discrimination that each experienced apart from their different experiences with either anti-Semitism or racism.

Pogrebin noted that the members had all experienced sexual harassment, and those who had children had experienced "the challenge of raising a girl to feel proud and dignified and a boy to be a caring, non-sexist male." There were other shared concerns regarding relations with the men in their separate communities. While each African American or Jewish woman felt "an extremely highly developed sense of group identity and group loyalty," each was at the same time comfortable critiquing the sexism within her own community.

For example, Pogrebin has been "battering down the walls of synagogues and Jewish communal organizations" in search of equal representation and respect for women and to give women greater roles in Jewish ritual. Along similar lines, less than 3 months after the Advisory Committee's meeting, a January 1994 *New York Times* article reported that an Israeli organization, "Women of the Wall," was instrumental in having Israel's Supreme Court recommend that the government study ways to reconcile the conflicting rights of groups who wish to pray at the Western Wall.

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3 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 37–38.

4 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 39.

In 1988 Orthodox Jewish worshipers had attacked women wanting to hold services there with a Torah scroll and prayer shawls, symbols commonly associated with men in Orthodox Judaism.[5] As a *Washington Post* article on the same day explained, [women are]:

> barred from wearing prayer shawls and carrying Torah scrolls because Orthodox Jews set the rules at the Wall and rigidly enforce Jewish traditions against both activities by women. They also try to keep women from praying out loud because of an ancient Jewish dictate against men hearing the sound of women singing.[6]

Pogrebin told the meeting audience that the African Americans in the dialogue group shared similar experiences, looking for honor, dignity, representation, and equality, both in their religious institutions and in black communal organizations. Moreover, during the prior 9 years, many other issues, domestic and international, engaged the attention of the dialogue group. These ranged from growing up female as a Jew or a black in the U.S. to Israel's military support of South Africa in contrast to American Jews' opposition to apartheid in South Africa.[7]

For instance, when a resolution in the United Nations was passed that equated Zionism with racism, the Jewish women felt that the black community had not spoken up against the resolution. The Jewish women also believed that blacks did not understand that Zionism and its central tenet, the "Law of Return," allowed every Jew to enter Israel and gain immediate citizenship; it was based on the historical experience of Jews through centuries of oppression and not on a racist policy anymore than affirmative action had been based on a racist policy instead of on the historical experience of blacks in America.

On the other hand, Pogrebin pointed out that, when the incident leading to the death of Yusef Hawkins occurred in Bensonhurst in 1989, the African American women wanted the Jewish women to speak out against white violence, whereas the Jewish women admitted that their community had heaved a great sigh of relief that "at least it wasn't us who did it." Thus, the two sets of women explored the tendency of each to protect their respective communities from defamation and from any association with negative events.

She also mentioned Bishop Desmond Tutu's statement about the Holocaust to the effect, "Why don't Jews forgive?" Pogrebin reported that this occasioned:

> a very painful exchange. We had to explain to our African American sisters why the Christian notion of forgiveness does not apply when it comes to Jewish perceptions and experiences of the Holocaust [in which] one-third of our people, one-third of all our families, had been murdered by the Nazis . . . with the clear purpose of eradicating Jews from the face of the earth.[8]

When Nelson Mandela visited New York City, tension arose because some Jewish groups had objected to what he had to say about the Palestine Liberation Organization, according to Pogrebin. On the other hand, Jewish dialogue group members identified Jewish organizations in New York that were "strongly pro-Mandela and had come out to raise money for the African National Congress which was delivered to Mandela during his visit."[9]

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5 Ari L. Goldman, "Jewish Women Gain Recognition; Women Gain at the Wall," *New York Times,* Jan. 29, 1994, p. A–9.

6 David Hoffman, "Testing Israel's Religious Laws; Court Rulings Called Setback for Orthodox Establishment," *Washington Post,* Jan. 29, 1994, p. A–13.

7 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 40.

8 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 43–44.

9 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 42.

Earlier in the year, the *New York Times* gave Harvard University Afro-American Studies Department chairperson Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a significant part of its op-ed page to expound his theory of why there had been such an increase in rage and enmity shown by some extremists in the black community toward Jews.[10] Pogrebin reported that this provoked much discussion within the group, as the African American women pointed out that, when the *New York Times* finally afforded large space to a black writer, it was to allow him to write about Jews. They stressed that black writers had more to discuss than just black-Jewish relationships and expressed rage over the media choices. Thus, observed Pogrebin:

> It's constantly an experience of enlarging the awareness factor, and, even if we cannot end up agreeing with each other, we do end up understanding each other.... I have to sit there sometimes and listen to things that make my blood boil ... and that I sometimes feel offended and insulted by. But the dialogue gives me a place where I can react honestly, where I can hear it, take it in, try to understand how in the world you get there, and then ask the other side to do the same thing when we present our perspective.[11]

She pointed out that the group held six or eight sessions on Minister Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, with the Jewish members not comprehending "why it is so hard for blacks to get up and say we reject a hate message." Pogrebin said that "we don't want a leader who expresses any of these kinds of negatives about another religion." But the African American members replied: "It's not that simple." They asked, "Why do you Jews only want to hear from us when there's an attack on Jews? Why do you come only to ask us to repudiate our own? Where are you when it comes to supporting us? Why don't you understand that for us Farrakhan's message is 90 percent about self-help . . . getting educated, getting a job, . . . learning to wake up to an alarm clock in the morning, . . . fulfilling your responsibilities. We are not going to disavow black male leaders who have those kinds of things to say to our youth."[12]

Pogrebin said that "I listened and listened, and for me it was real hard to swallow, but at least I understood how the black women perceived the issue."

Exactly 3 months after the Advisory Committee's meeting, a *Time* magazine article depicted the phenomenon of blacks being called upon to repudiate blacks. Reporting on a controversy that developed after a November 29, 1993, speech by a black speaker at Kean College, New Jersey, the article noted how similar controversies unfolded:

> Here's how it works: 1) a semi-obscure black figure says something outrageous or anti-Semitic; 2) pundits pontificate, word processors whirr; 3) one by one, black leaders are forced to condemn the offending words and the offensive speaker.[13]

Several weeks later, *Time* published a cover story on Farrakhan, including the results of a *Time*/CNN poll. Of 364 African Americans familiar with Farrakhan who were surveyed, 70 percent responded that he is "someone who says things the country should hear," and 53 percent that he is a "role model for black youth," although 34 percent agreed that he is

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10 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Black Intellectuals, Jewish Tensions; a Weaving of Identities," *New York Times*, Apr. 14, 1993, p. A–21.

11 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 43.

12 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 43–44.

13 Christopher John Farley, "Enforcing Correctness: a Black Muslim Spews Bigotry, and Black Leaders Across the U.S. Are Pressured to Condemn Him," *Time*, Feb. 7, 1994, p. 37.

"a bigot and a racist."[14] Of 503 African Americans polled, 26 percent believed that relations between blacks and Jews had gotten better, while 42 percent believed that relations have not changed.[15] A later nationwide *New York Times* poll of 291 blacks indicated that 40 percent believed that Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam did not represent the views of most blacks in the country, but, added the *New York Times* reporter, "many seem to share at least some of the racial views associated with the [Nation of Islam]."[16]

Almost 4 months after the Advisory Committee's meeting, a lengthy article by Pogrebin entitled "What Divides Blacks and Jews," was published in *New York Newsday*. In it, Pogrebin wrote that America has been home to numerous ethnic groups in conflict, but "the intergroup conflict that continues to excite the most heated public debate is the volatile, complex relationship between blacks and Jews."[17] She noted that:

> the causes of the severe and almost symbiotic tensions between these two communities lie not in blind hatred but in each people's unique history. Dislocation, loss and pain have left both groups feeling vulnerable and angry. . . .

Pogrebin then listed "10 points of divergence" helping to explain the tensions, and these can be found in her article appearing in appendix A of this report.

A March 1994 *Washington Post* article on the reactions in the black and Jewish communities towards controversies surrounding the Nation of Islam reported that:

> Many Jewish leaders, who are outraged by Farrakhan's declarations about Jews and view his popularity among blacks as an ominous portent, say some black leaders have not responded to Farrakhan forcefully enough. And they see signs of black antisemitism.
>
> Black leaders, by contrast, view continuing discrimination and socioeconomic disparity as the central issues in race relations, not Louis Farrakhan. They also resent that Jewish leaders tend to view repudiations of Farrakhan as a litmus test that determines which blacks are acceptable as allies.[18]

The article also points out that "Because there is no consensus on [such] issues, [Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith executive director Abraham H.] Foxman describes black-Jewish relations as a 'dialogue of disagreement.'"[19]

Marcia Gillespie, Ms. Magazine Editor-in-Chief

Ms. Magazine editor-in-chief Marcia Gillespie, one of Pogrebin's black counterparts in the dialogue group, explained that she was one of its newer members. She viewed herself as "somewhat of a provocateur" within the group because when she joined, "everybody was real comfortable with each other. . . . Everybody was just being so nice. And I kept saying, 'Look, I didn't come here to be nice, and I didn't come here to be best friends.'" In fact, Pogrebin, Michel, and Gillespie were friends, but Gillespie commented that "anytime we have groups like these over a period of time, sometimes, we are so comfortable just being with each other that we can get sidetracked."

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14 Yankelovich Partners, Inc., "How African Americans See It," *Time*, Feb. 28, 1994, p. 22.

15 Ibid.

16 Michael Kagay, "Poll Finds Most Blacks Reject Farrakhan's Ideas as Theirs," *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1994, p. A–8. The margin of sampling error was a plus or minus 6 percentage points.

17 Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "About Race: What Divides Blacks and Jews," *New York Newsday*, Mar. 2, 1994, p. 48, p. 82.

18 Lynne Duke, "A Continuing 'Dialogue of Disagreement;' Reactions to Farrakhan Strain Complex, Traditional Coalition of Blacks and Jews," *Washington Post*, Mar. 28, 1994, p. A–5.

19 Ibid.

She said further that "It's probably a great thing that from time to time people change . . . , new people come in, and then they say 'Let's get busy again, sisters.'" Gillespie's arrival coincided with the Crown Heights disturbances, and the sessions became extremely heated; the women expressed what they deeply felt personally and what they believed was their community's response. Gillespie pointed out that the discussion became most "energized" when the discussants were "perhaps speaking most honestly."

Gillespie then elaborated upon Pogrebin's point about having created:

> a place and a space where we can speak without editing our words or our emotions and where something else happens as a result. . . [a place] where there is absolute truth, [where] you are really being heard because it's not about somebody who is so busy trying to formulate their rebuttal that they don't hear what you are saying in the first place. . . . [W]e are really talking to and with each other and not at each other.[20]

She expressed some doubt as to whether men created the same kind of "place" or "space," but in any case, the members of the dialogue group "had those moments in which we come together and talk." For example, Gillespie mentioned that Pogrebin has been working on a book or diary about aging. Consequently, the group devoted "a lot of time just talking about aging." Gillespie explained that sharing their thoughts on such topics in some sessions made possible the other sessions on culture, race, anti-Semitism against Jews, the issue of anti-Semitism in the black community, or what responsibility blacks may or may not have to confront anti-Semitism in the black community.

Gillespie also noted that members of the discussion group have come together in order to "take stuff back out of the room" or share ideas and views on how each can be more effective as individuals and also more effectively act as a group later addressing the issues confronted earlier among themselves. A byproduct of their activities related to how issues have been addressed beyond the discussion group.

She observed that "whenever the big issue is . . . race or anti-Semitism or black-Jewish relations, it is always men talking." She believed that "it's extraordinarily important that this group also be in there saying, 'But hold it. There are some other opinions in the room.'" Moreover, "by using the experiences we have gained in this group, [one] can lower the volume and really get to pinpoint and address some of the points that need to be raised."

Another important lesson had to do with the selection of new members, said Gillespie, emphasizing that "for groups like this to function well, you have to give real thought to who is going to get selected." Moreover, whether the group was to be expanded or a member was to be replaced, there had to be clarity on the point that "the basic rules that were established to govern the group are going to be honored by the new people who join. Otherwise, you could have a group that disintegrates."

She also noted that one of the most difficult problems for the group was finding mutually convenient times to meet and explained that:

> [W]e spend weeks often trying to get one meeting every 2 months because everybody's traveling and busy, and one of the things that the group promised itself was that it would never meet if all participants could not be in the room, which can become extraordinarily difficult and extremely problematic. But it's worth it because you need all to be present to make the discussion whole and round.[21]

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20 Marcia Gillespie, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 46 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

21 Gillespie Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 51.

Gillespie emphasized "the concept of round. There is no head. There is no foot. There's nobody in charge. There is a group that comes together." She said the members go to each other's homes, and "We move it around the circle. We bring food. We do things that women would do when we come together as part of the ritual of this group." She encouraged the formation of more such groups and "Not just black-Jewish groups, but [also] groups that can begin the dialogue that we have been missing in this society where people talk in sound bites and in cliches most of the time, so that we really can begin to bridge barriers."

Speaking more personally, Gillespie said she had never considered herself to be anti-Semitic and continued to believe that was the case. On the other hand, in the course of the group sessions, she realized that, as an African American woman, she had:

> not always been on point when I heard statements coming from my sisters and brothers that were real problematic, that really spoke of anti-Semitism and needed to be addressed. I had to question my points of silence.
>
> What the group has also helped me do is to be much more about living the song I sing about in the way in which I engage in conversations whether it's with members of my family or African American people I don't even know, when things come up and hit my ear wrong.[22]

She said that now, when anti-Semitic statements were made, she has remarked:

> "No, I really don't think so." Because what the discussion group has [provided] is another kind of body of knowledge. I have more information to bring to the table and bring to the discussion which I think is extraordinarily important for me personally. [At the same time,] I've also made a point to be much more forthright in any conversations I have with my Jewish brothers and sisters.[23]

Black-Korean Team in Lefrak City

Daok Lee Pak, Ph.D.

Daok Lee Pak, a former member of Queens Community Planning Board 4, said that she had become a member of board 4 in January 1986 and served on it until 1990 when she had to resign for health and personal reasons. But, as a board 4 member, she had enjoyed the opportunity of interacting with many local residents and the leaders of various ethnic groups. During her tenure, she had befriended fellow panelist Edna Baskin, whom she considered very concerned about the well-being of the community. The two proposed the idea of organizing the first meeting between the Korean merchants and local residents.

In August 1986 the Mid-Queens Korean Merchants Association sponsored a dinner meeting at a local Korean restaurant. Representatives of board 4, the 110th Police Precinct, the Lefrak City Tenants Association, the area branch of the NAACP, and clergy and local Korean merchants were invited. The event gave residents an opportunity to air their feelings in a friendly atmosphere, said Pak, who noted that many sampled Korean cuisine for the first time. The dinner meeting was such a success that from then on, the Mid-Queens Korean Merchants Association has sponsored it annually, and it was especially well received by the children of the cleaning task forces of Baskin's summer program.

Then, on February 4, 1991, Pak was telephoned by several local activists regarding an incident that had happened at a Korean-owned C–Town supermarket. They asked Pak to attend a closed factfinding meeting involving only a handful of people, where she was to serve as an interpreter between the C–Town

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22 Gillespie Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 49–50.

23 Gillespie Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 50.

store manager, the C–Town store owner, and community leaders who were inquiring about the incident.

When Pak arrived at the meeting place, she encountered about 30 unhappy faces. After a briefing on the incident by a community liaison to a local State assemblyman, Pak had to stand by the C–Town supermarket manager who was asked to explain his version. But she was also able to offer a brief comment before helping the manager. She recalled saying that she had been saddened to hear what had occurred, that it seemed to be an unfortunate incident, and that she felt sorry for the youth and his family.

However, Pak also commented that the incident appeared neither to have been premeditated nor racially motivated. In her view, "It was simply a conflict between a misbehaved young child and the store manager, which could happen to anyone, in any society, even among neighbors of the same ethnic group."[24] She added that as community leaders who cared about the neighborhood, she hoped those present would look for the facts and not be misled or aggravated by a few ill-intended agitators.

Then she helped the C–Town supermarket manager with his version of the incident, which differed widely from the perception shared by the community. Many in the audience expressed concern that the incident might have been blown out of proportion, said Pak. A local State assemblywoman in attendance asked for the youth's mother to come forward to tell her side of the story; however, someone who described himself as an attorney for the youth stood up and announced that the youth's mother could not comment on pending litigation.

According to Pak, many who were present were displeased that an attorney had been brought into the closed community meeting. The State assemblywoman recommended that the youth's mother offer her version of the incident if she wanted the community's support. Then an activist minister rose to say that the mother and her family had been members of his congregation for some time and also that he believed what the mother would say more than what the supermarket manager had said. He even charged that Pak had made up the story for the supermarket manager and that her translation was not to be trusted.

Pak protested the minister's charge and explained that she was a certified interpreter for the U.S. courts. She also noted that the supermarket manager had shown good faith by appearing at the meeting without an attorney even though he was facing a third-degree assault charge. Despite the minister's remarks, the community leadership decided not to support the youth's mother due to her lack of cooperation, said Pak. Furthermore, they spoke with a unanimous voice, saying that "we don't want an outsider to come into this community to do any protest or to be an agitator." This became a decisive moment because those present called off the protest that had been scheduled for the next day at the C–Town supermarket.

Although New York City had not recovered from the 1990 controversy involving black boycotts at the Korean-owned Family Red Apple grocery store in Flatbush, people had become tired of such unproductive racial

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24 Daok Lee Pak, Ph.D., testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 56 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript.)

disputes, Pak observed.[25] "Which side was right or wrong became irrelevant. No one gained from these ugly displays." Pak said that she believed that:

> the Lefrak City incident was handled better than the Brooklyn incident because we already had a framework for dialogue. Many community leaders were reasonable and fine people with whom I had associated for the past several years.
>
> My major concern was that language and cultural differences would create an insurmountable barrier. What we learned from this incident is that prior planning and discussion can be used effectively to moderate volatile situations. We should establish an office that would facilitate this type of understanding. I hope that this will provide some insight into the events surrounding this incident.[26]

Edna Baskin, Concerned Community Adults President

President Edna Baskin of Concerned Community Adults said that she felt honored to describe what she and fellow panelist Pak did regarding the 1991 C–Town supermarket incident in the Lefrak City area of Queens. Both had been members of community planning board 4 to which the incident had been referred. Many of the board's members believed that theirs was not the place to which it should have been referred.

Nevertheless, Baskin thought that an obligation to the youth in the community called for concerned adults to stand up and take a position. Thus, she asked Pak to join her in organizing an informational meeting "because so often in our communities, the problem is misinformation, rumor." That seemed the case in this situation.

During the informational meeting, it was decided that a task force was necessary, because, apparently, the youth who was involved in the incident and the store owner were both in error. Baskin and Pak believed that a task force and seminars would be of help to the local Korean merchants and satisfy the community that something positive had been done to effect change for the young people.

Baskin considered the outcome successful "because we prevented negativism from spreading in our community . . . and we showed young people that we can make a difference." She believed that, although adults might make mistakes, it remained incumbent upon concerned adults to work with the youths. She was thankful to have Pak working with her because of Pak's ability to speak several languages.

21st Century Coalition

Rabbi Robert N. Levine, 21st Century Coalition Cochairperson

Robert N. Levine, the senior rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Sholom and cochairperson of the 21st Century Coalition, a group made up of religious and social service organizations, corporations, and individuals, prefaced his remarks by noting that:

> Many of us were active in one form or another during the recent mayoral campaign, and most of us came in with a particular political point of view. The election results made clear that the black-Jewish coalition held rather firm, particularly in Manhattan.[27]

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25 For background on the 1990 boycotts in Flatbush, see, e.g., "Mayor's Fact-Finding Committee Releases Korean Boycott Report," *New York Voice* (Queens), Sept. 8, 1990, n.p.; Michael Specter, "Day by Day, Racial Schism Grows on Church Avenue," *Washington Post*, Sept. 20, 1990, p. A–3; and Louis A. DeFreitas, Sr., "Community Boycotters: the Two Stores Must Close," *Afro-Times* (Brooklyn), Sept. 29, 1990, p. 3. More personal views appear in: Diane Ravitch, Teachers College historian, Columbia University, "King's Legacy Is Absent in War Against Koreans," *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 1990, p. A–22.

26 Pak Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 58–59.

He thought that the work that had been done by both groups was quite evident, and he said he was heartened to see that African American and Jewish interests came together and were mutually affirming because it was central to the work of the 21st Century Coalition. He added that:

> It is very important to us that the coalition is not viewed as a bunch of white Jewish liberals coming in to help disadvantaged children in district 5 in Harlem. Rather, this had to be a coalition that was mutually [beneficial].[28]

According to Levine, the only coalitions with a chance to succeed were those in which there were opportunities to give as well as privileges to receive. It was his position and that of his cochairperson, Rev. Glen C. Missick, and other coalition members that it was their "sacred obligation" to create an environment in New York City in which there was opportunity for educational advancement, job growth, and human dignity. If there was one thing that their separate communities had learned from their respective histories, it was that only in a society in which those opportunities were available to everyone would they ultimately be available to anyone.

Levine pointed out that "we must understand this from our own particular historic perspectives. We do not come to the table trying to compare our histories of persecution." He thought that it was quite easy for African Americans, Jews, and probably any other minority group to compare how they had been victimized, thereby trying to compete for who had gotten "a more raw deal." But, said Levine, "The fact is, you can't win that kind of competition."[29]

For example, he believed it would be spurious to declare from his perspective as a white male Jew, that he understood because "My people were in Egypt. My people went through the Holocaust. Therefore, we understand." Saying that would be:

> insulting and it's unfair. And it's unfair for someone in the African American community to claim likewise. What we do bring to the table is a certain feeling that there is something that is shared in our histories and our backgrounds that lead us to a common agenda, to a common vision of what society ought to be like. And again, from the mutual interest point of view, if we cannot create very precise opportunities for someone else, we cannot have the expectation that they will be there for us. We now know this.[30]

Levine then noted that another special quality about the 21st Century Coalition was that it has had two very distinct goals. One was to serve the educational needs of children in Central Harlem, and the second was to create a climate for dialogue between the different racial communities. The goals purposely appeared in the coalition's mission statement in that order because—unlike many groups that met together, went off on retreats for long periods of time, got to know each other, and then somewhat later decided to do something about the problems which drew them together in the first place—members of the 21st Century Coalition decided what they would do. In their projects members have tried to build relationships.

In Levine's view, this approach was "a very Jewish approach." For when the people of Israel were about to receive the Torah, the people's answer was, "We will do it, then we will understand. From the doing will come the understanding, and next will come the

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27 Robert N. Levine, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 60, (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

28 Ibid.

29 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 61.

30 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 60–61.

bonding."[31] He said that, although he could not pretend that bonding has fully occurred, he and his cochairperson were close friends who trusted each other and implicitly knew that each would be there for the other.

However, the coalition only meets periodically, with individual members working on their own projects. There have been retreats and socials, with his cochairperson stressing that social time was needed in order for members to come to know one another. Yet the thrust has been on solving problems, and Levine judged that some of the things that were accomplished to date had been impressive.

For example, the coalition had been told that the nursery and kindergarten programs in community school district 5 were thwarted because much of what was done at school could not be replicated or reinforced at home. Consequently, the Wings Pre-School Program developed a computerized method of learning, which easily could be translated into home use. At a cost of $2,000 per unit, a Wings unit was placed in every school. Of course, it has been important that coalition members "not only talk and do, but at times also raise money."

Another project has been called Ujaama-Yachad, Ujaama meaning "together" in Swahili, and Yachad meaning "together" in Hebrew. For the past two summers, the project has brought together district 5 youths and placed them in a Jewish summer camp for high school students where the youths of the two communities have lived, argued, and studied together, and put on plays together. Levine described it as "a phenomenal experience" that required raising about $30,000 each year.

The coalition has provided youths with internships in law firms around New York City, and was working on introducing a Boston-based program called "Facing History and Ourselves." The program adapted the case studies approach to having youths encounter situations of bigotry and persecution. The original case studies concerned the Holocaust, and the coalition was introducing it into district 5 at Central Harlem's Frederick Douglass Academy under Lorraine Monroe. In the process, Monroe observed that it was also important for the youngsters to face history in terms of their own persecution.

Having been fundamentally opposed to the notion of establishing a "contest" of persecutions, Levine appreciated how important it was to use one experience as a way of building bridges of understanding about another experience. Thus, the coalition was attempting to adapt "Facing History and Ourselves" to different cultural contexts and to organize a city-wide conference in which youths would be able to engage in planning ways to build intergroup harmony. Levine summarized his message by emphasizing that:

> whenever you build a coalition, there has to be something in it for everyone there, or it will not last. . . . [I]nstead of trying to search for implicit truth which may never be found, instead of trying to know each other well enough to begin to proceed, our approach has been to proceed to building the coalition, to having programs that are varied enough to assure that everyone in that coalition is given explicit responsibility.[32]

He suggested that awareness would then emerge.

Rev. Glen C. Missick, 21st Century Coalition Cochairperson

Glen C. Missick, the pastor of the Church of the Master in Harlem and Levine's partner in cochairing the 21st Century Coalition, acknowledged first that "the catalyst" behind the coalition was Linda Terry. He then described another coalition project, the Fitzpatrick Tennis Tournament, which has been operating in Harlem, where youths were

31 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 63.

32 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 67.

being instructed in tennis year-round. In addition to tennis, there were tutorial classes for the participants for which the coalition has been seeking funding.

Missick also focused on a different coalition in which Levine and he have been active. The New York City African American Clergy Council and the New York Board of Rabbis came together out of a perceived need to have an African American elected mayor of New York City. As a Brooklynite who had grown up in Crown Heights, Missick believed that he understood the politics of an ethnic city, New York. In 1988, when David Dinkins said that he planned to run for mayor, the African American clergy supported him in many ways, according to Missick.

Moreover, regarding that same mayoral campaign, a December 1992 *Washington Post* article, reporting on the status of tensions between blacks and Jews in 1992, commented on the troubled aftermath of the August 1991 killing of a rabbinical student in Crown Heights. The article reported that several nationally or locally prominent observers—blacks as well as Jews—believed that the subsequent tensions were not representative of the relationship between the two communities and further pointed out that "Dinkins, in fact, enjoyed wide Jewish support in his bid to become the city's first black mayor."[33] In fact, with regards to Dinkin's 1993 bid for reelection, a March 1994 *New York Daily News* article recalled that Dinkins had been "endorsed for reelection by both the mayors of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and [that Israeli] foreign minister Shimon Peres called Dinkins a great friend of Israel . . . ."[34]

During the public meeting, Missick stated that after the disturbances in Crown Heights, the aforementioned African American Clergy Council approached the New York Board of Rabbis, and suggested the establishment of a dialogue. A chairperson for the group has begun functioning in four of the city's five boroughs, and Missick has become the Manhattan chairperson as well as the citywide chairperson. The dialogue was painful at first, said Missick, because issues came up such as Gillespie alluded to earlier.

Controversy soon arose over Farrakhan, Jackson, and Rev. Al Sharpton. The black clergy was asked what they were going to do about the three. Missick stated that the black clergy basically replied, "We don't run them. They have their right to say what they want to say." He added that for about 2 years, the black clergy discussed the issue, and some including Bishop Norman Quick and Rev. Robert Foley, the Bronx chairperson, presented position papers that would eventually be published. There were also workshops during which participants voiced frank opinions.

As a result, this interfaith coalition began to organize other workshops and conferences on racism and anti-Semitism. A pre-Thanksgiving dinner at the board of rabbis was also held; its purpose was to go beyond talking on an intellectual or academic level and to rise to a level in which role models for relationships might be attained. In the course of these interactions between churches and synagogues, Missick met Levine.

Levine's synagogue, Congregation Rodeph Sholom, and Missick's Church of the Master formed one such relationship. Members of Missick's church attended a seder at Rodeph Sholom, and after the first trial of the Los Angeles police officers accused in the Rodney King beating, Missick helped to arrange for Mayor Dinkins and Melba Moore to attend a worship service and rally at Rodeph Sholom where various rabbis and black ministers preached. At last year's pre-Thanksgiving dinner, Jesse Jackson was brought in, "and it

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33 Lynne Duke, "N.Y. Black, Jewish Tension Not Seen as Indicative of Groups' Relations; Experts Say Dealings Historically Have Been Strained but Amicable," *Washington Post*, Dec. 27, 1992, p. A–6 (hereafter cited as "N.Y. Black, Jewish Tension Not Seen as Indicative of Group's Relations").

34 Bill Bell, "Working It Out," *New York Daily News* (Sunday *CitySmarts* section), Mar. 27, 1994, p. 3.

was a beautiful reunion, and the press was there from all over the country, all over the world."

Missick was reminded that objections to Jackson's "Hymie Town" remark often prompted Missick to inquire of his questioners, those who objected, about forgiveness. The same was true regarding objections to Farrakhan. Indeed, just the week prior to the Advisory Committee's meeting, a controversy related to Farrakhan resurfaced during a meeting with the board of rabbis, as black ministers were asked why they did not speak up about some of Farrakhan's statements. Missick said that forgiveness arose out of not only the Christian tradition but also the Judeo-Christian tradition. For that reason, he remind people about forgiveness and would ask the rabbis, "Don't you expect people to change? Don't you believe that people can change?"

Thinking about blacks in prison or young blacks on the street, Missick has often said to himself, "There but for the grace of God go I." But he also realized that people can change. While not necessarily defending Farrakhan, Missick noted that Farrakhan was well-respected in the black community because of the work he has done among young people:

> which, unfortunately, I am ashamed to say that our churches are not doing. He is giving them back their dignity and their self-esteem. So, no matter what he said back then—and we all make mistakes—if he has asked for forgiveness, as Jesse Jackson did with the "Hymie Town" situation, I think it is up to us to forgive and sometimes even forget.[35]

Missick pointed out that some of his colleagues and he have differences with Farrakhan, Jackson, Sharpton, and many others. Nevertheless, he reasoned that:

> this is a time of healing, and we need to come together. I often say that, if we were to have an invasion tomorrow from Mars, you would find how quickly we become brothers and sisters, whether we are Jewish, Japanese, Koreans, African Americans, whatever we are. We will all come together and hold hands and sing how we shall overcome. But we don't need to wait for that.[36]

Offering a personal anecdote, he explained that his is a Presbyterian church where several institutions and programs were begun, including the Dance Theater of Harlem, the Morningside Community Center, Crossroads Africa, which helped to stimulate the idea of a Peace Corps, and others. Nevertheless, at some point the church started to decline, and by the time Missick arrived, it had become "basically a senior citizens church with the old church building closed up." In fact, church members continued to worship in the community center, and, on the Sunday following the Advisory Committee's meeting, they were to vote on whether to move back into the old church building.

Missick said many members had moved out of Harlem northward, into Westchester County, and eastward, onto Long Island. He has been challenging the members for some time by reminding them about the church's great past, and stressing that "We need to say what we are doing now." Since the membership has not responded to the challenge, he felt frustrated.

In September he received a phone call from a 5-year-old child who asked him to come and pray for her because her cousin had just been shot. Missick did so and discovered that the slain 13-year-old boy had attended the church's Sunday school. Though he had dropped out of Sunday school 2 years earlier, the boy had been an honor student, a Little League player, and had recently signed a contract to do a commercial for Levi jeans. In his eulogy, Missick told the mourners, who

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35 Missick Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 73.

36 Missick Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 74.

included several whites, that he felt guilty, the church also ought to feel guilty, and whites as well as blacks ought to feel guilty. A 13-year-old had tried to escape an altercation that had escalated into gunshots, had been struck in the back of the head by a bullet, and then died 3 hours later.

The death became a "rude awakening" for Missick and the church. Consequently, the church started a Friday night service, including offering pizzas to the youngsters. On the first such Friday night, over 250 youths showed up, including gang members. A fellow minister who was also expert in working with youths asked the youths to rise for prayer, and over 75 of them did so. "They were saying 'Here we are. What are you going to do with us?'" said Missick.

He also recalled that after the youth's funeral he received a letter from a white mourner who had heard the eulogy and whose daughter had attended school with the slain 13-year-old. This mourner, a Jew, had been impressed and agreed with much of what Missick had preached at the service, but he wrote that Missick may have erred in saying that whites ought to feel guilty. Missick immediately responded in a "very nice, long diplomatic letter," that he believed that everyone was guilty for all of the violence, the guns, and the killings of youths. But he added that people needed to go beyond feeling guilty and begin addressing the problems. He had also hoped that the letter writer would have wanted to contribute something.

Two days later, a call came in from the letter writer who said that he was a director of *The Guiding Light* television soap opera. He was also producing a play called "Two Roads to Freedom" about the life of Frederick Douglass, and he offered to have it performed free of charge during Missick's Friday night youth program. Missick noted that the performance was to occur the Friday after the Advisory Committee's meeting and said that this was an example of a healing force that could come about when people spoke frankly with one another.

Black-Korean Mediation Project

Aiyoung Choi, Black-Korean Mediation Project Cochairperson

Aiyoung Choi, a cochairperson of the Black-Korean Mediation Project, explained that her organization:

> essentially came about as a result of . . . private citizens who became very worried and concerned about intergroup relations in New York City immediately after the Los Angeles riots in the spring of 1992. . . . Over a period of several months, we met to try to come up with something that could be done within the various ethnic communities . . . that would provide an opportunity for people to work together . . . to somehow help prevent tensions from rising. . . .[37]

The project involved 11 Korean and 11 black mediators trained as New York State certified community mediators soon expected to begin working as volunteers. Coming from different walks of life—nursing, banking, government, the law, and the like—each volunteer had a full-time occupation except for two who were graduate students. They would work in community mediation centers in the city's five boroughs upon completion of cultural sensitivity training and a 3-month apprenticeship program.

The classroom training component had just been completed, and the assignments to the centers were to be made within days after the Advisory Committee's meeting. One black mediator and one Korean mediator would serve on each team to resolve interethnic disputes as well as to work on other problems brought to them, ranging from landlord-tenant disputes to disputes between neighbors.

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37 Aiyoung Choi, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 85 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript.)

David Addams, Black-Korean Mediation Project Cochairperson

David Addams, Choi's cochairperson, further explained that the volunteers were trained in "comediation" preparing them to:

> think and work together as a team. . . . They don't just think about themselves. The process of "comediation" is one where you begin modeling the kind of relationship for people that you think is best for them. You see a black and a Korean working together, resolving their own conflicts in very positive and constructive ways.[38]

As ordinary human beings, mediators had different ideas about how to do things, said Addams. But the process of learning mediation allowed people to realize that there were ways to work out any differences, that there was a middle or common ground that could be shown to parties in conflict. The ultimate goal of the project was not only to create bridges between these two communities by getting people to learn about their different cultures and how to work together but also to take that knowledge back to the communities so that the people there can see what worked and how to do it.

Addams described an episode that had occurred during their own training. Choi and a black student mediator were working on a dispute involving a Korean woman who repeatedly said, "I don't know. I don't know." As a Korean herself, however, Choi knew that what the disputant meant was "No." Meanwhile, the black mediator had no idea that the Korean disputant had made up her mind; it sounded to the black mediator that the Korean disputant literally did not know or was undecided. The relationship of the comediators allowed Choi to educate the black mediator as to what the Korean disputant actually felt so that both mediators could move forward on how better to relate to both disputing parties. "That's the kind of modeling that we really want to do," said Addams.

He added that the project began by focusing on the relationship between the black and Korean communities. But discussions have already begun regarding ways in which to build bridges between a variety of communities. The goal was for "all communities to know how to work together and have people who actively are committed to building bridges between communities."

In answer to a question from Baskin, a prior panelist from Lefrak City, Addams explained that this project was not yet focusing on teaching high school students or young people about mediation as a way of conflict resolution. However, some organizations involved in the project engaged in other kinds of activities "teaching youth conflict resolution skills." Responding to a question from Nishi about major problems, Addams cited the difficulty in getting people to make the necessary time and the commitment to seek mediation early on. "We live in a very busy city. Everybody has a million and one things on their agenda. . . . And so it's often very difficult to get people to take the time to focus on the issues before there is a serious problem as opposed to after a problem has arisen."

Islam & World Peace Association

Before introducing a speaker who was appearing alone, Nishi noted that from the outset one goal of the Advisory Committee was to hear from representatives of Muslims, Jews, and Christians who have been working together as a team such as the previous sets of panelists have been doing. However, for different reasons, separate New York City and Washington, D.C., organizations consulted by staff, were unable to provide any team of pan-

38 David Addams, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 87–88.

elists, but Fathy Hegazy of the Islam & World Peace Association asked to be added to the panel, even if alone.

Fathy Hegazy

After almost 15 years of working in the U.S., Fathy Hegazy decided that he needed to do something about the problems suffered by Muslims. Whether immigrants or students, Muslims residing in Western countries predominantly populated by Christians or Jews began to suffer because the non-Muslims "were against us," according to Hegazy. Muslim families suffered, especially those women who wore Muslim head coverings in public.

Consequently, Hegazy approached some Jewish and Christian friends about organizing a group that named itself Taking the Next Step and that focused on problems between Israelis and Palestinians. Somewhat thereafter, this group considered meeting with other individuals involved in the International Conference for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Dialogue. That encouraged others to join at least one of the groups to share information and understanding about Islam.

"Islam is universal," explained Hegazy, noting that:

> When a Muslim reaches the age of understanding the teachings of the Koran, revealed to the prophet Mohammed about 1,400 years ago, the Muslim realizes the oneness of the Creator and the oneness of humanity. This is how to evaluate yourself in order to be a good human being. Many non-Muslims I have met do not understand Islam at all.[39]

He said that they considered Islam strange and something that was against their own faith.

Less than 2 weeks previous to the Advisory Committee's meeting, a front-page *Washington Post* article noted that "While Muslims are growing in number, diversity, and visibility in America, there remains among them a strong undercurrent of anxiety about living in a culture that many say treats Islam as foreign, mysterious, or worthy of fear."[40] The article reported that a national survey indicated that "Among a select list of religious groups, Muslims received the lowest favorable and highest unfavorable ratings. . . ."[41]

And yet, Hegazy pointed out during the meeting that Muslims in general and Arabs in particular were descendants of the prophet Abraham from his first son, Ishmael. The Israelis were descended from Isaac, the second son of Abraham, and were, therefore, cousins of the Arabs. Hegazy suggested that people have to find what was common among them, and any leader of a group—especially religious leaders such as rabbis, priests, and imams—should promote peaceful coexistence "in this land called America, the gift of the one God to all mankind." Hegazy called for all to talk together, to try to reach each other's mind, "the most precious gift that almighty God gave us."

Charging that ignorance has caused people of one community to hate people of another, Hegazy said that some whites thought that they were better than blacks, and vice versa, and that this problem has affected people when they were talking about Farrakhan, a Muslim. Hegazy said that a Muslim was one who accepted:

> the wonders of God. But was the teaching of Farrakhan the full [teaching of] Islam? No. And I am not saying this by myself. But, if you talk with a lot of religious [people], he takes part of it and he leaves part of it. Islam is universal . . . the contin-

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39 Fathy Hegazy, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 81 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

40 Lynne Duke, "Islam Is Growing in U.S., Despite an Uneasy Image; Particularly for Immigrants, Anxiety Lingers About American Attitudes," *Washington Post*, Oct. 24, 1993, p. A–1.

41 Ibid.

uance of God's way of life, and you have to exist on earth in a peaceful way with yourself, with your neighbor, your brother, and sister.[42]

A lengthy March 1994 *Washington Post* background article on the Nation of Islam indicated that the Nation of Islam, founded in Detroit in 1930, portrayed "blacks as the 'original man' and whites as devils. . . . It predicts that America is doomed because of the evil that whites historically have done to blacks." Moreover, according to the *Washington Post* article, "Many Muslims do not consider the Nation part of orthodox Islam. Mainstream Islam does not preach racial doctrine. . . ."[43] The same article named the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights as among several institutions that had denounced the Nation of Islam in recent weeks—although in fact, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights condemned a specific speech given by a Nation of Islam spokesperson on November 29, 1993, at Kean College in New Jersey—while also condemning "all manifestations and expressions of racism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism, and ethnic or religious intolerance."[44]

A separate article in the same *Washington Post* edition reported on a Muslim-Jewish interfaith discussion during which a question was raised as to whether "Louis Farrakhan spoke for all Muslims when he made harsh statements about the Jewish community." An imam, the director of the Muslim Community School in Potomac, Maryland:

> responded that those who "try to give Islam a racist interpretation, as is the case with the Nation of Islam, have no relationship to the body of Muslims inside the United States and outside."[45]

During the Advisory Committee's public meeting, Hegazy urged the avoidance of hypocrisy and called for leaders to show courage as well as vision—as did former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat—to achieve peace between those in conflict with their neighbors. The only way to stop hatred was to find what was inside oneself and to educate oneself not in a political way but in faith. Whether a person believed it or not, "we are all creatures of the same Creator," said Hegazy, regardless of what name the Creator was known by in different languages.

> Some say, "I am the right person and have the right faith." No. The right faith is to live in peace and accept other people, living in peace and dignity and with justice [among all people]. . . . No white is better that the black. No black is better than the white. No Arab is better than the non-Arab. Everyone is equal. Everyone is created by the same Creator.[46]

Discussion Period

Ghazi Khankan, an Advisory Committee member and a Muslim, added that he had been taught that when God spoke he addressed all human beings. "Indeed, the most honored in the sight of God is the person. Not the woman, not the man, but the person who is most righteous." He also called attention to the need for more inclusion when addressing specific religious faiths, recommending that the phrase "people of religion" be substituted for the narrower phrase, "Jews and Gentiles."[47]

He further noted that the term anti-Semitism, when intended to mean anti-Jewish, might be inappropriately applied. Since there

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42 Hegazy Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 83.

43 Lynne Duke, "At Core of the Nation of Islam: Confrontation," *Washington Post,* Mar. 21, 1994, p. A–1.

44 Ibid. See also, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Rights Commission Condemns Kean College Hate Speech," a two-page news release, Mar. 4, 1994.

45 Laurie Goodstein, "Muslims, Jews Nurture Trust in Frank Discussion," *Washington Post,* Mar. 21, 1994, p. D–3.

46 Hegazy Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 84.

47 Ghazi Y. Khankan, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil

were more Arab Semites than Jewish Semites, Khankan said that users of the phrase needed to clarify their specific meaning. Lastly, Khankan estimated that there were approximately 9 million Muslim Americans, suggesting that when speakers referred to the "Judeo-Christian heritage," they might better have said "Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage" to speak more inclusively.

Tamar P. Halpern, an Advisory Committee member, added that the National Conference of Christians and Jews recently changed its name to The National Conference because the organization considered the original name too limiting and restricting. Nishi agreed that refining the vocabulary was an important way to "increase our inclusiveness as well as our sensitivity."[48] Halpern said that The National Conference also engaged in bridge-building efforts such as were being described to the Advisory Committee. Pogrebin commented that she has been involved in a Jewish-Palestinian dialogue for many years and pointed out that Palestinians included both Christians and Muslims. Involvement in this group widened one's horizons by placing one in contact with groups dealing with "ethnic, political, and international issues all at the same time," she said.

Levine posed a more general question, that is, were these coalition-building and mediation efforts "a reaction to what we see as a fraying of intergroup relations? . . . [Or] can [these efforts] be viewed as an example of racial harmony and intergroup harmony that is happening in the city?"

Pogrebin replied that in the Jewish community there has existed:

> a very powerful myth that blacks and Jews have a long history of cooperation and coalition. There is a real resistance to recognizing that even in the so-called "good old days" not all Jews and blacks worked together in the civil rights struggle, and many African Americans did not necessarily feel comfortable about the association between us. While Jews considered the relationship a friendship forged on an equal basis, African Americans often considered it patronizing, unequal, and asymmetrical.
>
> So I think the first thing that has to happen in our respective communities—again speaking of what is a direct result of our kind of dialogue—is that we veterans of dialogue must go back and educate our own folks as to the feelings on the other side.

Less than 3 months after Pogrebin addressed the Advisory Committee's meeting, the *Washington Post* published an article citing the work of University of Arizona history professor Leonard Dinnerstein who documented anti-Jewish sentiments among blacks going back to the days of slavery.[49] The same *Washington Post* article also cited former U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Vice Chairperson Murray Friedman who found evidence of clashes between blacks and Jews in New York City in the 1930s and whose book, *What Went Wrong: the Creation and Abandonment of the Black-Jewish Alliance,* was expected to be published in the summer of 1994.[50]

Pogrebin said that she often spoke in the Jewish community, "trying to translate black opinions and attitudes to Jews who are still living in the 'good old days' of the so-called civil rights movement and who have no black friends or coworkers with whom they talk today." On such occasions, a Jewish listener

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Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 97–98.

48 Tamar P. Halpern, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 99.

49 Gustav Niebuhr, "Anti-Jewish Feelings of African Americans Have a Long History," *Washington Post,* Feb. 4, 1994, p. A–15.

50 Ibid. For additional views in the same vein, see also Milton D. Morris and Gary E. Rubin, "Blacks and Jews—the Turbulent Friendship; Two Observers Review the 100-Year-Old Relationship Between Black and Jewish Communities and Discuss the Prospects for Future Cooperation," *Focus,* April 1994, p. 3.

might ask, "Why aren't [blacks] grateful?" since it was Jews who joined the "Mississippi Summer" campaigns to register black voters, sent their young people into the struggle regardless of the risk, and walked arm-in-arm with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in the great marches of the sixties. "Why have [blacks] forsaken us?"[51]

Pogrebin explained that translating the perceptions of African Americans in her community was both a service and a byproduct of dialogue. "The function of a very small, painfully honest, and hard-working dialogue group is to decode one another's behavior in a safe, private space and then go back and translate what we learn and be a bridge between our two peoples."

Meanwhile, the function of an activist group was to work at the grassroots level, raise funds, and carry out projects. Not everyone had that purpose or could carry out that function. She believed that:

> A small group is not necessarily capable of fundraising and the kinds of education work that some of you have talked about. But dialogue has its place in preparing communities for coexistence and mutual respect. I recommend that a whole series of options be offered to communities so that people can plug into the particular expression of intergroup harmony that best suits them.[52]

Pogrebin also noted that what should be asked was: how much of these efforts were positive and how much were a reaction to the negative? On that point, Choi observed that the efforts leading to the establishment of the Black-Korean Mediation Project may have been both a positive effort and a reaction to a negative.

Regarding the latter, Choi explained that:

> We have to admit that had it not been for the Los Angeles riots, perhaps we may not have come together so quickly, although in New York City there had been several incidents involving Korean merchants and black customers. So it was . . . a natural concern between those two communities to want to come together. It was definitely a reaction to certain incidents that had occurred which we wanted to prevent from happening again.[53]

On the other hand, the mediators who have been assembled and trained were to work in communities where they will also be focusing on conflicts between "normal everyday people," those individual and interpersonal disputes that fray the quality of everyday life for everybody. In that sense, their work would be a positive contribution to the larger community.[54]

Missick said that the killing of the 13-year-old whom he had mentioned earlier "hit me hard." In that sense, the Friday night program at his church may have been a reaction to a negative. "Crown Heights is a reaction. This is why we all came together." He then called for people "to recognize the problem and see it way up front and begin to do more analysis, but not paralysis of analysis. . . . We need to use more prevention and cure."

He also voiced agreement regarding Pogrebin's remarks about how the black community and the Jewish community may perceive each other and about the functions of different kinds of groups. He added that on the very morning of the Advisory Committee's meeting, the *New York Daily News* carried an article by syndicated columnist William Raspberry that Missick characterized as excellent.

Winner of a 1994 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, Raspberry referred to Robert L. Woodson's "characterization of those black leaders whose power is 'grievance-based.'

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51 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 92.

52 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 92–93.

53 Choi Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 95–96.

54 Ibid.

There may be, [Woodson] said, 'an inverse relationship between the leader and the people; his success depends on their continued failure." Regarding women, Raspberry wrote that " . . . some feminist leaders . . . find it impossible to acknowledge serious progress toward gender fairness—not because there has been no progress but because their power derives from their ability to keep portraying women as victims."[55] Missick concluded from Raspberry's column that some minority leaders needed to guard against the dangers of exploiting an exaggerated status of minorities as victims.

At the same time, Missick believed it would prove more helpful to bear in mind the United Negro College Fund motto, "Not a handout, but a hand." Speaking as an African American to other African Americans, Missick has said that African Americans needed to start helping themselves and that there were things they can do for themselves that they did not have to have others to do for them. In fact, there was a measure of dignity in working for themselves and helping themselves.

In any event, Missick asserted that whites needed to realize that whites were privileged and that, if whites had found water in the desert, it was, as Hegazy may have suggested, their obligation, as children of God or Allah, to help their brothers and sisters who had not found water. He noted that the only thing worse than murder, as others have said, was for someone who was stranded in the desert to discover water and to keep it without telling anyone else about it. A different way of viewing it was to realize that it was:

> not about elevating ourselves. "I'm here, and I'm going to keep you down," as Raspberry talked about, but that "I want to get you up to where I am so that we can live together."[56]

In a related context, Levine subsequently referred to the earlier comments of Pogrebin and Missick, and agreed that:

> each of our communities is very slow to let go of our own sense of persecution, our own stereotypes about the other. . . . [But] we have to go beyond our own historic hurts, our desire to retreat into ourselves.[57]

The Jews suffered the Holocaust, said Levine, asking, "What could compare with that?" However, without putting the Holocaust aside, Levine suggested acknowledging:

> "Yes, that's our pain. What's your pain?" And to ask that question in a way which is not defensive and which is not competitive. To say, "there's plenty of hurt to go around, but I need to know you."[58]

Rhonda Taylor of the New York City Commission on Human Rights staff asked Pogrebin, if forgiveness was not a part of the Jewish system of belief, what was the sense in people attending the Advisory Committee's public meeting? Taylor herself assumed that, "The basis for our coming together is not only to get an understanding but to be able to forgive. If we can't forgive, what sense does it make?"

Pogrebin replied that trying to summarize 9 years of dialogue in 5 minutes forced one to speak in shorthand, and much had to be omitted. At any rate, Judaism contained a "very strong ethic of forgiveness, and we deal with it . . . in many contexts, and on Yom Kippur,

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55 William Raspberry, "An Interest in Failure," *Washington Post*, Nov. 5, 1993, p. A–27. Raspberry has explained that this edition of the *Washington Post* carried his column appearing in the *New York Daily News* on Nov. 9, 1993. Raspberry, telephone facsimile message to Tino Calabia, Mar. 30, 1994.

56 Missick Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 79 and pp. 94–95.

57 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 103.

58 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 104.

the Day of Atonement." However, what Bishop Tutu asked was simply not possible. "In terms of the Holocaust, you never can reach a point of utter forgiveness, or in our opinion, it will happen again. Our axiom is: 'Never again,' not 'Forgive and forget.'" She said that this conviction was "felt in the heart of every Jew," and that it was also what prompted the Jewish response to the crisis in Bosnia, "because we see too much of what we recognize." She pointed out also that:

> There is a piece of us that will never forgive the Nazis. A piece of us that will never forgive people who beheaded babies in Bosnia, a piece of us that simply can't reach the point where we say "Forgive, forget, and start again." We are ready to move on, but we won't achieve something that I consider a form of forgiveness that is tenable for me as a Jew.[59]

Taylor said, "I was asking about Jesse Jackson. I'm here defending him. He hasn't beheaded anyone."

Pogrebin responded that Jackson deserved forgiveness from Jews because he apologized for his "Hymie Town" remark and, in her view, had shown a growing sensitivity to Jewish experience. She was impressed when he represented the interests of Soviet Jews during his meeting with former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachov, when he marched with Jews against the neo-Nazis in Skokie, Illinois, and when he spoke at the 50th year anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night of terror targetting German Jews.

Apropos of Pogrebin's praise of steps Jackson had recently taken, it might be noted that less than 3 weeks after the Advisory Committee's meeting, a speech at Kean College by a Nation of Islam spokesperson unleashed a national controversy heightening black-Jewish tensions. As the controversy unfolded, a January 1994 *New York Times* article reported that Jackson condemned the speech, describing it as:

> racist, anti-Semitic, divisive, untrue, and chilling . . . , [and] called on political, educational, and religious leaders to respond to the remarks and to use the occasion to bring blacks and Jews closer together. . . . Abraham H. Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said yesterday, "I welcome Rev. Jackson's strong, unequivocal denunciation of the anti-Semitism and his repudiation of the context and the messenger."[60]

During the Advisory Committee's meeting, Levine added that Taylor's question about forgiveness opened a complex theological issue that he had never attempted to answer in one sentence. But he explained that:

> There is a distinction in our faith of forgiveness. There is a cause-and-effect virtue in the Christian community and a sincere act of religious faith. So it is in Judaism. Judaism, though, says [that] if there has been a hurt done person-to-person, before forgiveness can be given, the person has to do acts of repentance, has to come forth and say "I am sincerely sorry." They can't just say it. They have to mean it and back it up with concrete actions.[61]

Pogrebin was right in the matter, observed Levine, particularly in the case of Reverend Jesse Jackson. Levine said that with regard to Jackson:

> there has been a transformation and a sincerity that the Jewish community has been slow to recognize. And his appearance at the New York Board of Rabbis was symbolic of that harmony which is a model of what I think all of us need to do.[62]

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59 Pogrebin Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 107–08.

60 Alan Finder, "Muslim Gave Racist Speech, Jackson Says; Demands a Response to Farrakhan's Aide," *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1994, p. 21.

61 Levine Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 109.

62 Ibid.

In the context of the aforementioned Kean College speech, a late January 1994 *New York Daily News* editorial also complimented Jackson, saying that "Jackson spoke with great moral force on an issue that can't be negotiated, talked out, or smoothed over. He stood up in public to fight racism and anti-Semitism. Who will stand with him?" In partial response to its own question, the editorial named State Sen. David Paterson of Harlem and U.S. Rep. Major Owens of Brownsville in Central Brooklyn as among those who spoke out as Jackson had done.[63]

Response Requested from Nation of Islam

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights generally permits individuals or organizations that had been discussed during a public meeting to comment on the draft summary of the discussion. An early draft of this report was sent to Minister Farrakhan at the Chicago office of the Nation of Islam on March 24, 1994, and a reminder was sent on April 13, 1994 along with expanded sections of the draft. As of July 1, 1994, no response has ever been received from the Nation of Islam.

63 "Jesse Jackson Is the Solution," *New York Daily News,* Jan. 28, 1994, editorial page.

Part IV. Panel Two

Crown Heights History Project

Mindy Duitz, Brooklyn Children's Museum Director

Mindy Duitz, the director of The Brooklyn Children's Museum, explained that she was representing three institutions and other colleagues involved in the Crown Heights History Project, formerly called Bridging Eastern Parkway. The institutions were the Brooklyn Historical Society, which is located in downtown Brooklyn, the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, and The Brooklyn Children's Museum located in the heart of Crown Heights.

Founded in 1899, the Children's Museum was the oldest children's museum in the world, said Duitz, noting that it has been on the corner of St. Marks and Brooklyn Avenues for almost 95 years. The Preservation Society was a newer project in the same neighborhood. Duitz observed that having museums represented in events such as the Advisory Committee's meeting was unique.

While some might have wondered how museums had any bearing on the problems under examination by the Committee, she stressed that "it's extremely important to recognize the value and the important role cultural institutions play in helping to address issues of cultural concern, supporting the infrastructure of our educational system, as well as being entertaining." She believed it was also useful for people to consider how these cultural institutions "can help us look at ourselves and at other people."[1]

Ever since the outbreak of violence in Crown Heights in the summer of 1991, Duitz has been asked, "What are you doing about Crown Heights?" She now could reply that the Crown Heights History Project was one of her museum's responses. "However, I'd like to back up and say that we have always been working on these issues. We couldn't just wake up the day after a crisis in our community and be able to respond in any intelligent way."

She emphasized that the mission of the three institutions engaged in the history project has always been to help people understand themselves, others, and the world around them through exhibitions and programs. At the heart of the institutions was their commitment to offering socially responsive programs and activities and not to be "just academics in a remote, removed situation . . . ." She added that:

> Often during a crisis, the mentality is to quickly solve a problem. However, there are no quick solutions to deep problems. The Crown Heights History Project will help kids to understand what's happening, who the other person in the neighborhood is. It will be an ongoing process. At the Children's Museum, we have always looked at the issue of conflict resolution and are hoping to address it specifically through this project.[2]

Crown Heights has been a neighborhood that was in certain ways isolated, continued Duitz. There have been local children who visited the museum who have never left Crown Heights. Thus, the most important things the museum has provided were information and an exposure to the world and a

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1 Mindy Duitz, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 114–15 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

2 Duitz Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 115.

chance for young people to find out about themselves as well as other people. She related one example of isolation that children experienced after the July 1991 crisis.

In the fall, a season of many Jewish holidays, a young African American girl came to the museum distraught. She said that the families on Eastern Parkway, where the Lubavitch community was located, had been boarding up their homes because they were too afraid to come out. In fact, however, the festival of Sukkot was being celebrated, and the Lubavitch families were only putting up temporary festival shelters for the holiday, not boarding up their front doors. This little girl who apparently knew nothing about a group of her neighbors had misinterpreted the structures as barricades.

Duitz said there were many other examples from each group, and their visits to the museum help them to understand what is transpiring throughout their neighborhood. The crisis sparked by the Crown Heights unrest indicated that more specificity was needed in many of the programs that the three institutions were working on. As further background and responding to a request by Gelb, the president of the *New York Times* Company Foundation, Duitz explained how the history project began.

Executive director David Kahn of the Brooklyn Historical Society, executive director Joan Maynard of the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, and Duitz had, for years, been talking about starting a project on the history and cultures of Crown Heights. Then, while Kahn was visiting Gelb requesting funds for a different project, Gelb exclaimed, "Never mind that! What about Crown Heights?" Kahn replied by describing the history project in which the three institutions had been interested.

Gelb subsequently established a committee of leaders of various foundations and organizations that was named the New York Tolerance Committee. That committee was set up to look at the issue of conflict, particularly in Crown Heights, and it was through Gelb's committee that the project became funded. Duitz considered it "very creative of these donors to fund a cultural initiative rather than a social one." Now called "The Crown Heights History Project," it was to be about perceptions and misconceptions, but it has been difficult getting people to talk about themselves and how they felt about others.

Duitz also said that it has even been difficult for those implementing the project due to the nature of the subject. At the same time, said Duitz, those involved have been realistic in knowing that they were not "going to solve the world's problems with this project."

> Each of us has been very sensitive about our own group or our institution, about how we are being represented, and if we truly understand the problems. This has been really hard work for each organization and personally for each of us. . . . As a white Jewish woman, I now know how much I don't understand about racism, and I have had to look into myself and lead my institution to look at itself. We have instituted bias training and have struggled hard to address issues related to identity and conflict. I think we are really good at what we do, and I think we are just beginning a painful and very wonderful process. The most important thing that I've learned is never to make assumptions about anyone else's assumptions.[3]

She closed by noting that the project offered an example of a new role that museums can play. Museums have traditionally been gathering places where people were able to see themselves; at the same time, museums have changed people's lives, believed Duitz.

> Hopefully many of you have been in a museum and remember something you saw, something you experienced that lives with you forever, because it was so real, so beautiful, or so clarifying. Museums like ours particularly provide people with those enlightening personal experiences. . . . I've been the director of the Children's Museum in Brooklyn for

3 Duitz Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 118–20.

10 years, and working in Crown Heights for those 10 years has been the single most profound experience of my professional life.[4]

Jill Vexler, Ph.D., Crown Heights History Project Codirector

Jill Vexler, a cultural anthropologist with the Brooklyn Historical Society and codirector of the Crown Heights History Project, said that when she was first introduced to the project under its original name, "Bridging Eastern Parkway," she had no particular reaction to the name. In her field work with the Lubavitch Hasidic community, when she introduced the project to several Lubavitchers in Crown Heights, the immediate response from many was: "Bridge? Why bridge? Bridge where? Eastern Parkway? What bridge over Eastern Parkway? I don't get it. We don't want a 'bridge' to any other place or people."

To such individuals, the title implied meeting in order to mix, or the mixing of Lubavitchers with non-Jews, said Vexler. Her partner and project codirector, Craig Wilder, an urban historian, had similar experiences among some African American and Caribbean residents of Crown Heights. "It didn't put a nice flavor in people's mouths as an introduction to what we really wanted to achieve." Listening to people in the community, Wilder and she "realized that our best foot was not being put forward, and we would not be able to gain the confidence and credibility with the people to whom we needed to speak, but most of all to whom we needed to listen."

Consequently, Wilder and she began "to rethink the title, and we came up with a nice neutral term, the Crown Heights History Project, which is really much more accurate anyway." Moreover, the three different cooperating institutions would use separate titles for their individual subsidiary projects: "Crown Heights: the Inside Scoop," at the Brooklyn Children's Museum; "Crown Heights: Perceptions and Realities" at the Brooklyn Historical Society; and "Crown Heights: the African Diaspora" at the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History. Vexler emphasized that:

> What's important about it and what is absolutely a first in my museum career is that the museums really listened to the community. The traditional role of the museum as a scholarly institution has [led it to act] as the authority on whatever topic is being presented. In contrast, this project relied upon the community to educate us about their cultures and experiences.[5]

Elaborating on where Duitz left off about the museum's role in the community, Vexler said that museums have presented people but most often in a historical, ethnographic, or archaeological context. Therefore, Wilder and she tried to convince their interviewees that the museums involved in this project cared about and, therefore, focused these exhibitions on the people living today in Crown Heights, a neighborhood of many different cultural communities. For a cultural anthropologist such as herself, gathering information for the project by taking oral histories became:

> one of those dream projects in which one person leads you to another and another. The collective experience of meeting and interviewing people, attending community events, and learning from the communities' own scholars, adds up to getting a good feel for the cultures.[6]

As Vexler went among the Lubavitch Hasidic residents in Crown Heights, her motive was not only to learn about their experi-

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4 Ibid.

5 Jill Vexler, Ph.D., testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 121 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

6 Vexler Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 122.

ences—what Wilder and she called "their journeys to live there"—but also to gain their trust:

> so that they would know that their lives, their experiences, and in many cases, the objects which represent those experiences, would be absolutely, profoundly respected within these three institutions and by us [who are] in a sense, ghostwriters or voices dedicated to the accuracy and authenticity of presentations about their lives.[7]

Speaking as a cultural anthropologist, Vexler stated that it has been an "enormously humbling" experience to walk into homes, the doors of which were frequently and generously opened to her, where she learned about peoples' lives, joined in their family celebrations and in their family sadnesses. She came to realize that, although she grew up with basic Judaism and many Jewish customs, she knew virtually nothing about the culture and little about the belief system of Hasidic Jews. Yet, "it was all there to be learned just for the asking and just for the listening."

Through such transformational processes, which engaged data with museum design technique and interactive methodologies, the Brooklyn Children's Museum exhibition would present a description of the neighborhood's peoples. A more narrative and visual style would be employed at the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Society for the Preservation of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Weeksville. The museum staffs were being given "crash courses in what [Wilder] and I are learning about demography, religion, and sociology, as the museums transform these topics into settings in which people can learn about each other."

Vexler agreed with Duitz that no instant solutions were going to emerge. However, a setting would be created "in which questions which might not be voiced out on the street can be voiced and answered through these three exhibitions and their educational and public programs."

Craig Wilder, Crown Heights History Project Codirector

Craig Wilder, a historian at Long Island University and also a project codirector, explained that the project offered an opportunity:

> to all of a sudden make history applicable to us, to actually do something rather than to just let it live and die inside the classroom. . . . [W]e've learned that what we do professionally actually has some life outside of our institutions and can be something quite real. What makes it real are the people who pass through the museums who are often forgotten when making institutional decisions. Their lives are socially important. Their memories have value, and this is the message that we brought to the community, and we were forced to bring to it.
>
> Don't allow me to sound smart. We didn't bring it from the beginning. We went out with the concept that we could actually help people with all this information we had in our heads. I certainly believed that no one could tell me anything else about Central Brooklyn that I haven't already known. But as we entered into the community and talked to people, we learned that the way they described themselves is quite different from the way they've been described. . . . And so the museum, all of a sudden, turned into a place where the people had a chance to talk to each other and to us.
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> That's been a valuable experience for all of us that forced us to abandon the arrogant belief that we could actually help Crown Heights. [Instead, it forced us] to open ourselves to the revelation that Crown Heights can help us and help the universities and also the institutions that we share.[8]

As Duitz and Vexler had suggested, Wilder stressed the importance of treating each community, the people within them, their

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7 Vexler Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 122–23.

8 Craig Wilder, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 124–26 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

cultures, and "the things they have presented to us with respect. And that's a difficult message to get across." He said that the experiences of the people in the communities contradicted the message that the museum workers or others tried to communicate about treating their cultures with respect.

> The popular image of a community where something goes wrong or where a problem occurs is that the people must have done it. That they are somehow responsible for it. And so, if you look at media portraits of Crown Heights, the real image you get is the presence of black people with French accents or English accents or [of] Hasidic Jews.[9]

That shallow perception then allowed everyone else to conclude that the Crown Heights incidents could not happen anywhere else. Wilder stated that this was untrue but stemmed from "an outrageous assumption that we jump to in our own defense." For this reason, he and his colleagues have attempted to celebrate the diversity of Crown Heights "rather than to curse it and accuse it of causing riots . . . or tension."

Thus, a goal of the project has been to avoid "racial reductionism or religious reductionism" where the reasoning had been that something was wrong with the community because there has been a problem, said Wilder. Instead, those involved in the project have been asking Crown Heights residents, "what concerned them? How did they view their neighbors? How did they view themselves? Where those views crossed or came into conflict, what was involved in the conflict?"

Wilder agreed with Duitz that the issues were real and that they were not going to disappear just by having museum exhibits. The issues were much more substantive, requiring museums to be more than just "a place where artifacts are tied to walls very nicely with stories next to them, but rather a place of living and breathing, where real human beings come in and talk about themselves." Wilder called for a research process that allowed the community to control the project and to decide how the product would appear after the research was completed.

With the exhibits scheduled to open on April 13, 1994, Wilder said he expected that one interesting aspect would be that most of the decisions made about the exhibits were not really decisions made by the project staff "because we have been forced to make certain decisions by what people have told us." As Vexler indicated, visiting the people in their homes, sharing their holidays and their sadnesses, rendered them "three-dimensional," and that was what they should have been in museums, said Wilder.

Hasidic-Latino Efforts in Williamsburg

Rabbi David Niederman, United Jewish Organizations Executive Director

Rabbi David Niederman, the executive director of the United Jewish Organizations (UJO) of Williamsburg, noted that UJO represented over 125 schools, synagogues, and charitable and civic organizations in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. Williamsburg was home to about 50,000 Jews, most of whom settled there after the Holocaust. However, the Jewish community actually began to arrive in the early 1900s. Niederman said that he also founded a refugee organization 22 years ago that has become an international agency operating in many countries helping to rescue and resettle oppressed Jews and other refugees.

While everyone seemed to talk about Crown Heights, which became famous after the crisis there, Williamsburg, too, has had problems, although without a similar crisis. There have been tensions, Niederman admitted, but no crisis of the sort that broke out in Crown Heights where a person was killed.

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9 Wilder Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 126–27.

Nonetheless, such things are possible there for, although New York City includes a large Jewish community, that community is not well understood by many people.

An example of misunderstanding happened to him earlier during the meeting. "A very nice lady wanted to shake my hand, and I had to say, 'I'm sorry.'" Orthodox Jews are not permitted to shake hands with a woman, explained Niderman, but that did not diminish recognizing her gesture of hospitality and graciousness. In like manner, if an Orthodox or Hasidic Jew lived next door to someone who was not Hasidic, but African American or Latino, as could be the case in Williamsburg, and if there were no social interaction between the Hasidic children and the other children, "The first thing one would say, most probably, is, 'He doesn't care about me.'" On the other hand:

> . . . if you come into Williamsburg and see that we have a school system of 10,000 children and that these children, our own children, are segregated in school, and you have boys and girls separate. So then you see that, and you say, "Oh, I'm sorry. So it's not something of disrespect or that you don't like me." But simply this is the tradition and culture; there's a separation of the sexes and, therefore, the social activities that might exist in other communities, does not exist here.[10]

He indicated that many such misunderstandings were possibly the roots or the seeds of tensions and hysteria. A different problem, the main problem, had to do with the growth of the local Jewish community. After World War II, people "started to rise from the ashes and started life anew again," said Niederman. Very few came to Williamsburg, but those who did were part of big families. It has been very common to find families in Williamsburg with 8 and 10 children. Such families require large living quarters, and so this created another problem.

The need for housing has been complicated by religious and cultural demands; Hasidim had to live near their synagogue, their special school, even a kosher shop. They have been unable to relocate to different neighborhoods, since the religious infrastructure was missing. This again has added to the competition for existing housing because the Latino community was also growing in Williamsburg.

Niederman pointed out that the Hasidim and Latinos share strong religious values. Family values were also important; like the Hasidim, Latinos preferred to live in the communities where they had been raised, and they wanted to live near their parents. But Williamsburg offered limited housing. Though it still contained some available land, the Hasidim and Latinos were very poor. Looking to the city government for housing assistance, the Hasidim were told that the city had almost no resources, and, if those resources became available to the Hasidic community, the Latinos would be upset. Niederman stated that the Latinos were told the same thing, that, if those resources became available to the Latinos, the Hasidim would be upset.

The many special needs of Hasidic families placed additional demands on their disposable income. Raising a family of two or three persons was difficult enough, but raising a Hasidic family of 12, even more so, especially considering the need to meet their unique educational requirements and the added cost of kosher foods. Yet a Hasidic family customarily had only one bread winner because a parent had to remain at home to care for so many children.

Another issue related to security. Niederman expressed gratitude for the religious values in the Hasidic community that were accompanied by a sense of discipline. He said that a group of visiting Swedes came to one of the large school buildings serving 2,500 Hasidic students, and when the Swedes found no

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10 David Niederman, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, p. 132 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

metal detectors and no graffiti in the school, they could not believe it. They asked if the building was occupied. Niederman replied that it might be "over-occupied," perhaps holding more students than were permitted by the fire code. And yet there was discipline, a respect for one's elders.

Such discipline and respect also meant that crimes of domestic violence were nonexistent. This had its drawbacks because the police would point to statistics and show that there was a very low crime rate. The police would then conclude that little police protection was needed. When the Hasidim would argue that protection was needed against burglaries and muggings, the police would dismiss their reasoning by explaining that such crimes were not life-threatening, and that the police first needed to address life-threatening problems.

Another positive in their community that negatively affected security was the existence of a volunteer ambulance service. The relatively slow response time of the municipal ambulance service—estimated by Niederman at 13 or 14 minutes—led to the Jewish community's starting its own service. Its response time was about 2½ minutes, since Jewish volunteers were located throughout the community. However, this, too, lessened police presence because a police car was routinely dispatched whenever a municipal ambulance was summoned, but the community relied on its volunteer ambulance service.

Nevertheless, said Niederman, whenever there was a special call for police in the Hasidic community and the police cooperated, the perception of the general public has been that preferential treatment was being shown to the Hasidim. For their part, some Hasidim questioned why they lacked city services, especially since their community was not a drain on the public schools and other city services. Niederman emphasized that the Hasidic community was a tax-paying community and, therefore, the city should provide housing.

As for ethnic incidents among the Hasidim, Niederman admitted that there were problems, for "We all have bad apples." He offered no specifics, but less than a year earlier, a December 1992 *Washington Post* article noted that "groups of Orthodox Jews in the Crown Heights and Williamsburg sections of Brooklyn twice this month have beaten and subdued black men they said were committing crimes."[11]

Niederman pointed out that when the public looked at television or the newspaper, they saw conflicts involving people of different ethnic groups. He reasoned that it was wrong to see one member of an ethnic group cast in the media as being involved in an incident and then conclude that the entire ethnic group was violent. It was wrong whether the individual shown by the media was Hasidic, Latino, black, or Asian. The individual should be punished if a crime was committed, but Niederman decried the sensational journalism that portrayed an entire community as, therefore, violent or criminal.

Observing that an associate of the *New York Times* had been saluted earlier in the meeting for his work on fostering unity, Niederman proposed that there be a daily column in the *New York Times* to recognize people who foster unity. He recalled the slogan "All the News That's Fit to Print," and suggested that the *Times* "find some news that's fit to print to highlight those ventures that work for unity." Acknowledging a leader of Williamsburg's Hispanic community who was sitting beside him and with whom he had been cooperating to reduce tensions, Niederman asked, "When was this type of work recognized?" Since such work was being performed every day in every community, "Why shouldn't there be a column in the *New York Times* every day to report on that?"

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11 "N.Y. Black, Jewish Tension Not Seen as Indicative of Groups' Relations; Experts Say Dealings Historically Have Been Strained But Amicable," p. A–6.

Luis Garden-Acosta, El Puente Executive Director

In contrast to Niederman's point, a February 1992 *New York Times* article that characterized bias crimes in New York City as "nothing new" had reported that, as a Brooklyn teenager, Luis Garden-Acosta, the executive director of El Puente who spoke after Niderman, had been harassed and physically assaulted by black youths. Moreover, he had once been harassed by Latino youths, who had mistakenly perceived Garden-Acosta as Asian.[12]

During the Advisory Committee's public meeting, Garden-Acosta noted first that El Puente's bridge-building effort in Williamsburg had expanded to efforts in Crown Heights and Bushwick in Brooklyn, Soundview in the Bronx, and even Chelsea in Massachusetts. He described it "as part of a national effort to develop holistic empowerment centers for young people, their parents, and community." The founding center remained in Williamsburg where it had been born "out a very violent situation in 1981" that he was to allude to later.

Garden-Acosta explained that Williamsburg was predominantly Latino and contained the largest concentration of Latinos in Brooklyn, the New York City borough with the most Latinos. The Hasidim, Polish Americans, Italian Americans, and African Americans also lived in Williamsburg. The south side of Williamsburg, where Latinos predominated, was wedged in between the Polish community and the Hasidic community, and contained about 50,000 Latinos. Garden-Acosta noted that half were Dominicans, and among them were many undocumented Dominicans who probably had not been counted during the 1990 decennial census.

In the south side during 1981, almost one adolescent every week was lost to violence, 48 having been killed over that year. "So we were fed up in 1981 and decided that we had to move as a collective and build bridges in Williamsburg to make it safe for everyone." But there were difficult problems in Williamsburg related to housing and public schooling, in addition to criminal justice and the juvenile justice system.

With regard to criminal justice, Garden-Acosta pointed out that there had been many media reports about certain charges by a police officer of the 90th police precinct. According to Garden-Acosta, the officer had disclosed "that he had been commanded by his superiors to discriminate against the Latino community and to always prefer the Hasidic community. . . . He made [the disclosure] over and over again. He's still at the 90th precinct."

Garden-Acosta said that Williamsburg had the second largest Latino school district in New York City, with 25 schools serving approximately 19,000 students, 73 percent of whom were students of color. He characterized it as "the most colonized school district in the city," one without a Latino school superintendent or a Latino assistant superintendent. He further charged that it had "the worst affirmative action record" in the city, attributing this to the fact that the nine-member district school board "is controlled by people who do not represent, in any way or form, the 73 percent of the school population."

Three board members were from the Hasidic community, and they did not have children in the public school system. Three other members were from the Greenpoint community, which, at best, represented only 7 percent of the school population, stated Garden-Acosta. He added that:

> when we look at a lot of decisions that are made on that school board, it winds up being 6 to 3, 5 to 4. . . . And who on this school board is speaking for the Latino, the African American, and some Asian young people? Basically three people, at best.[13]

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12 David Gonzalez, "Hate Blasts From the Past: Bias Crimes in New York City Are Nothing New," *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1992, p. 25.

Although problems with the public education system caused some tension, "the war,"—as Garden-Acosta described it—was triggered by tensions related to housing. He explained that 30 years ago, what was commonly referred to as the Hasidic side of Williamsburg was inaccurately described, since Latinos and African Americans also lived there. "From all of the studies, one could say that on any given block about 50 percent is Hasidic at most, and 50 percent other, mostly Latino. In some cases, it was 70 percent Latino and 30 percent Hasidic."

Garden-Acosta acknowledged that depending on the time period and particular areas involved, there was always controversy. But, even if the mix had been 50-50, after five public housing developments were opened, the population "radically changed to a situation where 60 to 70 percent of the tenants became Hasidic and only 30 to 40 percent at best was Latino or other than Hasidic," he estimated. "The history of what is seen as unequal access to housing [caused] the major tension that exists in our community."

Nevertheless, Garden-Acosta emphasized that he supported what Niederman had stated, that it was not:

> an issue of the Hasidic community or the Latino community. . . . [I]t was an issue of certain politicians who wanted to retain power in the city of New York, no matter what the change in demographics, and to use the very real need the Hasidic community has for housing, and moved that tension in that manner to reinforce their own political base, discriminating against the majority, the Latino community.
>
> I think that they would have done that, if it wasn't the Hasidic community, if it was another group . . . so that they could in a sense ensure their political vote. It doesn't necessarily have to be the Hasidic community. But I do believe, and I think the record will bear out that politicians—wanting to retain those districts, wanting to be able to continue to represent that community regardless of the majority Latino presence then developing—created a situation that would insure their political power. So they thought at the time. And so in many ways there are people who have their own particular interests to keep us apart.[14]

Garden-Acosta asserted that among the greatest defenders of the status quo were those companies and corporations:

> that think that because we are always at each other's throats over the housing issue, the criminal justice issue, or the education issue, that we won't notice all of the toxic wastes that are dumped in our community.
>
> The Williamsburg community is the most toxic neighborhood in New York City. It houses the city's only nuclear waste and chemical waste storage plant, [a] supposedly temporary storage plant . . . . It has 43 transfer stations for sanitation. It is a crisscross of highways and bridges really connecting Manhattan with Queens and everybody else. Our community is used as a thoroughfare. . . .[15]

He pointed out that the highest incidence or the highest amount of lead in the ground was found in Williamsburg, a ratio of some 42,500 parts of lead per million in the ground. According to him, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated that anywhere from 500 to 1,000 parts per million constitute an environmental lead crisis. The local level warranted a grant to excavate parts of Williamsburg to remove the lead. In addition to the lead crisis, Williamsburg:

> could look forward to a 50-story incinerator being built there, something [that] would be the Empire State Building in our community. The tallest build-

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13 Luis Garden-Acosta, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 147 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

14 Garden-Acosta Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 147–48.

15 Garden-Acosta Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 148–49.

ing, a monument to garbage dumped on our community because certain politicians believe that this would be possible because we are at each other's throats for resources in housing, on the issue of education, and criminal justice . . . because somehow we could not come up with some principles of unity, they can move us in any way, shape, or form.[16]

Garden-Acosta believed that his participation in the Advisory Committee's meeting with Niederman sent a different message. He had opened by saying that Niederman:

. . . is a very modest, very humble, very holy man. He reaches out in ways that we have not seen in the Latino community for a long, long time. . . . He's going to try to make it happen with all of his might to move sometimes even the critics in his own community to do the right thing. And I have nothing but praise for him . . . a man of enormous courage.[17]

He concluded by declaring that:

We have found common ground in literally the ground itself, in our environment. And I think our presence here—the United Jewish Organization and El Puente—is a beginning. It's the beginning of practice around the kind of issues that the environment does not prefer one over the other.[18]

Responses from Schools, Police, and Sanitation

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights generally permits individuals or agencies that had been discussed during a public meeting to comment on the draft summary of the discussion. The comments received from municipal officials responsible for schooling, law enforcement, and sanitation appear in summary form below.

Community School Board 14 President Joseph Stefanizzi

In a March 1994 letter, community school board 14 president Joseph Stefanizzi pointed out that the present school district superintendent:

has either lived or worked in Community School District 14 for his whole life [and when he] was first selected in December 1991 and at the time of his renewal this past November, he had the support of all the PTAs, and over six hundred (600) parents appeared at the Community School Board meeting to support his candidacy.[19]

Stefannizi explained that candidates for superintendent "undergo a very rigorous prescribed routine which includes interviews, data review, reference checks, and parent approval." He also noted that:

although three board members are from the Hasidic community, they have always been supportive of all the children of District 14. It is an error to state that Hasidic children do not attend the public schools; Hasidic children do attend public school in District 14. . . .

The statement that "three other members were from the Greenpoint community, which, at best, represented only 7 percent . . . " is erroneous. In reality, more than 20 percent of the students are represented by these board members who have always acted in the interest of all the children. District 14 is truly a multicultural district where every group is represented.[20]

Steffanizzi, however, offered no statistics on the racial/ethnic composition of the chief education administrators, other staff, or the school board itself.

16 Garden-Acosta Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 149.

17 Garden-Acosta Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 143–44.

18 Garden-Acosta Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 150.

19 Community school board 14 president Joseph Stefanizzi, letter to Tino Calabia, Mar. 17, 1994, p. 1.

20 Ibid.

Among other points made by Steffanizzi were those indicating that district 14's elementary schools scored the highest in an evaluation of all the city's community school districts, and that the middle schools of only two other community school districts scored higher than community school district 14's middle schools.

NYC Police Department Assistant Commissioner Violet Hawkins

In a March 1994 letter, New York Police Department Assistant Commissioner Violet Hawkins wrote that a panelist's:

contention that the Police Department concluded that little police protection was required in the Hasidic community is an oversimplification of Department policy. Uniformed personnel are assigned to patrol precincts according to the Department's Patrol Allocation Plan [which] evaluates several factors to arrive at an equitable distribution of patrol personnel. In addition to calls for service or radio runs, the plan takes into consideration unique operational needs of a community, the rate of violent and nonviolent index crimes (e.g., burglaries), and the judgment of the patrol borough commander.

Additionally, the Department has actually increased the number of uniformed officers assigned to patrol duties in the 90th Precinct by 17.4 percent (236 vs 201) since August 1990. Current projections under the Safe Street, Safe City Program, which is the Department's blueprint for staffing and implementation of a community policing model, calls for the assignment of an additional 28 uniformed officers by September 1994. This figure would represent a 31 percent increase over the precinct staffing levels of August 1990.[21]

Regarding media accounts reportedly mentioning a 90th police precinct officer who had allegedly been commanded by his superiors to discriminate against the Latino community in favor of the Hasidic community, Hawkins stated that such a:

characterization of the Department . . . does not reflect Department values or policy. . . . [O]f course, we make judgments about services to be rendered, but these are not based on race or ethnicity. The Department continually strives to guarantee equal treatment for all through its values and policies. Orders, directions, or insinuations by a supervisor, which would result in a subordinate engaging in preferential treatment of any particular group, would be considered an abandonment of the most basic Department values. . . .[22]

NYC Department of Sanitation Assistant Commissioner Andrew S. Lynn

In an April 1994 letter, New York City Department of Sanitation Assistant Commissioner Andrew S. Lynn stated that the department had long sought to construct a waste-to-energy incinerator at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in Williamsburg. He noted that the project had been the subject of protracted permit hearings, an environmental impact statement, and a health risk assessment. The proposed incinerator site was a parcel of land over 200 acres large, zoned for manufacturing and industrial uses, and set aside to foster local economic development.[23]

Lynn closed by writing that:

The statement of . . . Garden-Acosta is misleading in two respects. First, he exaggerates the height of the proposed incinerator. Second, and more importantly, he suggests that the incinerator site was chosen because of dissension in the community.

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21 Violet Hawkins, assistant commissioner for criminal justice matters, New York Police Department, letter to Tino Calabia, Mar. 17, 1994.

22 Ibid.

23 Andrew S. Lynne, assistant commissioner, New York City Department of Sanitation, letter to Tino Calabia, Apr. 4, 1994.

This is not the case. The Navy Yard was chosen for the site of the incinerator, because it is a good location for an incinerator. The Navy Yard is accessible by barge and thus would allow the Department to avoid sending collection trucks through the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, the Navy Yard is the only large vacant industrial site that would allow for immediate delivery of the steam generated by the incinerator into the Con Edison steam grid.[24]

24 Ibid.

Part V. Youth Panel

Project CURE

David Lazerson, Project CURE Cofounder

After being introduced, David Lazerson, holder of a doctorate in urban and special education and cofounder of Project CURE, explained that Project CURE (Communication, Understanding, Respect, and Education) was started in the summer of 1991, a little over a week after the conflict in Crown Heights.[1] The group initially had no formal name, no logo, and no agenda. And yet many were surprised that common ground was found quickly and easily. For the musical component of the group, Lazerson has since become known as Dr. Laz, and the group itself has become "Dr. Laz and the CURE."

As seemed to be the case in Williamsburg, there were "certain people, elements, forces . . . that tend to manipulate things in the media to keep us apart. And I think those forces really came to play out in the Crown Heights community, where you have blacks and Jews," said Lazerson. In a full page December 1992 *New York Times* article, "Blacks and Jews on the Relationship: What's Special, What's Myth?" Lazerson related how on another occasion as a panelist, he had agreed with Amiri Baraka, then a fellow panelist, who suggested that there were forces that had:

> a divide and conquer mentality. Like, "Let's keep these two very powerful minority groups apart. Because, you know, if they get their act together and sort of unify in ways that we have in certainly earlier times . . ." So, if we got our act together in that sense, we could perhaps make some serious changes that some people don't want us to make.[2]

During the meeting, Lazerson expressed regrets that "many people buy into that manipulation that I feel is being perpetrated on us and on our community." It was the little things that divided people, and yet those same little things became "big issues out in the media world." However, he, his partner and cofounder of Project CURE, Rev. Paul Chandler of the Jackie Robinson Center, and Richard Green, the director of the Crown Heights Youth Collective, realized from the beginning that they had far more that united than divided them.

They first decided simply to bring together the various young people associated with their three separate organizations and observe what happened. If anything, the adults would act as guides to the process but not "call the shots." Lazerson said that Chandler often referred to him as Chandler's rabbi, and that he often referred to Chandler as his reverend. They both learned from each other and from the youths, such as T.J. Moses and Yudi Simon who had accompanied Lazerson and Chandler to the Advisory Committee's meeting.

According to Lazerson, the youths themselves appeared to have wanted to communicate with each other, but up to that point had not had the opportunity. Chandler and he then observed that, given the opportunity, the solutions to many of the problems were not as difficult as had been thought. By communicating with each other and experiencing face-to-

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1 For further background, see, e.g., Charles Young, "Dissin' Racists With Rap; After Crown Heights Riots, Music With a Jewish-Black Mix and a Real Fresh Fix," *Boston Globe,* Apr. 12, 1993, p. 3.

2 "Blacks and Jews on the Relationship: What's Special, What's Myth?" *New York Times,* Dec. 20, 1992, p. 40.

face dialogues, the youths began to overcome stereotypes that they had held about each other.

For example, the Hasidic teenagers met African American and Caribbean teenagers who studied harder in their fields of interest than Hasidic youths in theirs. The black teenagers met Jewish teenagers who came from broken homes, who lived in rent-subsidized housing, or whose parents received food stamps. One by one, the stereotypes began to fall by the wayside. Moreover, what began as one dialogue every 3 or 4 weeks developed into three or four programs a month. At the time of the meeting, Project CURE youths were putting on 15 to 20 programs a month.

Lazerson said that the progress was less a tribute to the community leaders than it was a tribute to the youths. Like the adults, the youths were "sick of the rhetoric, sick of the hatred, sick of the violence, and sick of the myths that were being perpetrated against us and our community." Regarding the adult leadership, Lazerson mentioned that when Mayor Dinkins met with Dr. Laz and the CURE and others several days after the street disturbances began, the mayor said to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, Shlita, "Let us bring peace to both communities." Lazerson believed that the same sentiment was truly felt by many of those present. However, reported Lazerson:

> without blinking an eye, the Rebbe said, "Mr. Mayor, we are not two communities. We are one community, under one administration, under one God." . . . And people were like, "Did he really say that? Did he really mean that?"[3]

Lazerson said that some Hasidim and other listeners thought that the Rebbe meant to give a different message, but the Rebbe had meant exactly what he said.[4] And Lazerson thought that what the Rebbe said to the mayor on that day of crisis was almost CURE's motto, a belief it has been trying to put into practice. "It's the little things, the insignificant things that not just divide us, but, in my opinion, make Crown Heights an exciting place to live, make the planet earth an exciting place to live," observed Lazerson.

T.J. Moses

T.J. Moses, one of the Crown Heights teenagers, said that he had been with Project CURE for almost a year and a half. He had become involved with the group through Green's Crown Heights Youth Collective where he had been working on art murals during the summer of the 1992 disturbances. When Moses first met Yudi Simon, a Hasidic teenager, Simon told him that he was a member of a rap group. Moses remembered looking at Simon, thinking skeptically, "Like, yeah. Right. Whatever."

Then Simon told Moses that he did rap and break-dancing with a group that had performed publicly in several places, and Simon asked Moses if he wanted to audition for the group, Dr. Laz and the CURE. Though still skeptical, Moses agreed. "I don't have nothing to lose, so I gave him my number," said Moses. To his surprise, Simon called and said that Lazerson wanted to meet him. Moses remembered that the first time he met Lazerson was on the anniversary of Gavin Cato's death in 1991. He also auditioned 5 minutes after he

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3 David Lazerson, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, pp. 154–55 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript). Reported also by Judith Keeler, "Slice of Life; Dr. Laz and Project CURE," *World of Lubavitch,* April 1993, n.p.

4 For additional information on Rabbi Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, see two separate, full page advertisements, "Global Day of Goodness" and "The Time of Your Redemption Has Arrived," *New York Times,* Mar. 23, 1994, p. B–2 and p. B–7 respectively. See also Ari L. Goldman, "Rabbi M. Schneerson, for 44 Years, Leader of Lubavitch Hasidim," *New York Times,* June 13, 1994, p. B–2, and Laurie Goodstein, "Death of Lubavitcher Leader, Rabbi Schneerson, Stuns Followers," *Washington Post,* June 13, 1994, p. A–4.

met Lazerson, during one of the group's televised performances. Lazerson hired him, and he has been with the group since then.

Moses mentioned that the group had just returned from a performance in Houston, Texas. The work was fun, and his job was:

> to get not only the young but the older people as well to see that racism is not good.... [J]ust because of the color of a person's skin, or the way they act, or how they dress, we shouldn't judge them by the way they look or their appearances. We should judge them by how they are inside....
>
> But people fail to understand that. I asked this lady in the jewelry store to show me some earrings. Without a blink of an eye, she said, "It costs a lot of money," and that's what I consider racism.... She could have just said something else, because ... I took it seriously. She could have been joking or whatever, but I took it into heart. Because I felt like [she thought], "Oh, he's an inner-city teenager. He can't afford them." That's what I thought.... I told Laz what I thought about it. He said, "Don't worry about it. Our job is to try to stop nonsense like that...."[5]

Moses admitted that he "used to be a bad boy, . . . a knuckle head" before he joined Project CURE. He refused to obey his mother and would not listen to his preacher. He did not want to listen to anyone. "I thought I knew it all, and I used to run around with my so-called friends, causing trouble until I got into trouble. I don't cause trouble no more.... I experienced the bad side. Now I want to know what the good side is like."

He explained that now in Crown Heights people have approached the group, calling out:

> "Hi, T.J.! When's your next show?" . . . And, if I go by Kingston Avenue by myself, . . . they come up to me. "Hi, T.J.! Hi, T.J.!" .... Yeah, you know, it's not a matter of the way you look, or whatever, like that. It's your personality. You're a good person, and people will like you for who you are, not who you want them to think you are.[6]

Yudi Simon

Yudi Simon said he did not like public speaking but introduced himself as a youth leader and dancer with Dr. Laz and the CURE. Also a resident of Crown Heights, he explained that he had been:

> raised not to be racial by my parents. My father used to bring different people from different ethnic backgrounds over to the house for supper and things like that. . . . But after the riots in Crown Heights, I sort of had a different outlook because I saw a lot happening, and a lot of it hit home. And I was very, very disturbed.[7]

However, one night, a week after the riot, Simon encountered a friend who told him about Project CURE and encouraged him to "check it out." Simon could not immediately follow up with a visit because of school schedules. But when the chance finally arose, Simon went though he:

> was kind of nervous.... At that time, I was carrying a weapon wherever I went, and I was debating on bringing one with me, I figured, if the black kids saw me. So I took an orange juice to cool me down.[8]

Simon reported that the occasion turned out to be interesting. Though still nervous, he went with Lazerson to a basketball court where some of those there began to play music. Simon stated that:

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5 T.J. Moses, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 158–59 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

6 Moses Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 160.

7 Yudi Simon, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 160–61 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

8 Simon Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 161.

I was kind of shocked that everybody could be involved together with the same thing. They say music is a universal language, and I kind of saw it then. And then we circled up. We said a prayer. They had Jewish kids, African American kids. . . . So then afterwards, we got to play some ball, and it was very interesting how most people play ball. You bump into somebody. Before you even turned around, the person said, "Excuse me, I'm sorry." Everybody was so friendly. You had this feeling, like, this is the way life should be.[9]

After basketball, the youths chatted in a hallway and "that sort of broke the ice" for Simon. Since then, he has been fully involved. But he noticed "a lot of people at first really 'anti-' what we were doing." He believed it was because such people did not know what to expect. In fact:

they always expected the worst. That's sort of, I guess, where stereotypes come from. Where people have to fill a hole with some sort of questioning of somebody else. But, instead of going over and asking the person, "what is it about, what is that hat on your head? Why do you wear your hair like that with the dreds?" Instead of that, they just assume, or they hear it from somebody else which had a bad experience. And right then and there, there's a stereotype made up, and it sort of fills the hole. It polishes nice. It looks very nice, but it's superficial.[10]

Simon reported that many of the project's former critics no longer said anything, or have themselves become supporters. They were beginning to understand what the project was attempting to do and were seeing what it had achieved. Simon thanked the audience "for striving for racial harmony. I see you as a coworker, not as a rival."

Rev. Paul Chandler, Project CURE Cofounder

Chandler complimented Moses and Simon, saying that listening to them made him realize how much they have grown since their involvement began. But the task of eradicating racism still remained, even though two civil rights marches on Washington had taken place 25 years apart. The same enemy has cropped up each day, and racism was both a disease as well as "something that is part of the American system to divide and conquer."

He reported that just before Project CURE's arrival at the Advisory Committee's meeting, they had been north of New York City, in New Rochelle, where there had been an attack on four Hasidic youngsters. In a briefing on the attack, they had been told that the four students had been assaulted by African American youths who had beaten the Hasidim and taken their basketball. However, upon speaking with the students, their teachers, guidance counselors, and principal, they learned that African American youths had not been involved in the attack, contrary to newspaper accounts.

Thus, such media reporting "stirs up a lot of blood and a lot of anger and a lot of hate for African Americans." The victims themselves stated that it was basically not African Americans who attacked them, and those who "stood around that were cheering on [the attackers] were Asian, they were Hispanic, they were African Americans, and they were white kids. . . ." Chandler said that Lazerson and he were amazed that they had been given the wrong information:

by people who are supposed to be insiders. Now I could accept [mistaken] information coming from the newspapers. But, when we get the information from the insiders—then we get the information from the real insiders who are the children, and the children are very innocent because they came out

9 Simon Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 162.

10 Simon Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 163.

with the truth. And the truth was that this thing happened, and it was blown out of proportion to the point that it became a real racial thing. And it [reportedly] boiled down to African Americans against Jewish kids, but that wasn't really the case.

I'm not condoning the incident. The incident was wrong. But it just shows you how things are stereotyped and how things are blown out of proportion, particularly by a media who use events or situations to sell newspapers and to sell stories.[11]

Chandler said that in Crown Heights two young persons had been lost, 7-year-old Gavin Cato and rabbinical student Yankel Rosenbaum, and Crown Heights did not want to lose any other young people. Having just returned from Houston and preparing to travel to Buffalo and to Columbia, South Carolina, the Project CURE group was aware that the problem of racism was everywhere. The group was called Dr. Laz and the CURE not because it had a real physician but "we do have the cure," continued Chandler.

[W]e say that the cure comes with your communicating in your home by telling the truth. To tell the truth you have to know who you are, meaning that I couldn't deal with them, unless I know who I am. One thing we have to do is teach our children and our families who they are. . . . So, therefore, when they stand with a Yudi Simon, they don't hold their heads down, and they hold their heads high.[12]

Currently, the children are being taught to hold their heads down, and that is why they have been in despair. Chandler continued:

That's why they go around not knowing who they are, wearing two earrings, wearing their hats backwards, wearing their pants down here, wearing jackets that say "Guess?" Guess who I am? Or something that says "Used," or "Damaged." They are being used everyday. They are being damaged everyday.[13]

Chandler reiterated that changing this required communicating the truth, then arriving at an understanding of who each person was, and then finding them able to respect each other. At Project CURE, this was occurring even to the extent that Hasidic youths and African American youths of Project CURE were invited to compete in basketball during half time of a New York Knicks-Philadelphia 76ers game. Chandler believed that this:

was the first time that Madison Square Garden had 10 yarmulkas running up and down the court . . . and young brothers with dreds . . . with 19,000 people cheering them on. This was for racial harmony night. This really boosted these young men that they went home proud not just that night, but it was a reward for the work that they had been doing. . . .

Now you see the [two groups] playing basketball together. Before they were like two ships passing in the night and not connecting, and, if they were, they were colliding. Now they pass, they talk. They don't go to the other side of the street. So it does make a difference. They do want the same things that we want. They want better homes. They want better housing. They want better education, and they want to live in peace and harmony.[14]

The *New York Daily News* account of the Madison Square Garden game pointed out that "For more than a year, [Project CURE] black and Hasidic youths from the racially torn neighborhood have played a monthly basketball game in hopes that respect learned on the court will lead to better relations off the court."[15] But, exactly 1 year later, in a front

11 Paul Chandler, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, pp. 166–67 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

12 Chandler Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 168–69.

13 Chandler Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 169.

14 Chandler Testimony, Hearing Transcript, pp. 170–72.

page *New York Times* article, "Crown Heights Tension Persists Despite Healing Effort," the chairperson of Brooklyn community planning board 9, a local rabbi, was quoted as saying, "Basketball games together, that's baloney, that's not real. . . . We won't be dating and dancing together, and that won't solve our problems."[16] Two months later, a *New York Daily News* article quoted Michael Meyers, one of the Advisory Committee's opening speakers, as calling such games gimmicks, for "A basketball game between some blacks and some Jews will not eliminate the deep-seated problem of polarization."[17]

In response to the January 1994 *New York Times* article, Lazerson, Chandler, and Green wrote to the *New York Times* editor, stating that:

> a lot has changed in the last two-and-a-half years. Hundreds of blacks and Jews in Crown Heights meet for dialogue, to play ball together, to clean up a filthy lot and plant flowers, to paint a mural, to share some laughter, tears and thoughts with a guest speaker like Cornel West. We have learned a lot from each other, even when the going gets tough. We have learned from contact and communication that the negative stereotypes don't hold water.[18]

Youth Action Program

Caroline Louissaint, Youth Action Program Coordination Counselor

Caroline Louissaint, the coordination counselor of the Youth Action Program on Fifth Avenue in Harlem, apologized for not appearing with the two young people scheduled to have been panelists. However, the young man and the young woman had found employment and had just begun working. She described her organization as having started 15 years ago with YouthBuild, a program to educate high school dropouts.

YouthBuild has been helping such students to earn their general education diploma and later rehabilitate housing in East Harlem. That program has just completed rehabilitating its fifth building, and those buildings house low-income and homeless young people. From that, other programs have emerged for younger students, such as the Young Scientist Club to increase math and science skills and the Leadership Institute of Learning geared for students in school concerned about what was happening in their communities and wishing to do community work while staying in school. Such programs have been designed and governed by the youths themselves, who are primarily African American or Latino.

The two panelists originally scheduled to appear were being trained by the Youth Action Program in conflict resolution so that they could help reduce violence in their community. Since the city's young people have been witnesses or often victims of a racially divisive society, the organization has been attempting to equip them with the means to address conflict and defuse aggression.

Recently, to help stem the increasing violence in the city, Louissaint's organization chose to focus on conflict resolution through the training offered by The Alternatives to Violence Project. Some of the young people who became trained in resolving conflicts and defusing tensions as a result of that project were then expected to use their knowledge to train other young people in conflict resolution. For example, graduates of the training were to have taught leadership development to other young people who resided in Riverdale,

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15 Karen Hunter-Hodge, Jere Hester, "The Crowning Heights! Black-Hasidic Harmony Grows in Garden," *New York Daily News,* Jan. 27, 1993.

16 Joe Sexton, "Crown Heights Tension Persists Despite Healing Effort," *New York Times,* Jan. 27, 1994, p. A–1.

17 "Working It Out."

18 David Lazerson, Paul Chandler, Richard Green, "Working Together," a letter to the editor of the *New York Times,* appearing Feb. 9, 1994, p. A–20.

one of the more affluent neighborhoods in The Bronx. However, said Louissaint, "due to unfortunate circumstances," these particular trainers found that they had to redirect their agenda from "What is leadership development?" to an examination of "The effects of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression."

Louissaint explained that the Youth Action Program had been requested by Riverdale Neighborhood House (RNH) to conduct the training. Two Youth Action Program staff and seven of their young persons were to serve as facilitators in training 30 young people of African, Latino, and European American descent from Riverdale during a weekend retreat in Westchester County, north of the city.

RNH had reserved a few cabins for the RNH contingent and the smaller Youth Action Program group at a camp site that RNH itself had used a few weeks prior to this retreat. Unfortunately, RNH had apparently left the site in disarray which irritated some of the site attendants, said Louissaint, and also someone this time rented one of the cabins—meant for RNH and the Youth Action Program group—to a family.

A dispute arose because the site attendants wanted RNH and the group to move, and a few racial slurs were aimed by the site attendants, who were white, against the staff and facilitators, who were minorities. The young RNH trainees witnessed this, but said nothing. They went about their business, but refused to move. The family that thought the cabin had been reserved for them drove up to the site, saw the group, stopped, and left again.

A few minutes later, the site manager came to the RNH and Youth Action Program staffs and said that the family had come, but a group of young people surrounded their car and intimidated them. Louissaint said that the RNH and Youth Action Program people were puzzled, because they believed that none of their group had approached the car. According to Louissaint, when they asked the site manager, who himself was black, for his impression of what had occurred, the site manager said "well, a spade is a spade."[19] In fact, what had occurred was that some Youth Action Program facilitators were walking back to the site from the basketball court. Still in their car, the family encountered these facilitators. Louissaint suggested that "It was apparent that the family saw a group of young people of color and immediately claimed they were intimidated."

The RNH trainees listened to the argument between the RNH staff, one of the Youth Action Program facilitators, and the black site manager. Some of the trainees began to say that the causes for the two altercations they had witnessed were examples of why they did not like white people. A few trainees were Latino, and some were biracial. The comments of the Latinos and of those who were biracial seemed tinged with self-hatred. One declared he hated "the white side of me, because white people are ignorant." Louissaint noted that several trainees had grown up together and gone to school together, but suddenly they were "disconnected" from each other, feeling badly, seeing their counselors being hurt. At the same time, the young people of European descent became defensive, arguing that "not all white people are bad."

After hearing these comments, the facilitators decided that they could not conduct the leadership development training when those to be trained were feeling so disconnected. Therefore, the facilitators constructed two workshops on racism, oppression, discrimination, and prejudice. In these workshops, the trainees were encouraged to bring out their feelings of those moments during the altercations and also the feelings that they experienced within their own neigborhoods.

For example, many not only grew up together but they also dated across the races. However, a few had experiences in which the

19 Caroline Louissaint, testimony before the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, New York City, Nov. 9, 1993, transcript, p. 188 (hereafter cited as Hearing Transcript).

police would approach them and ask the white woman if the nonwhite male was harassing her. Nevertheless, said Louissaint, after the workshops, the participants began feeling better about themselves and each other; the young Youth Action Program facilitators formed a bond with the Riverdale trainees. In fact, the Youth Action Program facilitators became "adamant about going [to Riverdale] and continuing the training with them . . . and doing workshops. They go there almost every other Friday now, and hang out, and go to the recreation area."

Louissaint also noted a related issue. When the youths from East Harlem traveled to Riverdale, they sometimes had to take two cabs. On occasion, when it was just males left trying to catch the second cab, no cab would stop for them. She continued:

> Sometimes they are there a half-hour waiting until they get a cab. They keep fighting the obstacles. They do not want to be treated this way, and they don't want to treat anyone else that way. Young people, when they go out to different neighborhoods, when they meet other people, suddenly the stereotypes disintegrate, and they feel a strong bond with the same group that they had problems with before, and that group also has a stronger bond with our group.[20]

She concluded by saying that "Young people reaching out to other young people will be able to create a 'true mosaic,' if given a chance."

Discussion Period

During the discussion period, Pogrebin offered her impression that Project CURE basically served young males. She added that she respected the Halakic or Jewish religious requirement for the separation of the sexes. However, she expressed concern that "Girls often get the short end of the stick. When people are allergic to racism, they too often commit sexism in the act of curing it." She asked Lazerson if there were any activities for females in his program.

Lazerson replied that her question was one often asked, and the answer was that several Project CURE programs were open to both sexes. For example, Lazerson noted that a Succoth party had recently been held for both men and women. Chandler added that Project CURE had been involved in the creation of murals, and a large one was painted near Flatbush Avenue and Empire Boulevard, right alongside a Botanical Gardens mural that had been created by African American women and Hasidic women.

Chandler also noted that, of six musicians with Dr. Laz and the CURE, the drummer was an African American female. Another activity involved taking perhaps 300 youngsters around New York on Allied Airlines. On that flight were Asian, African American, Hasidic, and conservative Jewish girls.

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[Chemical Bank, which hosted the Advisory Committee's meeting in the auditorium of its 270 Park Avenue building, provided a closing reception during which the group, Dr. Laz and the CURE, gave a musical performance. The following is an excerpt from one of the rap group's songs.]

"The Cover"

I know it's been said 'bout a million times before
But change don't come easy so ya got to know the score.
Lookin' for a friend, a lifelong brother?
You can't judge a book by lookin' at the cover!

Ain't talking in riddles, just callin' attention
To something so obvious you shouldn't have to mention.
Don't care where ya come from,
Don't care where ya been,
Don't care whatcha look like

20 Louissaint Testimony, Hearing Transcript, p. 178.

Or the color of your skin.
Don't care if you're fat
Or where you bankroll's at.
Don't care how ya dress
Or if your hair's a mess.

. . . .

Ya see, me and my boys overcame the hype
As we broke through each other's stereotype.
We don't murder, we don't steal.
We work hard to buy a meal.
We don't do drugs to get our spirits flowin'
Like to keep our brain cells alive and growin'.
I ain't into money, and I love to play ball;
It's true, my friends —
One God made us all.

So as you go through life with your sisters and brothers,
Remember—
YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK,
SAID
YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK
BY LOOKIN' AT THE COVER!

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Part VI. Summary

Over 20 individuals or representatives of private or nonprofit organizations shared their experiences in trying to resolve intergroup conflicts. Many were volunteers, and most were active as members of formal or informal teams. They had banded together out of a realization that through enlightened interaction and hard work it might be possible to bridge the differences or overcome the barriers between communities in conflict.

Teams such as the black and Jewish opinion leaders who were the first two panelists revealed how painful the interaction and hard work could occasionally be, but also, in retrospect, how rewarding. The black panelist had to depart after her presentation, while the Jewish panelist remained and ultimately fielded more questions about her dialogue group's debates than were asked of any other single panelist. The latter and two other panelists—a black minister and a Muslim—also offered contrasting views on the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Islam's effects on black-Jewish relations.

Engaged in a partnership project involving three museums and the black and Hasidic communities of Crown Heights, one black and two white professionals found that their work with residents also led to soul searching and the discarding of some of their own personal assumptions. These professionals believed, however, that the resultant exhibits, which were to be shown in the spring of 1994, will reflect projects that, in effect, became directed by the ethnic groups that had been the focus of the work.

Tensions between the Hasidim and Latinos in Williamsburg also came under scrutiny. The efforts of a Hasidic rabbi, who represented 125 Jewish institutions there, and the head of a Latino organization whose work was being replicated in other boroughs and in Massachusetts have not always been warmly received by people in their respective communities. However, they have struggled on together trying to expand upon common interests, and discovering, in the process, a major danger to both communities—the toxic wastes and environmental hazards building up in Williamsburg.

As in many other big cities, blacks and Koreans have come into conflict, especially Korean shopkeepers and some local residents they serve. A pair of neighbors living in Queens, a black and a Korean, described how they averted potential demonstrations against a Korean supermarket by black residents and one or more black outsiders. The cochairpersons of a Korean-black mediation project also described how two-person teams of certified mediators composed of a Korean and a black were trained and would soon be deployed in each borough.

Efforts were made to hear from teams of teenagers active in fostering racial and religious tolerance and harmony. A black-Hasidic pair of youths from Crown Heights spoke of their backgrounds, their fears and initial hesitancy to become involved, and their current work, which has drawn invitations for them to appear throughout the Nation with their adult organizers. Though a second pair of youths, who were newly employed, sent their regrets, a representative of their East Harlem agency described the complications encountered by these youths when assigned to assist in the leadership training of youths living in a more affluent community.

The Advisory Committee also attempted to schedule as panelists a team representing Muslims, Jews, and Christians, but, despite having approached two organizations, was unsuccessful in arranging for the appearance of such a team. However, a Muslim speaker outlined Islamic beliefs and some of the problems encountered by Muslims in America. He and others also spoke from different perspectives on the Nation of Islam.

It should be noted, too, that at the outset of the public meeting the Advisory Committee saluted the efforts of Chemical Bank and the bank's Committee on Racial Harmony, the *New York Times* Company Foundation, the New York Civil Rights Coalition, and the Inter-Relations Collaborative, which is based in New York City. Governor Cuomo also sent a message congratulating the representatives of the four firms or agencies that had been saluted by the Advisory Committee. At the same time, he welcomed the Committee's work in providing an opportunity for residents of New York and elsewhere to learn about the efforts of specific individuals fostering intergroup harmony.

The commissioner for the New York State division of human rights summarized the related work of her commission and announced a December 1993 statewide conference sharing somewhat the same focus as the Advisory Committee's day-long public meeting. The meeting closed with a reception and a performance by "Dr. Laz and the CURE," a group of musicians, singers, and dancers composed of black and Hasidic adults and teenagers from Crown Heights.

To elaborate upon, clarify, or confirm statements made during the meeting, numerous documents have been cited. Many of the documents are from national media sources easily accessible to the general public. Comments were requested from individuals and agencies who were mentioned during the day's discussion, and all comments received were considered during the preparation of this report.

Part VII. Conclusions

Based on the foregoing, the New York State Advisory Committee, by a unanimous vote of the six members present, adopted the report and the following conclusions during our February 16, 1994, meeting in Manhattan. A subsequent mail and phone survey indicated that all other members, except one who did not respond to mail or phone messages, approved of our report and conclusions.

As a result of our public meeting and additional research, we observed that local incidents of racially or religiously motivated violence and often widespread tensions have occurred and continue to occur in New York City. Increasingly such incidents have involved conflicts between racial or religious minority groups such as between blacks and Jews or blacks and Koreans. Political and media commentators have stated that even mayoral elections have been affected by these problems. Meanwhile, some institutions, both profitmaking and nonprofit, and many individuals have joined hands to work toward solutions across racial or religious lines at the citywide level or community level. Dialogue groups, interfaith coalitions, antibias task forces, and the like have sprung up in several areas.

Having heard from representatives of such groups and coalitions and from concerned individuals, we believe that it is advisable for governments, public interest groups, the media, and others to acknowledge and credit the bridge-building efforts of those engaged in fostering understanding among communities in conflict. Such recognition should spark the interest of others into forming additional multiracial or religiously diverse teams, coalitions, or task forces to expand bridge-building efforts and strengthen the community's capacity to resolve conflicts.

A representative of State government did report that State agencies have recently saluted the work of several agencies engaged in bridge-building work. But we believe that other levels of government, public interest groups, and the media should similarly salute the work of teams of volunteers and coalitions of organizations. Indeed, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and other State Advisory Committees could make a valuable contribution by devising ways of publicizing the methods and achievements of teams, coalitions, or task forces already mobilized. The media might also consider featuring a periodic news segment or regular column spotlighting their work. Governments and the private sector, both profitmaking and nonprofit institutions, could organize award ceremonies to give credit to such teams or coalitions.

We also learned from our speakers and panelists two related things. On the one hand, publicity about incidents of violence, tensions, or other intergroup crises has contributed to the formation of various dialogue and problem-solving groups. On the other hand, the limited publicity or recognition of the efforts of those groups seems not to approach the level of publicity bestowed on the negative events and crises themselves. Efforts such as we are suggesting might restore balance to the coverage of what is happening in many communities.

Several of those who have been working in teams or on coalitions agreed during our meeting that they began more in reaction to violence or tensions that had already occurred and not necessarily for prevention before local outbreaks of violence or intimidation. They and we also believe that organizations and individuals should be encouraged and supported in enterprises designed to be proactive, that is, enterprises that stimulate constructive interactions among people of different races and religious beliefs even in communities not stricken by a violent crisis. One proactive effort brought to our attention was led by unpaid volunteers. However, foundations

and other grantmaking institutions could foster more sustained efforts, as some are now doing.

A few of our panelists were frank in confessing that it had been difficult to speak up or act without hesitation when expressions of bias about race or religion were heard. They also questioned whether all those in leadership positions have lived up to their responsibilities when incidents of bias occur. Individuals and institutions need to adopt proactive strategies to eliminate conditions that may lead to conflict and tensions, but they should also be ready to react forcefully whenever violence and hatred in word or deed emerge; they can do this by denouncing outbreaks of bigotry and intimidation in a timely fashion.

We heard from various types of multiracial or religiously diverse teams and coalitions. Some were small, temporary, made up of unpaid volunteers, and were task oriented. Some were larger, of long-standing duration, and pledged to broadscale missions. Others were in between. A few were funded. In most cases, frustrations were experienced by members belonging to various types, and the social changes they sought usually came slowly and incrementally. Their efforts required dedication, time, and hard work that occasionally proved humbling, fraught with frustration, or even painful.

Consequently, we believe that opportunities should be created for veteran groups to share their experiences and proven methods with new groups. The creation of such opportunities should be supported by governments, other institutions, both profitmaking and nonprofit, and the philanthropic sector. Examples in the profitmaking sector of corporations which have been supportive would include Chemical Bank working through its Committee on Racial Harmony and the *New York Times,* which established the New York Times Company Foundation.

From what panelists told us and from accounts we have read, it seems that members of racial and religious minority groups that have historically been victimized in America sometimes compare their victimization in a competitive way. They may do this while trying to come to grips with their different perspectives about each other and their different kinds or levels of needs in the face of discrimination. Debate over the facts of discrimination or the strategies or remedies required to combat discrimination may stem from disagreements based on different assumptions or perceptions, and such underlying differences may even lead to revealing or creating new disagreements.

Even if disagreements persist after long dialogue or debate, some on either side of the debate reportedly begin to appreciate better where their opposite numbers are "coming from." Thus, while agreements may lead to understanding, disagreements can lead to a different yet still helpful kind of understanding. But encouragement and support must be given to dialogue group members and others when they find themselves in phases of disagreement or internal friction.

We are reminded that the Kerner Commission Report was issued over 25 years ago. It warned that America was moving toward two separate and unequal societies, one black and the other white. Since then, there has been an increase in the racial and religious diversity of America and in communities that are neither predominantly white nor predominantly black. Urban gateways such as New York City have been transformed into global cities, where conflicts have sprung up between minority groups, for example, between blacks and Koreans, as we noted at the outset. In addition, blacks and Jews—often assumed to have been allies of longstanding—have occasionally run into sharp conflict.

Without diverting energy from the work that needs to be continued to combat hostilities between some whites and some blacks, strategies for fostering racial and religious harmony must recognize the need for looking beyond the black-white equation of the past and for appreciating the fragility of any coalitions that appeared to have existed among some minority groups.

Participants pointed out that significant numbers of Muslims and followers of other nonwestern religions have made their homes in New York City. Some Muslims report being both misunderstood and mistreated by the larger society, as Catholics and Jews claimed

in earlier decades. For this reason, commonly used phrases such as "Jews and Gentiles" or "Protestants, Catholics, and Jews" need to be reflected upon and more explicitly cast as "Jews, Gentiles, Muslims, and Buddhists," or—in recognition of those who subscribe to no religious belief—simply "people of religion and conscience." While some interfaith groups have begun to identify themselves more inclusively, people of any or no religious persuasion need to evidence in their speech and thought an awareness of the growing diversity in the American landscape of religions.

Despite real or perceived differences, communities in conflict may also face common problems, as, for example, the case in Williamsburg. Hasidic and Latino leaders there expect serious environmental hazards to increase as a result of municipal plans for a new incinerator. They have pledged to take joint action on the issue. At some point in their bridge-building efforts, multiracial and/or religiously diverse dialogue groups or coalitions should review the question of what problems challenge or adversely affect both sides. Working together to overcome common problems may well help them solve other issues that were first perceived as dividing them.

Speakers and panelists also referred to conflicts arising from the existence of the "have's and have-not's," rises and falls in the economy, difficulties in apportioning declining resources to increased needs, or the failure or political refusal to allocate resources equitably. Consequently, it seems to us that opinion leaders, analysts, decisionmakers, and others affecting the allocation of public resources should help to base allocations on the best available assessments of needs so that all people or their communities are benefited in a fair and equitable manner. Whenever possible, the affected people or intended beneficiaries should be afforded opportunities to become involved in the decisionmaking process.

Though we had planned otherwise, we ultimately heard from only a handful of youths or their advocates. But even a cursory review of media records would show that street violence in New York City and elsewhere, which often sparks large scale tensions warranting police action, frequently involves teenagers and young adults. We recognize that engaging anyone willing to take part in intergroup efforts or projects should be a basic goal. However, where resources—monetary or otherwise—can or must be allocated in priority order, teenagers and young adults should rank near the top as participants in, or beneficiaries of, programs intended for community service, training, employment, recreation, and the like.

NEW YORK NEWSDAY, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 1994

ABOUT RACE

What Divides Blacks and Jews

By Letty Cottin Pogrebin

AMERICA IS HOME to Serbs and Croats, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and Jews, Irish Americans and British Americans, but the intergroup conflict that continues to excite the most heated public debate is the volatile, complex relationship between blacks and Jews.

Louis Farrakhan rides anti-Semitism to national celebrity, culminating in an adulatory appearance on Arsenio Hall and a cover story in Time. Al Sharpton and Jim Sleeper square off on Charlie Rose. Paul Berman writes a 10-page piece on blacks and Jews in The New Yorker; yes, The New Yorker. The NAACP and the Anti-Defamation League reach an impasse over Farrakhan. The Nation of Islam and the people of the book remain miles apart on issues of "truth" and history. And, like a Greek chorus, "Marty from Brooklyn" and "Janet from Manhattan" ventilate on the subject at every point on the radio dial.

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But despite this unending discourse, a key question remains unanswered: Why do so many Jews insist that blacks condemn black extremists, and why do so many blacks resent that insistence?

While some are quick to blame "Jewish racism" or "black anti-Semitism," hundreds of hours of participation in dialogue groups with blacks and Jews have taught me that the causes of the severe and almost symbiotic tensions between these two communities lie not in blind hatred but in each people's unique history. Dislocation, loss and pain have left both groups feeling vulnerable and angry, but for very different reasons and with very different outcomes that can be summarized, albeit oversimplified, in 10 points of divergence:

1. The aftershocks of black history include poverty, educational inequity, job and housing discrimination, inadequate health care, bigotry, and alienation within a society that preaches compassion and justice but practices indifference. The aftershocks of Jewish history include the fear that the dominant majority may suddenly turn against the Jews (as some Americans did during the energy crisis and the Gulf War), fear of possible peril to the state of Israel (every Jew's haven of last resort), and fear of the slippery slope that propelled another "civilized society" from spewing hate to building gas chambers. Don't look for symmetry here. Locally, one cannot compare present suffering with fear of potential suffering; yet for Jews one generation removed from the Holocaust, the fear is real and the vulnerability deeply felt. This should come as no surprise, considering African Americans' fear and

— *Continued on page 82*

Blacks and Jews

— *Continued from page 48*

vulnerablity nearly 130 years after slavery ended.

2. Because of their experience with disenfranchisement and marginalization, African Americans tend to focus on issues of power, and take exception to those who seem to be challenging black economic or political advancement. Because of their experience with scapegoating and blood libels, Jews tend to focus on issues of safety, and take exception to those like Farrakhan or Khalid Abdul Muhammad who seem to endanger Jewish well-being by singling out Jews for special criticism or blame.

3. Jews see their success as precarious, contingent on the good graces of the Christian majority, and susceptible to reversal at any time. Blacks see Jews enjoying white-skin privilege and great economic achievement, and they cannot understand why such a seemingly powerful group is quaking at the summit.

4. Jews believe our two peoples were gloriously united in the civil rights movement and that Jews played a vital role in black liberation. Blacks believe that Jews patronized them during the '50s and '60s and tried to take control of their movement.

5. Jews resent black ingratitude for the Jewish co-founders of the NAACP, for Jewish contributors to black organizations, for Jewish kids who went South to register voters, for Goodman and Schwerner, who shared Chaney's grave in a Mississippi swamp. Blacks are sick of hearing about the past. They don't want Jewish "help" or Jewish martyrs; they want good jobs and a future for their children.

6. Blacks worry that their situation will never improve. Jews worry that their good situation will never last. This is why each group has different survival issues. For African Americans, survival requires housing, education, employment, health care, drug treatment. Jewish survival requires protection of individual rights, separation of church and state, freedom of emigration, and a secure Israel. Blacks want the practical tools to make good in an overwhelmingly white country. Jews want the right to be different and yet feel at home in an overwhelmingly Christian country. Black empowerment. Jewish safety. Different needs experienced with the same intensity.

7. Jews see America as a promised land that made good on its promises. Blacks see America as the nation that enslaved them for 200 years and continues to deny them opportunities. This discrepancy explains why Jews tend to trust the system while African Americans are often hostile and suspicious.

8. Jews consider dialogue an end in itself; for blacks it is the means to an end. Jews feel fundamentally secure as long as people are talking to them. Blacks believe talk is a waste of time unless it's the first step toward building coalitions and mobilizing people to fight for change.

9. Blacks see Jews as white before they see them as Jews. Jews see blacks as people of color before they see them as the Christians most of them are. Although most Jews are Caucasian, many report that they do not *feel* white because they do not feel safe the way other whites do. Upon hearing this, blacks argue that Jews have it both ways: They benefit from "passing" in the majority culture while also gaining public sympathy as the quintessential victim.

'Jews see America as a promised land that made good on its promises. Blacks see America as the nation that enslaved them for 200 years and continues to deny them opportunities.'

10. Probing further, one learns that many blacks see Jews as *less* white than other whites — almost like an in-between, third race — and many Jews see blacks as natural allies quite unlike other Christians. Because they assign one another these special statuses, each group approaches the other with higher expectations than either invests in any other group. It follows, then, that their mutual disappointments will wound more deeply.

In light of all this, one can understand why Jews need to be reassured that the mainstreaming of false information about Jews to young minds in college classrooms and to roaring crowds at Nation of Islam rallies does not portend a replay of Germany circa 1933. Jews ask blacks to condemn their own extremists for fear that Jewish voices will not carry weight. Jews worry that the black community will not discredit the slander spread by charismatic zealots unless it hears such views repudiated by its own kind.

Black resistance to Jewish demands is equally understandable, given the widespread perception that Jews are neither weak nor threatened but, rather, have extraordinary power to sway public opinion through the media. Furthermore, blacks resent being paid attention to only when called upon in public to criticize their fellow blacks while being ignored on virtually every other issue. They also point out that whites are not asked to take responsibility for racist remarks made by other whites, such as Senator Ernest Hollings. And finally, given the lingering belief that Jews pulled the strings during the early civil rights struggle and patronized blacks in a relationship that was far from reciprocal, the notion of Jews telling them what to do in 1994 does not sit comfortably with African Americans regardless of their position on the merits.

Clearly, what each group needs from the other right now is a strong dose of empathy and sensitivity to the by-products of each other's past. Jews can and should continue forcefully to protest hate-speech, to correct poisonous lies, and to remind the world of the dangers of leaving anti-Semitism unchallenged, but they should not instruct others about the proper response to outrageous claims, as if no other group has a trustworthy moral compass.

At the same time, blacks should try to understand why Jews keep pressing black leaders for such disavowals. Beyond obvious motives of fear and self-interest, the Jewish need to hear reassuring words from blacks can be read as a measure of the high regard Jews have for the opinion of the African-American community. After all, Catholics, Asians and whites in general have also been maligned in the recent onslaught of hateful speech, yet no other ethnic or religious group seems to care as much as Jews what black people think of them. Finally, the Jewish demand for a response from black voices bespeaks a greater recognition and respect than the rest of America extends to the authority and power of black leadership.

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