Community Forum on Race Relations in Grand Rapids

**Michigan Advisory Committee
to the United States
Commission on Civil Rights**

August 1998

A summary report of the Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. This report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction.

The United States Commission on Civil Rights

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, first created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and reestablished by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government. By the terms of the 1983 act, as amended by the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study and collection of information relating to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections; and preparation and issuance of public service announcements and advertising campaigns to discourage discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

The State Advisory Committees

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and section 3(d) of the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994. The Advisory Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Advisory Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request assistance of the State Advisory Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference that the Commission may hold within the State.

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Letter of Transmittal

Michigan Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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The Michigan Advisory Committee submits this report, *Community Forum on Race Relations in Grand Rapids,* as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the State. The report was unanimously adopted by the Advisory Committee by a 13-0 vote, all members voting. The Advisory Committee is indebted to the individual participants for their time and expertise, and to the Midwestern Regional Office staff for the preparation of this report.

This report is a summary of a community forum held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 25, 1997 regarding race relations and racial and ethnic tensions in Grand Rapids and the surrounding community. Invited participants at the community forum included individuals from the city administration, elected officials, the Grand Rapids Police Department, the U.S. Attorney, the FBI, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, representatives from the religious community and the business community, and leaders of community service organizations. A public session was also held at which testimony was received. The Advisory Committee understands the Commission has an active interest in race and ethnic tensions, and trusts the Commission and the public will find the material in this report informative.

Respectfully,

Roland Hwang

ROLAND HWANG, *Chairperson*
Michigan Advisory Committee

Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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1 Introduction

Foreword

In many respects the Michigan Advisory Committee finds the study of racial and ethnic tensions a more difficult issue to examine than its previous examinations of racial violence and hate crime. When hate groups march in public or when prominent hate crimes are reported in the media, the vast majority of citizens in the State condemn the overt and open display of bigotry and hate. Similarly, although as recently as 30 years ago overt, visible, and blatant acts of discrimination in employment and housing were widespread, now such acts of overt and blatant bigotry are likewise decried.

Based on the presentations made to this Advisory Committee, the absence of manifest hate and bigotry does not necessarily indicate that there has been a diminution of racial and ethnic tensions in the State, or the emergence of real equal opportunity for minorities. Ironically, the absence of overt manifestations of hate and prejudice may serve to be a stronger force for the perpetuation of racial and ethnic inequalities.

When the causes of racial and ethnic discrimination are covert and not easily identified, racism and ethnic discrimination assume a nebulous presence in the community. Determining and resolving discrimination in such situations becomes nearly intractable, as the exact nature, cause, and dimensions of the problem are difficult to discern. Worse, as racism and prejudice become less overt, the acknowledgment of race and ethnic problems may diminish and with it the resolve of a community to address them as a pressing community issue. This is the central issue the Advisory Committee confronted in Grand Rapids—the presence of persistent, nebulous racial and ethnic tensions and bias that may be operating to limit equal opportunity for minorities.

Although few hard and fast instances capture the existence of racial and ethnic bias, a great deal of data set out a picture of disparities in income, education, employment, and housing along racial and ethnic lines. Such data suggest an inequality of opportunity. Observing such disparities, the question arises, why—if there are no barriers to equal opportunity—are members of minority groups disproportionately receiving lower wages, fewer jobs, less education, and much more likely to be living in poverty and in less desirable housing?

In 1983 the United States Commission on Civil Rights published a statement entitled *Intimidation and Violence—Racial and Religious Bigotry in America.* That report noted the increasing number of violent acts perpetrated against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. In 1990 the Commission issued an update of that report finding that:

> The phenomenon of racial and religious violence and harassment is a continuing threat to the maintenance of a peaceful, democratic, and pluralistic society. The Commission concluded that parents, educators, leaders of religious institutions and other opinionmakers should work together to develop educational programs designed to produce cognitive and emotional change with respect to racism. . .and other kinds of. . .bigotry.[1]

Studying the same topic at the local level, the Michigan Advisory Committee issued a report on racial and ethnic intimidation in Michigan in 1982, *Hate Groups in Michigan: A Sham or A Shame.* The report focused on the level of hate crime in the State and found that racially motivated violence in Michigan was a serious and growing problem.[2] Following its 1982 report, the Advisory Committee completed a second study of hate crime in 1992, "The Increase of Hate Crime in Michigan," finding an increasing level of hate crime, and observing a significant level of intolerance and conflict among the different minority and ethnic racial groups.[3]

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[1] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Intimidation and Violence, Racial and Religious Bigotry in America* (September 1990), p. 1.

[2] *See,* Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hate Groups in Michigan: A Sham or a Shame?* (1982).

[3] *See,* Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "The Increase of Hate Crime in Michigan" *(1992),* Midwestern Regional Office, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, unpublished. See also, reports of the Indiana Advisory Committee to the U.S.

In the 1990s, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, following its statements concerning overt acts of racial and ethnic intimidation, engaged in a series of studies on racial and ethnic tensions. Hearings were held in Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and the Mississippi Delta. In each setting testimony was heard on obstacles to equal opportunity for minorities in housing, employment, public accommodation, as well as the presence of existent tensions between racial and ethnic groups, and instances of hate crimes.[4] Writing for the Commissioners, then Chairperson Arthur A. Fletcher stated:

> In undertaking this project, the Commission realized the Nation is at a crossroads. How the Nation responds in this critical hour to its increasingly diverse population, the well-evidenced racial and ethnic tensions, and the frustration of unmet needs in our cities, will determine the future well-being and progress, not only of its urban communities, but of the Nation as a whole.[5]

In this report, the Michigan Advisory Committee joins with the Commission in examining racial and ethnic tensions in one community—Grand Rapids, Michigan. The focus of the Advisory Committee's study is twofold: (1) equal opportunity for minorities in housing, employment, and public safety, and (2) the presence of existent tensions between racial and ethnic groups, including incidents of racial and ethnic violence.

The City of Grand Rapids

The City of Grand Rapids is the second largest city in the State of Michigan, located in the western part of the State's lower peninsula, 40 miles from Lake Michigan. The 1990 census reported the city's population at 189,126. Whites number 142,225 persons, 75 percent of the city's population; 34,776 residents are African American, 18 percent; and there are 8,447 Latinos in the city, 5 percent. The American Indian and Asian and Pacific Islander populations in the city are less than 1 percent.

TABLE 1.1
Population of Grand Rapids and Kent County

	Grand Rapids	Kent County
White	142,225	439,433
Black	34,776	39,544
American Indian	1,385	2,638
Asian or Pacific Islander	1,932	5,103
Other race	361	550
Latino	8,447	13,363

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A.

Grand Rapids is located within Kent County, an area undergoing rapid population growth and strong economic growth. Most residents of Kent County outside the city limits of Grand Rapids are white. The total population of Kent County is nearly one-half million, almost three times the population of Grand Rapids. Yet, nearly 90 percent of all African Americans in the county live in Grand Rapids, and two-thirds of all Latinos live in the city. Among the other two minority groups, half of the American Indians residing in Kent County are in the City of Grand Rapids and less than 40 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders live in the city.

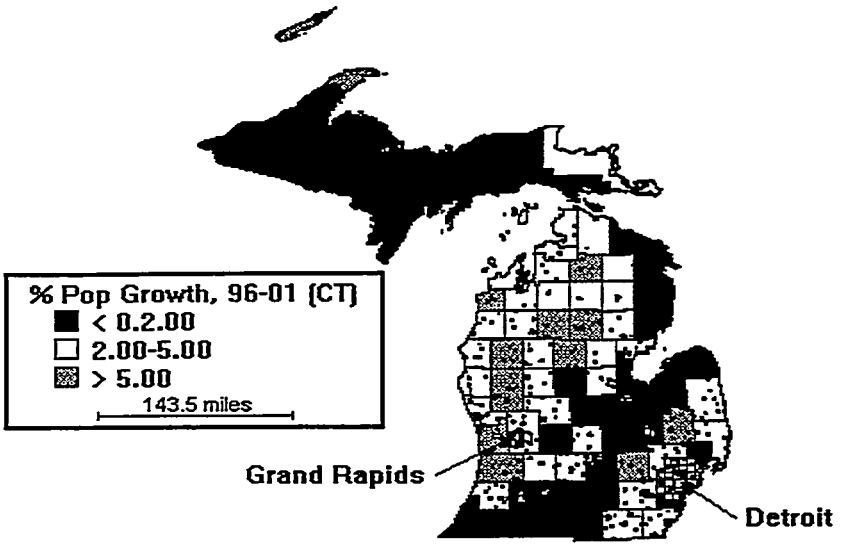
Households are domestic establishments including all individuals living in the same domicile. Among whites in the City of Grand Rapids, 50 percent of the households are families, with 45 percent of those families having children under the age of 18 in the household, and in 7 percent of white households there are children present under the age of 18 and there is only one parent. In African American households in the City of Grand Rapids, 30 percent of the households are family units, and in 33 percent of the households there are children under the age of 18 living in one-parent homes.

Commission on Civil Rights, *The Increase of Hate Crime in Indiana* (1992), and *Hate Crime in Indiana: A Monitoring of the Level, Victims, Locations, and Motivations* (1994); Ohio Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hate Crime in Ohio* (1995).

[4] *See* U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty, Inequality, and Discrimination*, vols. I, II, III, and IV.

[5] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty, Inequality, and Discrimination*, vol. I: *The Mount Pleasant Report* (January 1993), letter of transmittal.

FIGURE 1.1
Grand Rapids, Michigan



Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Midwestern Regional Office.

American Indian households have the lowest percentage of family households, 4 percent, among the racial groups in Grand Rapids, while Asian and Pacific Islander households have the highest proportion of families, 62 percent. American Indian households are similar to African American households in the proportion of families with children under the age of 18 living with a single parent, 30 percent, while Asian and Pacific Islander households with children under the age of 18 living with one parent is 9 percent of all households.

Grand Rapids and the surrounding areas are in the midst of an economic boom. The prosperity of the city was featured in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, "Low Unemployment Brings Lasting Gains To Town in Michigan"(June 24, 1997). The article reports that in the Grand Rapids areas, the labor force has grown by more than 18,000 in 1996 and 1997, an increase of 3.5 percent. The unemployment rate in the area has plunged in 1997 to 3.1 percent and wages for entry-level jobs are climbing at a 4 percent to 5 percent annual clip.

Yet even in the midst of this booming economy there is still a big gap between worker-short employers in suburban industrial parks outside the city limits and job-hungry residents, many of whom are minority, in the city's near southside. As one example, Davidson Plyforms' factory is only 7 miles from a gritty inner-city neighborhood, but that is a huge distance in a town where bus service stops long before dusk.

The specter of poverty disproportionately haunts those who are minority. In Kent County the proportion of individuals below the poverty level is 9 percent, and in Grand Rapids it is 16 percent. The poverty rates for whites are below those standards, while the poverty rates for every minority group exceed those norms.

In Grand Rapids one out of every three African Americans and American Indians and one in five of every Asian and Pacific Islander live in poverty. In contrast, just one in ten of every white person in the city lives in poverty. In Kent County the poverty rate is 9 percent. The poverty rate for African Americans in the county is 31 percent, three times the county rate. American Indians have a poverty rate of 24 percent countywide, more than double the rate of poverty in the county.

TABLE 1.2
Household Type by Race

	Grand Rapids	Kent County
White		
Total households	56,236	165,335
Family households		
Children under 18 years	13,455	49,708
No children under 18 years	15,271	49,754
Other family		
Householder, no spouse present		
Children under 18 years	4,024	10,376
No children under 18 years	3,089	7,814
Nonfamily households	20,397	47,683
African American		
Total households	11,026	12,924
Family households		
Children under 18 years	1,916	2,345
No children under 18 years	1,492	1,761
Other family		
Householder, no spouse present		
Children under 18 years	3,596	4,053
No children under 18 years	1,366	1,461
Nonfamily households	2,656	3,304
American Indian		
Total households	417	866
Family households		
Children under 18 years	62	223
No children under 18 years	39	121
Other family		
Householder, no spouse present		
Children under 18 years	126	189
No children under 18 years	37	96
Nonfamily households	153	237
Asian or Pacific Islander		
Total households	483	1,182
Family households		
Children under 18 years	216	552
No children under 18 years	81	201
Other family		
Householder, no spouse present		
Children under 18 years	48	104
No children under 18 years	45	89
Nonfamily households	93	236

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.

TABLE 1.3
Poverty Rates by Racial Group

Poverty rates	Grand Rapids	Kent County
All groups	16%	9%
White	10	6
African American	33	31
American Indian	36	24
Asian or Pacific Islander	22	13

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A.

The Advisory Committee Hearing

On June 25, 1997, the Michigan Advisory Committee convened a public meeting on a racial and ethnic tensions at the Harley Hotel in Grand Rapids. Twelve panels of invited speakers addressed the Committee, including: Ingrid Scott-Weekley, director, Grand Rapids Equal Opportunity Department; Lee Nelson Webber, executive director, Grand Rapids Fair Housing Center; James Ferris, lieutenant, Grand Rapids Police Department; Mark Harold, Grand Rapids Police Department; Michael Dettmer, U.S. Attorney, Western District of Michigan; Rick Smith, Special agent, FBI; Jeffrey Davis, assistant U.S. attorney, Western District; Albert Lewis, rabbi, Temple Emanuel; Michael L. Wood, Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids; Morris Greidanus, Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism; Bob Woodrick, president and CEO, D & W Food Centers; Mary Jo Kuhlman, Burger King of West Michigan; Lynette Ferrell, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce; Jorge Rivas, Michigan Department of Civil Rights; W. Paul Mayhue, county commissioner, Kent County; Richard Garcia, Michigan Department of Civil Rights; Walter Mathis, editor, *Take Pride*, a community newspaper; Lawrence Borom, president and CEO, Grand Rapids Urban League; Hazel R. Lewis, president, Grand Rapids Branch, NAACP; Zoraida Sanchez, executive director, Latin-American Services; Richard Espinoza, executive director, Hispanic Center of Western Michigan; Jaime Malone, editor, *El Hispano News*; Levi A. Rickert, director, North American Indian Center of Grand Rapids.

Also addressing the Advisory Committee from the community were: Michael C. Hyde, Salvan Radjan, Dr. Flores, Walter Jones, III, Ms. Pembleton, Mr. Hartfield, Mrs. Hartfield, Rodney Brown, Gail Harrison, Molly Shorewell, Sherlock Federick Nitz, Rene McNair, Sharon Hall, and Richard Westerford. A court reporter transcribed the proceedings.

This report is a summary of that meeting. Chapter two discusses housing issues; chapter three addresses employment issues; and chapter four reports on public safety, police-community relations, and hate crime. Chapter five contains perspectives from the speakers about the state of race relations in the community. The Michigan Advisory Committee sets out its conclusions and observations about racial and ethnic tensions in Grand Rapids in chapter six.

The Michigan Advisory Committee is deliberately constituted to represent both major political parties and the broad spectrum of political philosophies. It is independent of any national, State, or local administration or political organization. To ensure that there was a broad and balanced perspective of information, presenters included local government officials, State government officials, Federal Government officials, representatives of the business community, law enforcement officials, leaders in the religious community, editors of minority newspapers, and leaders of community organizations. An open session was also held at which members of the public addressed the Advisory Committee. Comments of every speaker appear in this report.

2 Housing

Equal access to housing has been an historic part of the civil rights movement. Equal housing opportunity means two things: (1) equal opportunity for mortgage loans, and (2) equal opportunity to live in the neighborhood of one's choice. Equal opportunity in housing is mandated in a series of Federal Executive orders and acts, specifically: Executive Order 11063 relating to equal opportunity in federally financed housing,[1] Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,[2] section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968,[3] section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,[4] section 109 of Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974,[5] the Age Discrimination Act of 1975,[6] the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987,[7] the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988,[8] and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.[9] In the Grand Rapids area, the Fair Housing Center, a private, nonprofit organization, is the primary agency ensuring equal access to housing opportunities throughout the metropolitan Grand Rapids area.

Home Ownership

Data from the 1990 census show minorities, both in the City of Grand Rapids and in the surrounding community, having a significantly lower rate of home ownership than whites. Whites are the only major racial and ethnic group in the area to have a home ownership rate greater than 50 percent. In the City of Grand Rapids, 60 percent of all households own their home, while the home ownership rate for whites in Grand Rapids is 64.7 percent. In Kent County, 70 percent of all households own their home; the home ownership rate for whites is 72.8 percent.

In the City of Grand Rapids, where the rate of home ownership is 60 percent, just 42.2 percent of African American households own their homes, and for Kent County the rate of home ownership for African Americans is even lower, 40.1 percent. The pattern for Latinos is similar. Latinos living in Grand Rapids have a home ownership rate of 42.3 percent, and the home ownership rate for Latinos in Kent County is 44.6 percent. Within the city limits of Grand Rapids, Asian American and American Indian households have the lowest rates of home ownership among all minority groups, 29.9 percent and 25.7 percent. In the entire county, however, home ownership rates for Asians exceeds 50 percent, 53.9 percent, and is higher for American Indian households, 38.2 percent.

Housing Segregation

The minority population in Grand Rapids and Kent County is concentrated in 44 of the county's 344 census blocks in the central and near southside areas of Grand Rapids. Figure 2.1 depicts the observed minority population concentration in a small number of census blocks. Data show minorities are less than 4 percent of the population in 54 percent of the census blocks. In 27 central city census blocks, however, minorities are more than 50 percent of the residents, and in 17 of those census blocks, minorities are 80 percent of the residents.

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[1] Exec. Order No. 11,063, 3 C.F.R. § 652 (1962), *as amended* by Exec. Order No. 12,259, 3 C.F.R. § 2307 (1981), *reprinted in* 42 U.S.C. § 3608 (1988).

[2] 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d–2000d–7 (1988).

[3] Pub. L. No. 90–448, 82 Stat. 476 (codified at 12 U.S.C. § 1701u (Supp. 1994).

[4] 29 U.S.C. § 794 (1988).

[5] Pub. L. No. 93–383, 82 Stat. 649 (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 5309 (1988).

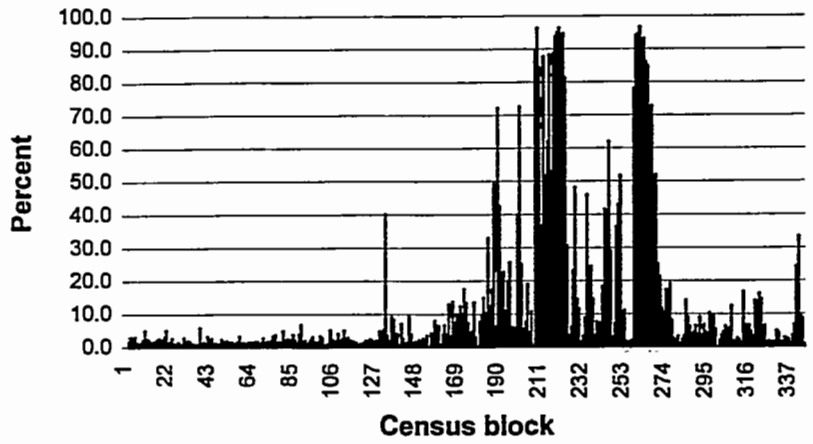
[6] 42 U.S.C. §§ 6101–6107 (1988).

[7] Pub. L. No. 100–242, 101 Stat. 1815 (1987).

[8] 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601–3619, 3631 (1988).

[9] 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131–12165 (Supp. 1994).

FIGURE 2.1
Minority Population by Census Blocks



Source: Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, from 1990 U.S. census data.

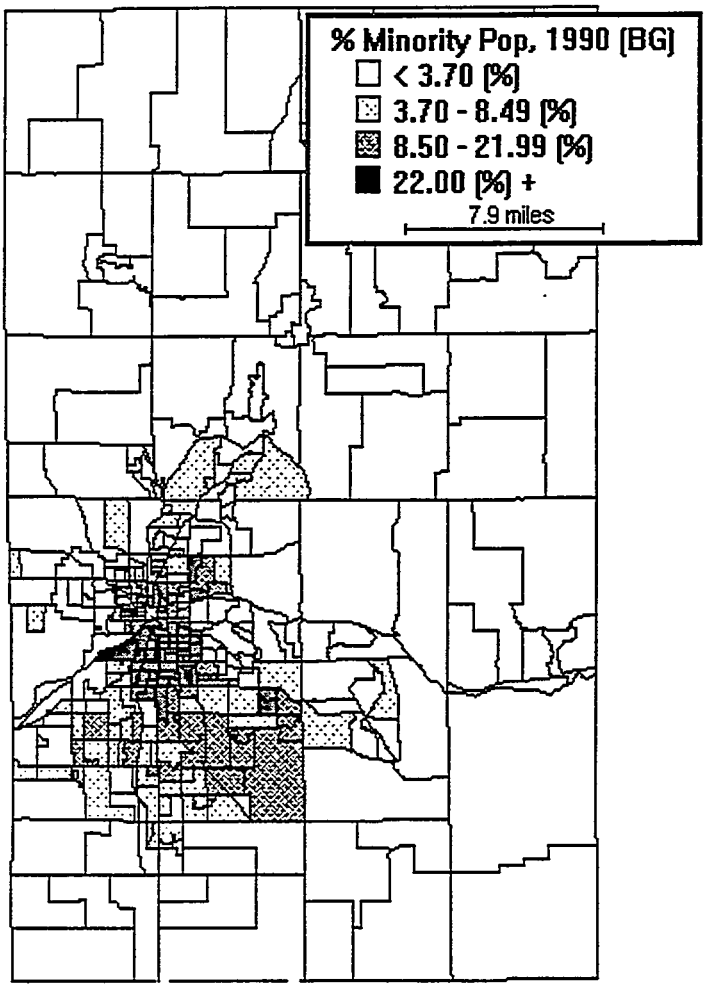
TABLE 2.1
Owner Occupied Housing by Race and Ethnicity

	Grand Rapids	Pct.	Kent County	Pct.
Housing units	68,983		181,730	
Owner occupied		60.0		70.0
White	35,618	64.7	119,063	72.8
African American	4,562	42.2	5,050	40.1
American Indian	118	25.7	346	38.2
Asian	138	29.9	603	53.9
Latino	908	42.3	1,531	44.6
Renter occupied		40.0		30.0
White	19,438	35.3	44,535	27.2
African American	6,249	57.8	7,554	59.9
American Indian	341	74.3	560	61.8
Asian	323	70.1	514	46.1
Latino	1,239	57.7	1,904	55.4

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.

Outside the city limits there are few areas in the county where the minority population exceeds 2 percent, and no areas where the minority population is higher than 4 percent. The isolation of minorities is particularly noticeable. Thirty percent of the census blocks in Kent County have a minority population of less than 2 percent, despite minorities being 15 percent of the county's population. The minority populations for the municipalities surrounding Grand Rapids also reflect the minority isolation.

FIGURE 2.2
Kent County and Minority Population by Census Block



Source: Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, from 1990 U.S. census data.

Lee Webber, director of the Fair Housing Center, told the Advisory Committee about the number and types of complaints regarding housing discrimination received at her agency.

The following examples will briefly illustrate some of our complaints. First example, an African American student visits a large apartment complex near a college campus. She is told corporate policy prohibits renting to students in favor of a more "family oriented population."

A series of three tests conducted shortly thereafter reveals that white students are never told about a no student policy while each African American student tester is quickly informed that they cannot rent at that complex and referred to other locations. That is discrimination based on their race. Second example, a Mexican home seeker calls a mobile home park to inquire about renting a lot for the home she and her husband have purchased. Over the phone she is given directions to the office and told when to come in for an application. When she arrives with her husband who is also Mexican, they are told, "Frankly, we don't have applications for people like you." A third and last example, a real estate agent presents a very attractive offer on behalf of an African American household seeking a larger suburban home for their growing family. The owner questions the agent about the race of the prospective buyers and when the agent repeat-

edly declines to discuss their race, the seller refuses to consider the offer, despite the buyer's qualification and even preapproved financing.

Two points are important from these examples. The first is that housing discrimination exists in Grand Rapids. This is not something that we have left behind 20 or 30 years ago. Last year we conducted 300 housing tests and we documented measurable differences between testers who differ in race or in other variables in more than one of three of those tests. One hundred seventeen tests, or 44 percent of the ones in which we could draw a conclusion, showed a measurable difference between the treatment of testers who were similarly qualified and for similar housing. Given an average housing search of two to five inquiries that we might all make, home seekers who are racial and ethnic minorities are virtually certain to encounter housing discrimination whether or not they are ever aware of it.

Secondly, housing discrimination, when identified, can often be corrected with evidence provided through housing testing and claimants who are willing to pursue the resolution of complaints. Based on our complaints received in the last 2 years, we have handled 101 actual cases alleging rental, sales, or lending discrimination. Seventy-two of those 101 cases have been resolved in favor of the claimants, resulting in payments to those claimants of just over $80,000. In addition, [remedies] have also included fair housing training to housing professionals for many of the firms involved in these complaints. These are significant corrections in discriminatory housing policies and practices. So my point today is that housing discrimination exists and also that it can be corrected.[10]

Webber summarized for the Advisory Committee that the problems in housing discrimination are fundamental, persistent, and pervasive. Individual successes do not add up to a solved problem. A level of denial operates in the community, and if housing is not a problem for white people, it is simply not an important problem. Webber asserted that there needs to be an acknowledgment that discrimination in housing exists, and it holds the entire community back from realizing its potential.[11]

Webber concluded her testimony with reflections on the support for equal housing opportunity from local officials:

We are fortunate, however, to work with the support of local units of government, housing and lending leaders, and a large membership of individuals and organizations who share our commitment to housing opportunities. The more that we are able to publicize fair housing issues, including the kind of hearings that you are holding today, the more we find an intolerance, a healthy intolerance of illegal discrimination growing in the community. We find that's a healthy factor and we believe that sort of a shared intolerance can be a force to unify Grand Rapids across racial lines rather than to divide its residents.[12]

[10] Testimony of Lee Webber before the Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI, pp. 106–08, (hereafter referred to as Grand Rapids Transcript).

[11] Ibid., p. 21.

[12] Ibid., p. 9.

3 Employment

In the labor market, by whatever measuring standard, minorities and particularly African Americans in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are in an inferior economic position relative to whites. Consider:

1. Minorities, particularly African Americans, have higher rates of unemployment than whites; the unemployment rate for whites in 1993 was 4.9 percent; the minority unemployment rate was 15.6 percent. (*See section 1 of this chapter, The Unemployment Rate.*)

2. Minorities are concentrated in the lower paying and less desirable positions in comparison to whites; African Americans and Latinos find themselves concentrated in service worker and clerical jobs, and significantly underrepresented in the managerial jobs and the blue-collar crafts. (*See section 2 of this chapter, Occupations.*)

3. Minorities have significantly lower per capita income and lower levels of educational attainment: the per capita income for whites is $15,153, for minorities it is $8,086; one-third of minorities over the age of 25 in Kent County do not have a high school diploma, 18 percent of whites do not have a high school diploma. (*See section 3 of this chapter, Education and Income.*)

4. Nearly 95 percent of those employed in Kent County rely on private vehicles to get to work; 30 percent of minority households have no vehicle, making them much more dependent upon public transportation for employment opportunities. (*See section 4 of this chapter, Transportation.*)

The Grand Rapids MSA includes the four counties of Allegan, Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa. The total population of the MSA is 937,891. Similar to Grand Rapids, it is a predominantly white population, 831,437 (88.6 percent) of the MSA residents. Among the 106,454 (11.4 percent) minority residents, African Americans are the largest group, 63,232 residents (6.7 percent); there are 29,149 (3.1 percent) Latinos, and Asians and American Indians total 14,073 (1.5 percent).

TABLE 3.1
Grand Rapids MSA, Population by Minority Group, 1990

	Total	Percent
Total population	937,891	100.0
White	831,437	88.6
African American	63,232	6.7
Latino	29,149	3.1
Other races	14,073	1.5
Total minority	106,454	11.4

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.
Note: Latinos are included in total minority, but not in racial groups.

Unemployment

The labor force is the number of all employed and unemployed individuals. Individuals are considered *employed* if they are 16 years of age or older and (1) are in the armed forces; (2 did any work at all as paid employees in the survey week; (3) worked at their own business or farm; (4) worked 15 hours or more during the survey week as unpaid workers in an enterprise run by family members; or (5) spent the survey week absent from work because of illness, bad weather, vacation, or some personal reason.[1]

[1] U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Technical Documentation Summary Tape File 3 on CD–ROM, pp. B5–6.

TABLE 3.2
Grand Rapids MSA., Labor Force Status by Minority Group,1993

	Labor force	Pct.	Employed	Pct.	Unemployed	Pct.	Rate
Total population	515,346	100.0	485,850	100.0	29,496	100.0	5.7
White	474,107	92.0	451,061	92.8	23,046	78.1	4.9
Af. American	27,002	5.2	22,065	4.5	4,937	16.7	18.3
Latino	13,539	2.6	12,012	2.5	1,527	5.2	11.3
Other races	14,237	2.8	12,724	2.6	1,513	5.1	10.6
Total minority	41,239	8.0	34,789	7.2	6,450	21.9	15.6

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Note: Latinos are included in total minority, but not in racial groups.

Unemployed individuals are people who are 16 years of age or older, did not work at all during the survey week, were available for work, and were (1) looking for work during the last 4 weeks, (2) waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off, (3) had a job to which they were going to report in 30 days, or (4) would have been looking for work if they had not been ill.[2]

The unemployment rate alone may not present an accurate picture of the labor market situation. For example, when the unemployment rate is calculated, people are considered employed if they did any work for pay during the survey week. Thus, the unemployment rate does not distinguish between full- and part-time work. A person working only 20 hours a week is considered to be as fully employed as a person working 40 hours a week.

Another problem with the unemployment rate is *underemployment*. The difficulty stems from the formal definition of employment. Consider a trained teacher working as a janitor, or a trained technician working as a short-order cook. No consideration is given for the worker who is employed but has skills for a higher level job. To the extent that *underemployment* exists, the unemployment rate understates the true amount of unemployment.

The formal definition of an unemployed individual may also be misleading. Frequently, after a number of months or perhaps years, of looking unsuccessfully for a job, a worker may become frustrated and simply stop looking. Such people are not counted either in the number of workers employed or in the labor force, because they are not actively seeking work. Because these workers, whom labor economists describe as *discouraged workers*, are not counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate can be considered an understating the true level of unemployment.

Despite problems with the unemployment rate as an accurate gauge of employment opportunity, the unemployment rate for all minorities is nearly three times that of whites in the Grand Rapids MSA. Data from 1993 show minorities in the Grand Rapids MSA having an unemployment rate of 15.6 percent, compared to a 4.9 percent rate for whites. For African Americans, the employment picture is even more stark. In 1993, African Americans had an unemployment rate of 18.3 percent, nearly 4 times the unemployment rate of whites.

Occupations

Not only do minorities in the Grand Rapids MSA have significantly higher rates of unemployment than whites, but employed minorities are concentrated in the lower occupational sectors. One index of occupational status is the EEO–1 report, a classification of all jobs into nine broad categories: (1) officials and managers, (2) professionals, (3) technicians, (4) sales workers, (5) clerical and office workers, (6) craft workers, (7) operatives, (8) laborers, and (9) service workers. An employer information EEO–1 survey is conducted annually under the authority of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

[2] Ibid.

TABLE 3.3
Occupational Attachment of the Civilian Labor Force, 1990, by Minority Group and EEO–1Category

	White	African Am.	Am. Indian	Asian	Latino
1. Officials and managers	48,506	1,301	170	277	511
	95.5%	2.6%	0.3%	0.5%	1.0%
	11.2%	5.3%	7.2%	7.3%	4.1%
2. Professionals	51,711	1,896	103	365	483
	94.8%	3.5%	0.2%	0.7%	0.9%
	11.9%	7.7%	2.7%	9.7%	3.9%
3. Technicians	13,139	492	47	139	279
	93.2%	3.5%	0.3%	1.0%	2.0%
	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%	3.7%	2.2%
4. Sales workers	52,137	1,649	207	407	794
	94.4%	3.0%	0.4%	0.7%	1.4%
	12.0%	6.7%	8.9%	10.8%	6.3%
5. Clerical and office workers	65,374	3,100	242	303	1,114
	93.2%	4.4%	0.3%	0.4%	1.6%
	15.1%	12.6%	10.3%	8.0%	8.9%
6. Craft workers	55,325	1,714	325	348	1,427
	93.5%	2.9%	0.5%	0.6%	2.4%
	12.7%	6.9%	13.9%	9.2%	11.4%
7. Operatives	65,819	6,283	596	1,061	3,638
	85.0%	8.1%	0.8%	1.4%	4.7%
	15.2%	25.4%	25.5%	28.1%	29.0%
8. Laborers	19,827	1,662	154	231	1,257
	85.7%	7.2%	0.7%	1.0%	5.4%
	4.6%	6.7%	6.6%	6.1%	10.0%
9. Service workers	54,080	5,838	430	562	1,902
	86.0%	9.3%	0.7%	0.9%	3.0%
	12.5%	23.6%	18.4%	14.9%	15.2%
10. No EEO category	8,492	773	66	79	1,137
	80.4%	7.3%	0.6%	0.7%	10.8%
	1.9%	3.2%	2.8%	2.1%	9.1%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Fumished by: Michigan Employment Security Commission, Information and Reports Section.
Note: The first line for each category is the total number of individuals. The second line is the group's percentage of the total occupation's total. The third line is the percentage of the group in the occupational category. The racial group Latinos is included in total minority, but not in racial groups.

All private employers subject to the provision of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, as amended, with 100 or more employees and all employers with Federal contracts and 50 more or more employees are required to report their employment by race and gender in the nine categories to the Joint Reporting Committee.[3] EEO–1 categories divide the work force into two sectors, the white-collar sector and the blue-collar sector. In both sectors in the Grand Rapids MSA minorities are: (1) underrepresented in the higher categories, and (2) overrepresented in the lower categories. For example, in the highest category of the white-collar sector, officials and managers, 95.5 percent of these positions are held by whites,

[3] The Joint Reporting Committee (EEO–1) jointly represents the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contracts Compliance Programs (OFCCP), U.S. Department of Labor. The data data collected from the EEO–1 reports are used by the EEOC and the OFCCP in carrying out their enforcement responsibilities.

though they are 88.9 percent of the population. African Americans, who are 6.7 percent of the MSA populace, hold 2.6 percent of these jobs, and Latinos who are 3 percent of the population have 1.0 percent of these positions. Moreover, African Americans and Latinos are underrepresented in *every* white-collar category relative to their population.

In the blue-collar sector, craft worker is the highest skilled and highest paying category. Again, whites hold 93.5 percent of these positions, though they are 88.9 percent of the population. African Americans and Latinos hold 2.9 percent and 2.4 percent of these jobs, though they are 6.7 percent and 3.1 percent of the population. In the lowest blue-collar category, service worker, whites hold 86.0 percent of these jobs, a rate below their population rate; while African Americans hold 9.3 percent of these jobs, a higher rate than their population rate.

Additionally, minorities who are in the labor force find themselves clustered into the lowest paying job categories. Among all African Americans in the labor force in white-collar occupations in the Grand Rapids MSA, just 5.3 percent are officials and managers while 12.6 percent are clerical and office workers. Similarly, in the blue-collar sector, 6.9 percent of all minorities are in the skilled trades, i.e., craft workers, while nearly one-fourth, 23.6 percent, are service workers, the job category with the most menial jobs and the lowest compensation. Approximately 4 out of 10 minorities who are in the labor force work in the lowest paying occupations of the work force.

Education and Income

If education is a predictor of earnings, then the educational attainment of minorities, and African Americans in particular, is a partial cause for the disparities observed in per capita income. In Kent County, the per capita income for whites is $15,153. Per capita for minorities is half that of whites: African American per capita income is $8,079, American Indian per capita income is $8,805,. Latino per capita income is $7,200, and Asian American per capita income is $10,142.

In Kent County, among persons 25 years of age and older, one-third of African Americans, 34.3 percent, do not have a high school diploma, and less than 10 percent, 8.3 percent, have a bachelor's degree. The education picture is similar for American Indians; 29.7 percent do not have a high school diploma, and 11.1 percent have graduated from college. Among African Americans, fewer than 1,000 individuals have a graduate or professional degree, 2.9 percent of the adult population. The rate of graduate education is similar for American Indians; 2.4 percent of the adult population holds a graduate or professional degree.

TABLE 3.4
Per Capita Income by Race, Kent County

Group	Per capita income
White	$15,153
Black	$8,079
Latino	$7,200
American Indian	$8,805
Asian or Pacific Islander	$10,142

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.
Note: Income in 1990 dollars.

Among Asian Americans, the education levels at the extremes are bifurcated. One-third, 33.2 percent, do not hold a high school diploma, while nearly 30 percent, 28.3 percent, have graduated from college. In addition, 10 percent of the adult Asian community holds a graduate or professional degree. The connection between education and occupation is observed by noting that Asian Americans, though less than 1 percent of the population, hold 9.7 percent of the area's professional positions. However, Asians, despite their education achievements, are still underrepresented in management, holding less than one-half of one percent of all officials and managers jobs.

Compared to the more than 30 percent of minority adults without a high school diploma, more than 80 percent of whites over the age of 25 have at least a high school diploma; the rate of those whites without a high school diploma is 18.1 percent. The rate of college education among whites is similarly much higher than that of African Americans and American Indians, but lower than that of the area's Asian American population. Twenty-one percent, 21.7, of whites have a bachelor's degree, graduate degree, and/or a professional degree, and nearly 7 percent of the adult white population, 6.7 percent, has a graduate or professional degree.

TABLE 3.5
Race by Educational Attainment, Kent County, Persons 25 Years and Over

	Number	Percent
White		
Less than H.S. diploma	50,288	18.1
High school graduate	88,048	31.6
Some college, no degree	57,071	20.5
Associate degree	22,598	8.1
Bachelor's degree	41,759	15.0
Grad. or professional degree	18,825	6.7
African American		
Less than H.S. diploma	6,741	34.3
High school graduate	5,837	29.7
Some college, no degree	4,185	21.3
Associate degree	1,261	6.4
Bachelor's degree	1,058	5.4
Grad. or professional degree	578	2.9
American Indian		
Less than H.S. diploma	435	29.7
High school graduate	481	32.9
Some college, no degree	331	22.6
Associate degree	55	3.7
Bachelor's degree	127	8.7
Grad. or professional degree	35	2.4
Asian or Pacific Islander		
Less than H.S. diploma	758	33.2
High school graduate	420	18.4
Some college, no degree	320	14.1
Associate degree	140	6.1
Bachelor's degree	418	18.3
Grad. or professional degree	228	9.9

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.

Transportation

The opportunity for minorities to have employment or to apply for a job can be dependent upon transportation. Employment opportunities that are away from minority communities and unserved by public transportation may in reality be inaccessible to minorities. The problem may be circular: a vehicle is needed to obtain and hold employment; employment is needed to acquire a vehicle.

In Kent County, some sort of private vehicle is used by 93 percent of the work force for getting to work. This includes individuals who drive alone and carpool. According to the census survey, less than 2 percent of the population, 1.4 percent, use public transportation to get to work. Among those, bus is the most common carrier, 98.7 percent, with rail and ferry being the other public modes of transportation.

Minorities, particularly African American households, are much more likely to be without vehicles. Twenty-seven percent of minority households in the Kent County area own no vehicle. Among African American households, 29.6 percent have no vehicle. In contrast, only 6 percent of white households do not own a vehicle.

Rabbi Albert Lewis from Temple Emanuel addressed the issue of public transportation. He noted that as more individuals are being forced off welfare rolls and into the work force, the public transportation service in Grand Rapids is being decreased.

TABLE 3.6
Vehicle Ownership by Race and Means of Transportation to Work, Kent County

Group	No vehicle (% of all HHs)
White	6.2
Black	29.6
American Indian	19.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.5
Means of transportation to work	**% of all workers**
Drive or carpool	92.7
Public transportation	1.4
Walk	2.6
Other/work at home	3.3

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A.

As western Michigan continues to grow and to expand, the population of the area will become much more diversified. We will have an increasing number of minorities in the area. People will need more and more public transportation. Public transportation is not being increased; public transportation is being decreased. Fees are being increased. People on welfare are required to go out and to seek jobs, but if they do not have transportation, then we simply perpetuate an underclass of people. I do not see a sensitivity in the area dealing with those issues.[4]

Testimony to the Advisory Committee

Several presenters commented at the community forum about equal employment opportunity for minorities. One panel was specifically constituted to hear from the business community itself. Members of that panel included: Bob Woodrick, president and CEO of D&W Foods,[5] Mary Jo Kuhlman, representing Stewart Ray, owner and president of Burger King of Western Michigan, and Lynette Ferrell, vice president of Small Business of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce. The Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce is a membership-based organization with approximately 3,500 members, employing nearly 160,000 persons, in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Woodrick told the Advisory Committee there is a strong sense of denial about the existence of racism in Grand Rapids. Most whites in the community are unconscious about the issue of race, and this lack of awareness is among many whites of good will and serves to perpetuate the problem. He also maintained that the political, religious, and business leadership in Grand Rapids has ignored the issue, at a time when what is needed is an open, honest community dialogue on the issue of race.

Grand Rapids is no better or no worse than a lot of other cities, villages and townships in this country. . .as it pertains to the subject of racism. . . . I [believe] there is a strong sense of denial [about racism] in Grand Rapids. Most white people are very unconscious about these issues, and the real tragedy of that is that this unaware racism is among many whites of good will. There is no open, honest, and meaningful dialogue on this subject. From my experience everytime the term racism comes up, people run for cover, and they go to great lengths sometimes to avoid using the word racism. That is part of the problem that we have here in Grand Rapids.

I also feel that the leadership here in Grand Rapids, whether it be political, corporate, educational, and religious, if they can put this issue to the bottom half of the agenda, that is where they will put it. There is very little effort being made by our leaders to acknowledge this issue, and even less effort in trying to eradicate it or develop programs dealing with the issue. The black and the white communities here in Grand Rapids are the separate communities totally. One can go to social and cultural functions in this city, sporting events, res-

[4] Testimony of Rabbi Albert Lewis before the Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 80 (hereafter referred to as Grand Rapids Transcript).

[5] D & W Food Centers is a 24-store grocery chain in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. The stores employ approximately 1,000 individuals.

taurants and see very few people of color at any of these events. . . . In 1996 during a school board election, there were bumper stickers and lawn signs that appeared that had a racially charged message; they stated, "Vote Right, Vote White."

I know there are certain efforts by the academic community here dealing with diversity, but it is geared primarily towards students. . . . I question whether you are going to really ever accomplish anything if you don't deal with the adults as well as the children.

Within my own company, we feel that if by addressing just diversity and not the racism we are never going to get the job done. . . . In fact, we have a saying in our company which is: "advocating diversity without acknowledging racism is like embracing religion without faith." You absolutely have to deal with the racism issue if we are ever going to get to where this community, this country, this society should be.

We have a very weak transportation system here. Between the zoning regulations that go on in the suburbs and the lack of transportation, a message could be sent that these outlying communities do not desire or want people who are different. I am not saying that is their intention, but that is the message that could be sent.

From my own personal experience, within my own company, I can definitely say that racism is alive and well. I say that because we have incidents where certain customers will not accept the change out of the hand of some of our cashiers who are of color, and some of our store directors have been told that they do not want certain persons handling their food or packing their groceries. We have had telephone calls that have said our stores are getting too dark. This sends a message and a signal that we do have a problem in this community.

There are, though, groups of individuals coming together to discuss the issues of racism. . . . One is the Institute for the Healing of Racism, which was founded by Nathan Rutstein. We have. . . a couple of individuals in our company who spend half their time working in the community. . . . I can support and feel very good about President Clinton when he said what we need is a national dialogue on race. I think that is what we need to do in this community.[6]

Kuhlman told the Advisory Committee that Burger King of Western Michigan is typical of most businesses in that it is concerned with its ability to sustain business in the long term. If the community is not healthy, tomorrow's work force will not be productive and tomorrow's clientele will not be prosperous. Racism is part of the company's concern with the community's health, particularly with respect to young minority adults who are caught in a cycle of discrimination, minimum wage poverty, poor education, separation from the larger society, an absence of hope, and no signs of belonging. When the Burger King of Western Michigan corporation looks at racism, it sees it as a threat to the company's business. So, as a company, Burger King of Western Michigan has committed itself to addressing beliefs, practices, and infrastructure that reinforce racism.

Burger King of Western Michigan is an employer whose 2,500 employee work force is predominantly young people with an average turnover rate of 100 percent. Our work force reflects a cross section of our community. Typical of most businesses, it is concerned with how do we sustain a business long term if we do not have a community that is healthy? So when we speak of racism, we see the effects it has on our business and on our young people. We feel that today we must address the beliefs, practices, and infrastructure that reinforces racism, so that tomorrow's upcoming work force [is productive].

Each of us is born with a right to human dignity, but as I look around life I find myself asking where is that right for the African American, the Hispanic, the North American Indian, and other nonwhite groups?. . . Recently the editorial page printed a pictorial commentary depicting a child carrying a decrepit brick building on his back; the building's name was "inner-city public schools." The caption to the picture was "the black child's burden." As we visualize that picture, the building could easily have read your work place, health care, neighborhood, employment.

I work with young adults that are caught as a result of racism in a cycle of discrimination, minimum wage poverty, less education, disengaged from the larger society, with a presence of drugs and crime, in an absence of hope and no signs of belonging. Our systems are no longer effective for people to be self-supporting and part of a larger community. Our youth are weary and restless from seeing a lack of response from the decision makers of today.

As a society we have failed. We cannot afford to lose our youth to the effects of racism. They are our work force, our customers, our resource, and most importantly they are our children. What hope can we offer? Breaking the racial strife should not be one of our youths' burdens.
As a business, Burger King has tried many ways and continues to explore what can we do to change this

[6] Grand Rapids Transcript, pp. 98–104.

cycle. Some efforts have been on a small scale; some on a larger scale. One effort has been a charter high school.[7]

The charter school has a very broad perspective. One of the primary goals for the students at the school is employment opportunity. In addition, a mentor is provided to each student so that they not only find and identify their career path, but also. . .they are helped in identifying what is their dream so that they are prepared for the next step in life.[8]

Ferrell told the Advisory Committee the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce has a diversity council made up of CEOs of major employers in the area to address the issue of racism. The programs include putting an emphasis on the management of human resources and small group activity with dialogue on race issues. The chamber is 109 years old, and this present initiative on race is the first time in its history that the subject of racism and race relations has been a major focus.

Two years ago [the Chamber of Commerce] formed a diversity council made up of CEOs of major employers in our membership. The mission of the diversity council is to promote inclusive employee community. Our motivation for addressing the issue of diversity is our core value that it is absolutely the right thing to do. The diversity programs are based on the presumption that if a group in an organization does not feel empowered, that organization will suffer.

Race is the one issue of diversity we believe to be the priority. Our approach to this issue has two major components. The first is the development of a diversity management system. This is a system of managing human resources that recognizes that this discipline is as equally as important a success indicator as traditional measures such as profitability and quality.

The second major component is the employers' Coalition for Healing Racism. This is a small group activity that focuses on dialogue. The goal is to develop relationships of trust and understanding among multiethnic groups. I am inundated daily with types of [racist] comments, which are just an extreme level of mistrust.

Our chamber is 109 years old and this present initiative on race is the first time at an annual meeting that the subject of race has been the major focus. So the [chamber] has come quite a long way in embracing the [race] issue.[9]

Woodrick, who is active with the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and was a sponsor of its initiative on race, told the Advisory Committee what prompted the chamber's interest.

A few years ago the Hudson Institute issued a report which stated that by the year 2000, 85 percent of the entry level work force would be minorities. That same year I was in New York at a conference and the president of Agostino Supermarkets, which is a chain in Manhattan, gave a readout to the group about the demographics of his work force; it was 14 percent white. The reality is that there is a business reason to get involved in this issue. We have to begin creating the right culture within our present work force for the entry of minorities into the work force.

I talked to the president of the chamber and told him I think the time had come for the chamber to take a position on this issue. The leadership of the community has to come forward and take a position on racism. If they do that, it makes it easier for others to get involved. Most people avoid this issue. Even within the chamber, we talked for 2 or 3 years before we finally got them to do something. Racism is a very volatile issue. There is fear [about this topic]. . . . Most white people, in my opinion, haven't the foggiest notion in the world what it is like to be black in America. From my experience, they don't want to know, because if they did there would be pain, shame, and embarrassment. Personally I'm at a complete loss trying to understand how this society, in good conscience, could rationalize this disease for all these decades.

We are the only chamber in this country dealing with the racism. Everybody's talking diversity, but we have a coalition for the healing of racism. . . .

What really disturbs me more than anything else, and what I find most confusing, is the religious leadership on this issue. If there's any component of our society who should be a drum major for this issue, it should be the religious community. We have 650 churches in this community. We are a religious community, and from a theological standpoint there are no differences on this issue. I am at a complete loss as to why the religious community does not put as much emphasis on the issue of racism as they do on homosexuality. . .and women in the clergy. You know exactly where they stand on those issues, and if. . .they would only bring that zest and fire to this issue we would be a lot further along than we are.[10]

[7] Ibid., pp. 114–19.

[8] Ibid., p. 124.

[9] Ibid., pp. 120–22.

[10] Ibid., pp. 114 and 121.

4 Public Safety

Hate Crime and Ethnic Intimidation

In April of 1994 Governor John Engler (R) responded to reports of increased hates and violence in the State and asked the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Department of Civil Rights to establish a bias crime response task force. The task force was a broad-based group representing populations victimized by bias crime incidents, as well as agencies and government units that offer various related services. The Governor's original charge to the commission listed several objectives, which included: (1) establishing a statewide network to deal with hate violence incidents, (2) analyzing data collected from hate violence incidents to ascertain Michigan trends, (3) determining future educational and preventive strategies and developing appropriate evaluation tools, (4) working with the legislature and civil rights agencies to deal with issues raised by hate violence incidents and their perpetrators, and (5) establishing policies for preventive strategies.[1]

The task force used the following definition of bias crime: "Bias crime is any act of intimidation, harassment, physical force or threats of physical force directed against any person or family or any property or advocates motivated either in whole or in part by hostility because of race, color, ethnic background, national origin, religion, and disability or sexual orientation, real or perceived, with the intent of causing fear and intimidation or of defining the free exercise or enjoyment of any rights or privileges secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States or the State of Michigan whether or not performed under color of law."[2]

Ingrid Scott-Weekley told the Advisory Committee that hate crime and hate group activity were real problems in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

> We see that the presence of hate groups are on the rise in our particular community. We have groups here such as the Neo Nazi party, the Aryan Woman's League, Northern Hammer Skins, and the Knights of KKK. There is a disturbing trend where we see articles in the newspaper about the KKK. There was one in the Grand Rapids presently, and I also have a copy of one that appeared in the Middleville newspaper, depicting a kinder and gentler Klan, in which there are Klan members stating that they are not violent; they are not racist; they are committed to separation of the races, but certainly not racism and violence. This [is a] misportrayal of the group in order to increase recruitment and make that organization more attractive to those members of our society who are susceptible to [its message].[3]

Michael Dettmer, U.S. Attorney, Western District of Michigan, also attested to hate crime incidents in western Michigan.

> There have been a few hate crimes. We have had a number of potential church arson cases, none of which we thought fell under the [civil rights] statute. We have involved ourselves and want to involve ourselves in ethnic intimidation cases. There have been crosses burned on people's lawns in Holland. We oversee those crimes and want to make a Federal presence to ensure cases are being handled with ability and integrity by local law enforcement agencies. . . . We have in our office at any one time about 600 pending cases, and we generate probably 400 convictions a year. I am not aware of a [hate crime] conviction that we've had in the last year.[4]

Rick Smith, FBI special agent in the Grand Rapids office, told the Advisory Committee that some of the areas the FBI investigates include various types of civil rights violations, which would include hate crimes, and certain incidents of racial and religious discrimination. Nation-

[1] Report of the Bias Crime Response Task Force to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, May 1996, p. 1, presented as an exhibit to the Advisory Committee by Richard Garcia, community forum meeting, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI (hereafter referred to as Bias Crime Report).

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

[3] Testimony of Ingrid Scott-Weekley, Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 12 (hereafter referred to as Grand Rapids Transcript).

[4] Ibid., p. 67.

wide, about 28 percent of the crimes that are investigated by the FBI are considered civil rights violations. Smith told the Advisory Committee that in the last 2½ years allegations of hate crime made to the Grand Rapids office have not increased.[5]

The Governor's task force determined that an established uniform method for the collection of data on hate violence incidents was not in place in the State. Testimony from several presenters supported this finding. The Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 requires the Department of Justice to acquire data on crimes that manifest prejudice based upon race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability. In the 7 years or so that that statute has been on the books, only about 60 percent of law enforcement agencies nationwide comply with it. In Michigan in 1995, 480 local law enforcement agencies reported under the act, and they reported 405 hate crimes or crimes that would fall under the definition of that statute.[6]

Jaime Malone, editor of *El Hispano News*, told the Advisory Committee that people who have bias against minorities have become sophisticated in their discrimination, so that it is sometimes difficult to discern whether an incident is really motivated by bias.

> One of the things that happens is that people in the [minority] community do not know how to differentiate hate crime from other [criminal acts]. The other thing, though, we find in this area is that people are learning a very sophisticated way how to discriminate. They have learned how to really make [minorities] feel [inferior] without saying it. . . It is well done.[7]

Richard Garcia said the statistics received by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights come from the State police as reported to them by local law enforcement agencies.

> The data we receive comes directly from the Michigan State Police Department. The Michigan State Police collect their data from not only different Michigan State Police positions, but also local authority. One of the problems is that local authorities may not know what a hate crime is. . . . Now if a local agency, such as an agency here in Grand Rapids, is not filling out forms and is not doing what it is they're supposed to be do, [the State police] won't get [accurate hate crime] information.[8]

The difficulty in recognizing and determining an accurate count of hate crime incidents was illustrated in data presented to the Advisory Committee from the Grand Rapids Police Department and the Grand Rapids Urban League. The police department reported 8 hate crime incidents in 1996 and 3 incidents in the first quarter of 1997. The incidents and victim groups for those 11 incidents in that 15-month period were: 3 acts of intimidation (victim's group: black, black, white); 3 acts of vandalism (victim's group: black, black, white); 4 acts of assault (victim's group: gay, Asian, black, white); and 1 robbery (victim's group: white).[9]

In contrast to the police department's finding of 11 incidents in a 15-month period, the Grand Rapids Urban League coordinated a project in the fall of 1992 to learn of the extent of hate crime. Over a 6-month period, several organizations, social services agencies, and enforcement organizations in the greater Grand Rapids area compiled data on hate crime and hate group activity. The group reported 46 hate crime incidents: 8 distributions of hate literature, 15 verbal harassments over the telephone, 3 acts of physical violence, 5 acts of property damage or vandalism, 14 acts of public harassment, and 1 act of intimidation.[10]

Jorge Rivas, executive for the Office of Community Services in the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, told the Committee about recent egregious hate crime and hate group activity in west Michigan.

> In the last couple of years the Klu Klux Klan has come four times to Michigan; one time to Grand Rapids. . . .
>
> Last year two Vietnamese went to a local bar in Grand Rapids. One was sitting on a table and the other one was dancing on the floor. Without any provocation or any verbal argumentation, a white

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[5] Ibid., p. 63.

[6] Ibid., p. 52.

[7] Ibid., p. 196.

[8] Ibid., p. 51.

[9] Grand Rapids Police Department, Hate Crime Report, presented to the Michigan Advisory Committee by James Ferris, community forum, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI.

[10] Grand Rapids Urban League, Bias/Hate Incident Report, presented to the Michigan Advisory Committee by Lawrence H. Borom, community forum, June 25, 1997, Grand Rapids, MI.

teenager came to the table where the Vietnamese was sitting down, and without any provocation he hit the Vietnamese person. He went into a deep coma and 4 hours later he died.

Recently two schools, one from Sparta which is in Kane County and one from Wyoming, went to a field trip in the Humbolt Park Zoo here in Grand Rapids. One of the schools did not have any minorities enrolled in the group that came to the zoo. The other school had two African Americans. When they converged in the zoo in the park, some of the white students started to call the African American students all kinds of names and eventually a fight started among the students.

In addition, the department has observed that Hispanics, especially migrants, have been suffering a lot because they come from another State, or they are from another country many times. When they come to work, sometimes they are harassed. Recently, a group of white teenagers went to the farm camps and broke the windshields of the cars of the migrants. . . . Recently, there have been other incidents.[11]

Community Policing

Community policing with respect to minority communities involves two distinct concerns. The first concern is the level and quality of service provided to the minority community. The second concern is the use of excessive force by the police. Representatives from the Grand Rapids Police Department addressed the department's response to both issues, while others making Community policing with respect to minority communities presentations offered their assessment of police services in Grand Rapids.

Police Services in the Minority Community

Mark Harold, commander of the staff services bureau of Grand Rapids Police Department, discussed the general philosophy of the police department and its new community oriented approach, and the department's service to the minority community:

During the past several months the Grand Rapids Police Department initiated a major program designed to more efficiently identify and respond to neighborhood problems in our community. . . . To achieve the goal [the department] works directly with communities for the purpose of creating neighborhood safety. This includes properly and courteously responding to requests for police services, identifying and correcting the apparent causes of criminal activity or reported neighborhood problems, and encouraging people to accept responsibility for themselves and their neighborhood. Our new philosophy is to respond to every problem, even if it is not police related.

At this time two officers of the community affairs unit are assigned to work with all of the neighborhoods and the business district. Their sole responsibility is to become the link or liaison between the neighborhood and the department. The responsibilities of the officers are, for example, to attend neighborhood meetings and to work directly with staff volunteers from the association to prevent or control neighborhood problems.

In the past, traditionally police departments have done what they felt was important. We are trying to rearrange our philosophy to respond to the individual concerns of the community and the neighborhood. One of the key things the department has done is a neighborhood survey program.... In July of last year, the department [began to] survey residents in the city. Each officer has to go out on each block of the city and conduct surveys so that the entire city will be surveyed once a year. The department is getting direct input from the community as to what they want its police department to do. Then the department tries to respond as best it can to the community needs.

It is not an easy thing to do, changing the orientation and philosophy of a police department like this. What the chief of police is doing is an extremely customer-driven approach to resolving problems in the neighborhood and hopefully alleviate some of the problems pertaining to race that are going on in the City of Grand Rapids. [Along those lines], in February and March of 1997. . . the department conducted a diversity training program for all members of the Grand Rapids Police Department, including the chief.[12]

Excessive Force

James Ferris, lieutenant, Grand Rapids Police Department, discussed allegations of police misconduct, the handling of such cases by the department's internal affairs unit, and the City's civilian appeals board. In the 6-month period January 1997 to June 1997, 139 formal and 389 informal complaints have been made to the internal affairs unit. These include 10 complaints of excessive force. Three of those complaints have been appealed to the civilian review board.

[11] Grand Rapids transcript, pp. 206–07.

[12] Ibid., pp. 29–31.

TABLE 4.1
Complaints Made to GRPD Internal Affairs Unit

	Jan.-Dec. 1996	Jan.-June 1997
Formal complaints	154	139
Informal complaints	222	389
Referred to review board	N/A	3

Source: Grand Rapids Police Department.

Ferris told the Advisory Committee:

In 1996 the mayor appointed a committee. . .to conduct investigations into the allegations of police misconduct. As a result of meetings the committee felt it needed to recognize that some racism exists within the Grand Rapids area and other communities. As a result of that, a civilian appeals board was created, with the power to oversee a [police department] internal affairs complaint and the power to adjust or change or affirm that decision. The civilian appeals board consists of nine members, established as the reviewing agency; each city commissioner can nominate one member, and the mayor nominates three members

At this point the enforcement powers of the civilian appeals board are limited to the review of the actual complaint itself. If they affirm the decision that has already been made by the internal affairs unit, then that decision will stand. If they feel that it is not the proper decision and they either want to reverse it or change it, they can do that. If they reverse the decision that the internal affairs unit made, the power to determine the discipline still would reside with the police department through the chief of police and city manager.

The internal affairs unit of the Grand Rapids Police Department investigates all allegations of employee misconduct. The internal affairs unit. . .receives and investigate complaints and allegations regarding police officer misconduct. Complaints can be made directly to the internal affairs unit, the city attorney's office, or the department's labor relations bureau. The source of our complaints regarding employee misconduct may include verified citizen complaints, anonymous callers, fellow coworkers, supervisor and other documents which are generated as a result of our operation of our police department.

All our complaints receive appropriate investigation and for those that cannot be satisfactorily resolved by just speaking to the complainant, we fill out a complaint form that is sent to the individuals in a normal manner, outlining what their complaint is against the officer. When a final disposition is generated, the individual complainant is also sent a copy of that disposition as well.

Monitoring, weekly internal affairs investigations, and summaries are forwarded to the city attorney and the labor relations director at different times during the year or whenever it may be deemed necessary. The chief of police, the city attorney, and the labor relations director, in addition to other city staff, will get together when deemed appropriate and we meet periodically to review the police misconduct complaints and to make any changes, and we also prepare an annual statistical summary for the chief of police regarding the total number of complaints that we've had during the year.

So far in 1997 the department has received 139 formal complaints and 389 informal complaints. . . . This includes 10 allegations of excessive force. Last year, there were 154 formal complaints, 60 city attorney claims, and 4 Freedom of Information Act. There were 10 lawsuits; in addition, the department has what is referred to as procedural reviews, accidents, and other occurrences and the department had 222 of those.

As far as racial complaints, that would be a slur or anything of that nature, that would also be carried, but it wouldn't be carried under excessive force. It would be carried under a violation of the code. We have a manual of procedures and the manual of conduct, code 9.3 that says that you will not use any racial remarks or refer to any people in a derogatory manner, be it a police officer, citizen or anyone else. . . . The committee had found through a review conducted a few years ago that...the number of actual complaints, both formal and informal, which included allegations of racial misconduct as a primary or secondary feature was 3 percent, 11 of 438 formal complaints and 72 of 2,375 informal complaints for a 3-year period from 1993 through 1995.

So far in 1997 there have been three complaints that have gone to the civilian appeals board for review, and in one of those three complaints the disposition of the internal affairs unit was affirmed by that board after a complete review.[13]

The U.S. attorney and the FBI can also become involved in cases of police brutality. Complaints of police misconduct may be made with the local FBI by either the alleged victim or

[13] Ibid., pp. 24–46.

family members of the alleged victim. Once the FBI receives a police brutality complaint, the FBI has the responsibility to complete a preliminary investigation within 21 days. This includes a background investigation, criminal record searches, and other historical searches on the officer or officers against whom the allegations were. Once those reports are gathered together, one report is turned over to the local U.S. attorney's office and another goes to FBI headquarters and the civil rights unit of the U.S. Department of Justice. The decision to prosecute is not made locally, but by the individuals who have that responsibility in the civil rights department of the U.S. Department of Justice.[14]

Paul Mayhue, a county commissioner of Kent County, told the Advisory Committee that the issue of police brutality has been a constant problem for the African American community in Grand Rapids and the surrounding communities. He asserted that it was pressure from the African American community that forced the mayor to establish a civilian review board in the city.

A situation of excessive force and police brutality is a situation that centers on African Americans, and is a situation that is all over the community. Minorities in our community know that when we ride through East Grand Rapids and you are a black person, you are going to get stopped; black male or female, you're going to get stopped. Driving while black.

One of the situations [the minority community] decided [to address] is the situation of excessive force and police brutality.... In Kalamazoo, Michigan, three Grand Rapids police officers went there and harassed some African American people and subsequently beat them up. They were acquitted, let go free, because the press highlighted the fact that the people that were beat up had records. So, the three police officers got off.

That situation there propelled us in our communities to form a group called the West Michigan March Delegation. The West Michigan March Delegation began to work on the excessive force and police brutality issues in this community where those three officers, the same three officers that went to Kalamazoo, were doing harassment and brutalizing people in my district. Two of those officers were officers that drove an automobile up on a curb and rammed into a young man that was suspected of dealing drugs. Now mind you, this is not all police; we have a respect for some of the police in our community, and not all police in the minority community are guilty of doing these types of things.

So, we began to deal with this problem of excessive force and police brutality. We devised the idea that we wanted a citizen's review board, and we worked very diligently in trying to put this citizen's review board together. In January of 1996 we went to the city commission with a contingent of 40 to 50 people who gave testimony about various atrocities that had happened in the minority community dealing with police behavior. . .such as people being stopped, handcuffed, and their heads being banged on the sidewalk; people that were being kicked while handcuffed; and others just generally brutalized and cursed and treated in a really negative way. . . . There was a lot of public sentiment for a citizen's police review board; even the press sided with us. Finally the mayor and the three other commissioners got together and pushed it through with the opposition of three other commissioners. The civilian appeals board, however, is a weak, watered-down version of what we had initially went for; because the police chief still has the last say on it and he can appeal and turn anything down that he wants.

In tandem with that was the work of an attorney by the name of Joe Tooley. Joe had been working on a situation dealing with police seizure. . . . So the press went out and did a study and found that 687 people were stopped, their property cited, their money taken, but no arrest. And out of those 687 people, 84 were African American. . . There have been eight incidents within the past year and a half of people dying or hanging themselves in the Kent County jail. That needs to be looked into.[15]

Lawrence H. Borom, president of the Grand Rapids Urban League, also expressed the sentiment that many in the African American community feel the local police unnecessarily harass and badger them.

There is a sense here of frustration and helplessness and powerlessness among African American people. I talk about the sense of powerlessness in terms of the location of the Urban League here in Grand Rapids. It is in a southwest corner of the city that has had a great deal of gang activity, narcotics activity, and frequent brushes, young people particularly, with the police in the area. There is a very strong sentiment on the part of the many young people that. . .they are

[14] *See* testimony of Michael Dettmer and Rick Smith, Grand Rapids transcript, pp. 50–78.

[15] Grand Rapids transcript, pp. 130–38.

TABLE 4.2
Racial Composition of Grand Rapids Police Department

	Number	Percent	Pct. of city population
White	290	83	75
African American	32	9	18
Latino	11	3	5
American Indian	8	2	1
Asian Pacific Islander	9	2	1

Source: Grand Rapids Police Department.

harassed and taken advantage of by the police. We have had several complaints ourselves as an agency, and we have turned them over to the police.[16]

Richard Espinoza and Jaime Malone told the Advisory Committee of police misconduct directed toward individuals in the Latino community. Espinoza cited, in particular, the random stopping of Latino youths for no particular reason.

The thing I hear locally from my staff is that they see a lot of reports or incidents where young people, Hispanics in particular, are stopped [by the police] for no reason at all, just checking them out. . . . There is a lot of discrimination at the city level and by the police. The problems are common that come in to us. In many instances, the cases don't go to civil rights because when I threaten them, they stop what they are doing or they do what they have to do.[17]

Malone told the Committee that most cases of police misconduct are not reported.

I think that 80 percent [of police misconduct] is not being reported. . . . I know cases of Wyoming [city] police [harassment]. . . . I went up to the chief of police 3 months ago and I asked him why so many Hispanics were pulled over by the police. . . . He explained to me that at that time they were looking for some guys who had robbed a bank, and they were supposedly Hispanic, and that's why they were pulling over so many Hispanics. The bottom line is 80 percent [of police misconduct incidents] don't get [reported because] what can a Latino do?[18]

Diversity in Law Enforcement Agencies

In June 1997, the Grand Rapids Police Department had a total of 350 sworn officers. Sixty, 17 percent, are minorities, serving in a community that is 25 percent minority. There are 46 officers with the rank of sergeant or higher. Of those, 10, 22 percent, are minority. They include: 2 African American and 1 Latino lieutenants, and 5 African American, 1 American Indian, and 1 Asian American sergeants.

The increase in diversity in the Grand Rapids Police Department has only occurred in recent years. Mark Harold told the Advisory Committee that when he joined the department in 1984, there was only one minority supervisor in the department. Since that time, the numbers have gone up steadily.

In the U.S. attorney's office there are 30 assistant U.S. attorneys. Three, 10 percent, are minorities. They include one African American in the civil division, one Pacific Islander in the criminal division, and one American Indian. Jeffrey Davis, one of the minority assistant U.S. attorneys told the Advisory Committee why diversity is important for the office.

When the U.S. Attorney's office is working with communities, it needs to have a diverse group of people because different people bring different perspectives to the job that others cannot and I think that is critical as the office works with different communities.[19]

Dettmer, the U.S. attorney, agreed with Davis. He told the Advisory Committee he has the hiring power in this district. Hiring selec-

[16] Ibid., 158.

[17] Ibid., p. 184.

[18] Ibid., pp. 184–94.

[19] Ibid., p. 60.

tions are merit based, yet a conscious effort is made to seek minority representation in the office.[20]

Despite recent increases in minority representation in both the police department and the U.S. attorney's office, Jaime Malone was not persuaded that these agencies and other public agencies in the area were making a real legitimate effort to increase minority representation. He told the Advisory Committee:

> This is a country where we play legally the cat and mouse game. They say one thing and they do another thing. The FBI was here to meet with the community, and some of these people here today were at that meeting. The FBI doesn't have a black guy here, but that day they knew they were going to have blacks listening so they brought in a black person, so the community can see a black face. I met with the chief of police, and he explained that the police department was doing an academy for young kids in high school so they can find out exactly if they want to be in the police. So then I go up to the academy and find 60 kids; and I find one Hispanic and not one black. Hey, you say you really want [minorities], but you don't even try to get them. So the truth is it's somewhere down in the woods.[21]

[20] Ibid., p. 66.

[21] Ibid., p. 200.

5 Race Relations

Perspectives from Government Officials

Ingrid Scott Weekley is the director of the Grand Rapids Equal Opportunity Office. She opened her testimony with a statement from the Mayor of Grand Rapids, John H. Logie:

The Mayor of Grand Rapids wants to personally extend to you an official west Michigan welcome and to express the commitment of the city and certainly his administration in eradicating racism and discrimination and continuing to make strides in moving towards solutions which guarantee all members of our society and our community the opportunities, rights and privileges guaranteed by the Constitution.[1]

Weekley continued with her personal comments:

Grand Rapids is not unlike other cities of similar size and makeup in our country with racism, discrimination, segregation, economic and educational disparity present. Racism as an issue is alive and well and manifests itself regularly in a variety of ways.... In 1967 Grand Rapids experienced race riots, much like Watts and other cities throughout the country. After the riots efforts were made to implement positive change. Money poured in and programs were developed to address the many issues. Public housing was erected, dialogue occurred, affirmative action programs were implemented.

Now we find ourselves in 1997, 30 years later, in a community that although has changed some over the past three decades, has remained the same in many ways. There is still racial segregation. There is a growing frustration among the underclass and a gap continues to widen between the haves and have-nots. Many say that there's little or no differences between the status of minority and poor people today as compared to 30 years ago when our city erupted in violence. I think there are several factors which continue to contribute to the race and ethnic tensions that exist in our community.

One, I think that there still remains an attitude, particularly among many members of the white population, of denial, of indifference, of intolerance. A belief exists in [the white community] that "I did not contribute or play any part in the conditions of people of color; therefore, I have no responsibility." Two, the misconception that somehow affirmative action really does in fact mean excluding better qualified whites and hiring less qualified minorities and African Americans.

Many individuals do what I consider to be and many of us consider to be the politically correct thing. . . . People attend community events and pay lipservice to their commitment to eradicating racism and providing equal opportunity. But that is all we see, outward manifestations of commitment and very few groups actually working hard to affect the necessary change that is needed.

I can also say that there are many forces in Grand Rapids who are working to bring about change. We have groups like GRACE, we have the Citizens League who conducted a study on race relations, and out of that has come a lot of dialogue in workplaces throughout greater Grand Rapids. We do have many people in our community who are committed to resolving the issues and the tensions that exist.[2]

Jorge Rivas is the executive for the Office of Community Services in the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. He told the Committee:

I believe that there are still very significant and widespread kinds of problems. But, when you analyze what is happening in the last 20 years, I believe that there is some hope. I believe some [people] and some groups are doing [good things]. The Michigan Department of Civil Rights has taken a very strong stance in race and is working very hard to address these issues in the schools, colleges and universities, and police departments.

When I look back 20 years I can see that some advance has been made; however, much more needs to be done. The Department has been following carefully what is happening regarding race relations.[3]

Paul Mayhue is county commissioner, Kent

[1] Testimony of Ingrid Scott Weekley before the Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Grand Rapids, MI, June 25, 1997, p. 2 (hereafter cited as Grand Rapids Transcript).

[2] Ibid., pp. 8–10.

[3] Ibid., pp. 124–25.

County, 17th District. He has been a commissioner in Kent County for 10 years.

I've been here in the [Grand Rapids] community since I was about 4 or 5 years old. I can remember going out of my neighborhood and being called, "boogie nose." One got a lot of racial harassment for just walking out of our little area.

I believe that the good work of this Advisory Committee and the United States Civil Rights Commission, and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights as well as others, all other agencies and people committed—like the business people you heard from today—with all of our work, I think we've made real progress. I think that kind of progress we all should be proud of.

One of our fellow commissioners said at the last meeting that he felt that race relations was like a patient undergoing major surgery. I agreed with him, but I have a different perspective. When we hear these kinds of stories [of racist behavior], we should note that the patient is improving. Maybe 20 to 30 years ago that patient was in a coma; today I believe the patient is still critical, but at least in stable condition with the good work of people like yourself working for a cure.[4]

Perspectives from the Religious Community

Three representatives of major faiths spoke to the Advisory Committee on racism and race relations in the Grand Rapids area. They included Rabbi Albert Lewis, Temple Emanuel, Mike Wood, Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids, and Morris Greidanus,[5] First Christian Reformed Church.

Rabbi Albert Lewis, Temple Emanuel:

Having lived in the Grand Rapids area now for a little over 25 years, it is sometimes not clear to me: What is racism? What is the denial of reality? What is pure insensitivity, and what is irresponsibility? What is clear to me is that the final effort or the final effect is the same on the persons against whom or upon whom these actions are perpetrated.

At the same time, I am heartened when I watch what is happening through the Kent Intermediate School District, which has overall responsibility for all of the school districts in this area. They now have a diversity council. They are aware that there will be increasing numbers of Asian people, Hispanic people, African American people, Native American people coming into the area, and that we need to be proactive in being sensitive to the needs of those people, their students, their families and how we respond to this increased and diversified population.[6]

Michael Wood, the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids:

I [believe] it would be more honest and appropriate for me to speak out of my own personal experience. That means that the testimony I am going to offer the panel this morning is one of a racist.

Ten years ago if somebody asked me if I were a racist, I would have said, with some indignation, "no." I am convinced at this moment that if we were to ask 1,000 white folks if they were racist, they could be attached to a lie detector, say "no" and pass. I think that is the real problem. . .the denial and the ignorance that helps to perpetuate racism.

I would have been as apathetic and as uninformed as I was 10 years ago if it were not for my youngest daughter developing a friendship and a relationship with an African American male that produced two grandchildren. One of my coworkers in the office shared with me that he and his wife are just frightened by the prospect of having their daughter experience what our daughter did. I felt rage having my grandchildren described as somebody else's worse nightmare, but it is a part of the reasoning that I began to understand what racism is, how it wounds, how it destroys the very soul of the innocent.

I believe that racism is an illness. It is a pathology. I do not remember making a conscious decision to be a racist. I think some of the socioeconomic, psychological viruses that I came in contact with through my parents and my schools and my teachers and Michigan coaches and my ministers left me with prejudices and ignorance and insensitivity that wounded others by my indifference and ignorance and apathy. . . .[7]

The [Catholic] diocese is involving the schools in [racism awareness]. It is developing dialogues and facilitators with the idea that a geometric expansion of facilitation and trainers are going to be able to bring about dialogues that help change and elevate our awareness of the nature of the problem and the possibilities of a solution. In these. . .dialogues you have groups of 12 to 14 people meeting 3 hours at a time over a period of 8 weeks speaking about their

[4] Ibid., p. 145–46.

[5] Greidanus also represented the interfaith group GRACE, Grand Rapids Area Council on Ecumenism.

[6] Grand Rapids transcript, pp. 80–81.

[7] Ibid., pp. 83–84.

individual experiences of racism and the wounds and the suffering that's been a part of their personal experience. One can not hear those things and remain apathetic and indifferent and uncaring. It is not possible.

See, a part of the reason racism is able to perpetuate itself is the distances, the absence of relationships, the absence of dialogues of people not knowing each other. What the dialogues do is put people in front of each other in the same proximity. . .and that changes reality. The dialogues on racism enable. . .churches to begin to get in touch with the suffering that is a reality, and the dangers and the costs that are a part of racism, and the injustice that is a part of racism, and the poverty that is a part of racism.[8]

Morris Greidanus, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church and a board member of GRACE, Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism:

I think there is racial tension in Grand Rapids. It just waits for an incident like a police matter, or a personnel matter at the school board, to flare up. . . .The geography just works against us. We are living in [separation from each other] wondering what's going to happen. . . .

GRACE has developed, with community aid, racial justice institutes which supports healing racism. . . . We try to work on racism in ourselves and with others. The Grand Rapids Area for Ecumenism is the best ecumenical group I have ever seen in a city where I have served. Catholics are very active in it and Protestants and. . .there are some differences, but I think the cooperation is very good ethnically. But when we did the past session with black and white clergy, attendance wasn't great, not from black clergy though. So, probably there is some resentment on their part. There is loss of hope, that's obvious.

There are also some partnerships between. . .predominantly black and predominantly white churches. My own congregation has a very close partnership with Zion Missionary Baptist. So those are very good things and we're thankful for them in this community. I think there has also been some initiatives from Promise Keepers; . . . there's a racial reconciliation component that has certainly been very powerful and given some new energy.

We need to hear each other's stories and we need to get them down, and then we need to move ahead. Nelson Mandella said you've got to put the past behind you. . . . We need to hear how people have been mistreated by the police, by a car dealer, or by a superintendent. We need to hear that pain and we need to help them to work past it and find solutions.[9]

Perspectives from the Minority Communities

Those invited to make presentations from the minority communities included: Lawrence H. Borom, president of the Grand Rapids Urban League; Hazel R. Lewis, president of the NAACP Grand Rapids Branch; Walter Mathis, president of *Take Pride*, a newspaper focusing primarily on the African American community in Grand Rapids; Zoraida Sanchez, director of the Latin-American Services in Grand Rapids; Jaime Malone, editor and publisher of *El Hispano*, a newspaper that focuses on the Latino community in metropolitan Grand Rapids; Levi A. Rickert, executive director of the North American Indian Center of Grand Rapids; and Salvan Ragjan, an Asian Indian.

Lawrence H. Borom, Grand Rapids Urban League:

What I have discovered since coming [to Grand Rapids] is that this is a town with a great deal of tension between the races and the tension is both historic and widely perceived, sometimes perhaps more a belief than, in fact, a reality. But certainly there is a sense here of frustration and helplessness and powerlessness among African American people.

There's a sense that jobs are not available, that the official organizations that are set to help solve problems of African American young people and for that matter families are not available to them. So this sense of powerlessness pervades, with the result that you have a black community in Grand Rapids that feels that it is going nowhere in a hurry.

There are obviously some African American people in this city and in the surrounding area that have done well for themselves, but there are a great number of other people who are African American who are in poverty. The poverty rates indicate an extremely high poverty rate, particularly among children and youth under 18. We have had a recent expose of the double proportion of infant mortality for black youngsters in Kent County compared to other groups.

One could search the corporate registers and find very few African Americans in some of the major firms in

[8] Ibid., pp. 91–92.

[9] Ibid., pp. 88–89.

major positions. In other words, the African American community is isolated here. Nor has it progressed and prospered to the extent that other people in the community have prospered.

I see it as a very serious situation in terms of race relations, in terms of tension between the races in Grand Rapids, and one that needs much work. In particular, the official agencies that are responsible [must see to it] that employment discrimination does not happen, that police abuse does not happen, that services and accessibility to services are equal.[10]

There is an effort in Grand Rapids among people, both white and black, who are dissatisfied with the current status of race relations and the current status of the African American community. What is clear is that the efforts have been ineffective or have been overturned or have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem.[11]

The problem is much larger than what one organization can deal with. One of the biggest problems is the history and the recognition on the part of the people in the city that things are very hard to change. So there is a good deal to fear in this city about even raising the issue of discrimination and racial inequality in Grand Rapids and western Michigan, since western Michigan is a very hostile place towards people of color and specifically towards black people.[12]

Hazel R. Lewis, NAACP, Grand Rapids Branch:

I can tell you that racism in [Grand Rapids exists] to a great degree. I have calls everyday in regard to jobs, schools, and sometimes in regards to home owners and what the police are doing to somebody in front of their door. I know what prejudice is. I was in a store and a person followed me up and down the aisle until I got to the counter. When I went to another store, they didn't bother me at all. I have been followed at other stores where I shop regularly. I just don't worry about it anymore. Racism today is more subtle than it used to be. But recently it is getting out of hand.[13]

Walter Mathis, *Take Pride*:

If you check back to your old times when you had plantations, you had the slaves, you had the straw boss, and you had the plantation owner. Everytime one of the slaves would do something wrong, another would run to the straw boss, and the straw boss run to the master. Well, that situation hasn't changed in society here. We have the community, we have our sharecroppers which we pay good money for, department heads, Afro Americans to keep us in check. Then we have the straw boss which is your corporations. Every one of your corporations has an affirmative action person who has no power or no guts or anything like that. But they are paid such a good salary that they cannot afford to take my side.

That's what society's all about. It's all money driven. The only thing that helps the black man in the United States is the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title VI. Title VI is the only part of the law that speaks about economics. All the rest talks about racial harmony and all that kind of stuff. You can't get along with anybody without any money.

President Kennedy said it best, simple justice required that public funds—to which all taxpayers of all races contribute—not be spent in any fashion which encourages, increases, subsidizes, or results in racial discrimination. That was said in 1963.

Now all our grocery stores are on the outside of the city. All of our theaters, all of our nice homes, are on the outside of the city. We have to go outside the city for these things. Yet, to get there we have to go across the crocodiles, rattlesnakes and avoid being arrested and harassed.[14]

Zoraida Sanchez, Latin-American Services:

The racial problems in Grand Rapids are a great problem. The main problem I have found is that people do not want to believe [there is racism]. They don't want to say in public or admit that we do have a problem. Most of the time people do discriminate, but the people that do these things do not realize that they are doing it. It will be when they admit that they have a problem with other people that the situation will improve or will start to improve.

The situation has improved within the last 5 years. Before it was very difficult for Hispanics to find employment in this area. It was very difficult for Hispanics to be in a public or private place without being discriminated; even at church we are still today discriminated and we feel those things are for different people.

I believe that public education can do something to improve the situation. The schools should include in their curriculum racial relations. That will help lessen tensions that we have today. Everything starts

[10] Ibid., pp. 157–58.

[11] Ibid., p. 175.

[12] Ibid., p. 176.

[13] Ibid., p. 160.

[14] Ibid., pp. 165–66.

at home and when families are having dinner and talking and if the adults are talking about not liking others, well that's the situation. But if at school something different is taught to them, they can teach their parents. It's very difficult to change attitude when people are adults. It's different when they are children.

In Grand Rapids, we do have good people; we have sensitive people. We have people in positive high positions that do mean well for others, that do fight discrimination. And the elected political officials here are good. Most of them are good people. They have good faith; they like to work together with us. . .but it doesn't mean that their employees follow that example. It doesn't mean that the information desk treats everybody the same when they go and ask for information.[15]

Jaime Malone, *El Hispano*:

Racism in this area is very strong, very settled, very organized, very professional, very high. It is a kind of racism driven by the big powers in this area. We have big and powerful persons who have a lot of money who create a surrounding power that makes racism [for minorities]. . . very professional and subtle.

I think that the race relationship between black and white is not good at all. I believe we have a lot of good white people, the same for black people. I believe also the race relationship between Latinos and blacks is being threatened because as we speak about diversity, most of it is black and white. . . . So, the idea is , "Okay, we want to be diverse; let's get some blacks—now we are diverse." Then what happens is the situation is created where black and Hispanic will be sometimes somewhere having to fight for the same crumb. . . . So the situation is not happening now, but it's a progressive thing that is happening.

There is a feeling that [Latinos and Hispanics] just don't count. What we are saying here is that maybe because Hispanic don't make no noise, because Hispanic don't scream, kick, do all those things, we are not being heard, we're not taken care of, we're not put in enough attention.

The last thing I would say here is that we as human beings have all kinds of people—good, bad, worse, and whatever. So we find that same situation in whites and in blacks.

The racial relationship here has to have those who are in power—economically and politically—use the power to create a real harmony among those who are not in power. Sometime Zoraida [Sanchez] says they want to work with us, and Zoraida is one of my best friends. I know that they put on a good face to work with us, but the bottom line is that they really don't work with us.[16]

Levi A. Rickert, North American Indian Center of Grand Rapids, is a member of the Prairie Band Patowatami Nation and also serves on the Grand Rapids City Community Relations Commission.

I happen to be an American Indian and I don't have long hair. Before, when I had long hair, I could not raise any money for the Indian Center here in Grand Rapids. So I got my hair cut, put the blue blazer on, and now I raise money for the Indian Center. Because of my uniqueness—if you just looked at me, I may not appear to be an American Indian—I have been able in a sense to get by in different worlds. . . . And because of my uniqueness, I listen to all communities talk about racial relations in Grand Rapids and Kent County and hear what they have to say.

The President wants candid talk on race relations,. . .but candid talk is not real pleasant talk when you talk about racial relations. White people still don't want to be around black people. Sometimes the black people, quite frankly, appear to be just as racist as the white people because they don't want to be around white people. . . Andrew Hacker argues [in his book] that in America we only have two colors, black and white. [This statement] suggests that the American Indian population is so small, about 0.8 percent in Kent County, so insignificant, it doesn't really matter. We don't fit into the racial mix.

This really compounds things for Indians because we have been referred to as the forgotten minority in this country, and we have been many times excluded and also as an American Indian it is something that we have that most other people don't have and it gets real confusing. It gets real complex because most people, quite frankly, don't understand it becomes the issue of treaties and sovereign rights that we have. . . . We enjoy dual citizenship and that's very significant.

One of the most significant things that happened to Indian people, even up to perhaps 15, 20 years ago was the fact that our kids were literally snatched out of homes and put into boarding schools because the American government had the philosophy they were going to Americanize the Indians. They were going to take the Indian out of the Indian body. . . . The kids were left with very lonely feelings, and some would

[15] Ibid., pp. 181–82.

[16] Ibid., pp. 187–90.

argue that the high rate of alcoholism in this country as it relates to Indian people can be directly attributed to the boarding school experiences. But what it did [was] diminish the whole Indian family structure.

Now forms of racism exist. There are sports teams nationwide that use Indian characters as mascots. I have been told hundreds and hundreds of times that that is an honor. I don't see a white man dressed as an Indian with paint on his face, who has no idea what the significance of that paint may have been, as an honor. I see no honor bestowed upon Indian people with the tomahawk chop. It's a form of racism.

There's no conversation in the public square. I think there's a certain amount of denial. People want to romanticize the Indian. . . . What happens so many times, people may have had one meeting 15, 20 years ago with one Indian someplace, and feel as if they have had the [entire American Indian experience].[17]

Salvan Ragjan, an Asian Indian:

I am an Asian Indian and if you think Native Americans are invisible, Asian Indians are even more invisible. . . . I am convinced that the religious community has a strong role to play in race relations. . . . I am convinced that no amount of race relations in America will go forward without understanding the history, understanding the losses, and understanding the duplicity not only in terms of our relationship with African Americans, but also with regard to American Indians and also Asian Americans.

I am hopeful of the impetus that the President has given for conversation. I think that the public square is silent, and because it is silent and there's no discussion, then the denial can go on. I wear a little button on my lapel,. . .it says "I'm a recovering racist." I wasn't born in America, but I grew to be a racist, and I still struggle everyday with what it means not to be a racist. But the race that I was prejudiced against was the Japanese who killed my grandfather. After I was schooled in western thinking, western philosophy, and western theology, I was prejudiced against African Americans.

I ask myself, "Where does that come from and what am I doing?" It is precisely because of me coming into terms with what I am and where my journey is taking me that I'm saying that we have to have honest conversations.

I live in a neighborhood that is fairly affluent [with] good neighbors,. . .but about three houses down I have neighbors that do not want. . .to have anything to do with me, who want to pretend that I do not exist. That is precisely why we have to talk. We don't have the luxury of ignoring each other because if we don't protect each other, we will destroy each other and there will be no future for anyone.[18]

Public Testimony

Michael C. Hyde:

My family is an interracial family. I have children who are black, Latino, and European. I moved here 7 years ago. . . . Our experience has been such that when we go out to a restaurant, we are often refused service or not served or asked to sit by the back door or by the kitchen solely by reason of the fact that we are an interracial family. My Latino children have several times been stopped by the police, photographed, and fingerprinted on the street corners for no reason. One evening my children called me from a pay phone at a small convenience store if I would come and pick them up after playing basketball with friends. As I drove up, the police were there fingerprinting and photographing my children. When I asked what they had done, it was only because they were standing on the street corner.

My African American children have repeatedly been stopped by the police, especially when they're driving their cars, for no reason. We live very close to East Grand Rapids. When we shop, we often go into East Grand Rapids to the drug store and the cleaners because it is the closest and most convenient place for us to go. I am afraid to send my children there because they are almost always stopped by the East Grand Rapids police for made up reasons.

Grand Rapids and western Michigan is not always a nice place to live. There are a lot of barriers to overcome. Yet, at the same time there are tremendous reasons for hope. There is a movement within the Interfaith Dialogue Association, which comprises Muslims, Baptists, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus, addressing some of the race issues.

There's a great deal of hope, but that hope is fragile. The reality on the streets is that if you are young and Latino or young and black, you are a danger to everyone around you and a danger to yourself and that's the myth that exists here in Grand Rapids, and I know from personal experience that my children are not a danger to anyone. My neighbor's children are not a danger to anyone. Their friends are not dangers to anyone. And that's the truth. We need your Commission to promote that.[19]

[17] Ibid., pp. 207–10.

[18] Ibid., pp. 214–15.

[19] Ibid., pp. 179–80.

Dr. Flores:

I am the son of migrant farm workers. We were not immigrants to this country, but rather migrants from Texas. Coming to Grand Rapids and experiencing most of my upbringing in Grand Rapids, I have learned very well what racism is. Racism occurs when an organization exerts a power or an influence over someone and places them at a disadvantage or a disparate level of academic achievement, economic well-being, or political status. That is the reality minorities experience in Grand Rapids.

I live in a neighborhood that is predominantly Hispanic American and in an area that is blighted. . . . I tried to move onto the west side of town, which is predominantly white. . . . I was confronted with housing discrimination. I was screened by an informal neighborhood association, which is not an official association. . . .

We have a system that needs to be changed here if, in fact, the experiment of democracy is to work. This democracy we call America cannot continue to allow the educational system to fail our children miserably. Minority children in Grand Rapids for the most part achieve at half the rate that white students achieve at, and they drop out or are pushed out or suspended or expelled from schools at twice the rate. The reality is that minorities are obtaining one-quarter of the benefit we call a public education that is entitled to all U.S. citizens. . . .

I am constantly marked by the fact that I am a convicted felon. I experimented with that psychedelic drug that Timothy Leary was so fascinated with. It marked me for life. I continue to have problems with police and other institutions, rather than looked at for my achievements. As we put more police on the street, the likelihood of minorities being stopped and incarcerated increases.... What we are doing is scarring the minorities in this Nation, in the State, and in this community and not enabling them to become employees. . . .[20]

Walter Jones III:

I am political action officer for the Michigan State Conference district black caucus in the western part of Michigan. In the City of Kalamazoo,. . .minority business is being stifled and development is very slow. Most banks in the area are not adhering to the Community Reinvestment Act or the policies of community reinvestment. We have no specific contract compliance in Kalamazoo; minority contractors and women-owned businesses are not getting a fair part of the business. . . . The courts have been very unkind to us as a people, and I think that has a very direct bearing on what's taking place and the attitude among the majority to the problems that we have.

I think that something must be done very soon because we are in a boiling pot situation; there's no decent jobs, affirmative action is dying on the vine, people aren't working and being forced to find jobs that aren't there. I think that the civil rights is going to have to move and move fast before we find ourselves in a position of economic race war. . . .

In Kalamazoo County we have the highest death rate among children in the United States among Afro American babies. We're losing 30 per 1,000. I'm not getting any answers at all from at home; that is why I come from afar to testify here. I see what's happening in our area and the Kalamazoo County area as almost being criminal.[21]

Ms. Pembleton:

It is really shameful that in 1997 we are still back where we were a long, long time ago. In my heart, I think what will happen is this Committee will get a lot of data, a lot of feedback, take it somewhere, and file it away.

It is extremely shameful. We are going into the 21st century and we [African Americans] are still begging for basic human dignity and rights. We go begging for the kinds of things that other races take for granted. We should not have to come before other human beings and beg for things that they take for granted.

When whites ask and when any Committee like this asks what can we do to fix it, that question is embarrassing, really. Black folks and other people of color should be treated with the same dignity, the same respect that white folks take for granted. That's not a big thing to figure out, and it will help remedy some of these problems

Now what I have done as an African American mother and citizen is try to remedy my problems by myself, because in order for us to get the kind of dignity, the kind of growth that we need as African people, we have to take matters into our own hands. We have to educate ourselves. We need to learn to spend like people with good judgment. When the African people spend money, we never see that money again, so how are we expected to build an economic base when I spend my money and never know where it goes.[22]

[20] Ibid., pp. 219–24.

[21] Ibid., pp. 225–29.

[22] Ibid., pp. 230–31.

Kevin Hartfield:

My five children are in the East Grand Rapids School District. . . . My kids went to this school district with the intention of thinking they were going to graduate. Not one of my children graduated from high school. Just recently this past year I went to reenroll my kids in school. School officials called the police and had me escorted off the premises. . . . Nobody seems to know what to do about my children's education. How can I get my children to have a productive life if a white school district doesn't [let] them graduate. All five of my kids have been pushed out of the school system. In order for them to have an education I will have to take it upon myself to teach them.[23]

Joyce Hartfield:

I am not from here, I am from Benton Harbor. I have lived here for 13 years, but I consider myself still from Benton Harbor because I never was welcome here, so I never felt at home in Grand Rapids.

When I first moved here we had problems with the East Grand Rapids School System. My children have been spit on, attacked, had their clothes pissed on. The worst types of discrimination.

Our case eventually went to court. The judge recommended that our kids don't go back to the East Grand Rapids School System because of the things that had happened to our kids and that we move with them somewhere else. . . . I could not understand how is it better for my kids not to live around somebody that looks like them rather than fix the problem. . . .[24]

Rodney Brown:

I have taught political science for the last 3 years at Grand Rapids Community College. Grand Rapids is a very disillusioned community in regard to race relations. I see the relationship between blacks and whites in particular in the community as a slave and a slave owner dichotomy. Most of our leadership in the community, excluding a few in the black community, operate on directives from members in the white community.

Collaborative relationships between blacks and whites in our community is very much needed, but in many instances in our community, the black leadership only makes decisions if it does not offend, disrupt, or go against the traditional methods and practices of the historical power group, i.e., white males. This in my estimation resembles a slave acting out his owner's wishes.

On the other hand, in the white community, they see this practice as being consistent with the intended objectives of control, which is one of the basic objectives of white supremacy. Thus, as I mentioned, this relationship characterized as slave and slave owner relationship.

I'd like to give you an example. In response to an initiative that President Clinton called on regarding community development banks, a group of local business people and community representatives attempted to form a bank. This group transcended color, yet control would have vested in the people of color on this bank board. The mainstream banks were in direct opposition to these efforts and many of them voiced their displeasure. The bank effort was thwarted. . . . This is economic injustice. In the meantime, two new separate banks are being organized in Grand Rapids without any opposition whatsoever from the people in power. The majority community allows for their friends, associates, and allies to compete freely in the banking environment,. . .and prevents the economic empowerment for the minority community.[25]

Gail Harrison:

I am from North Ottawa County which is 95 percent white. There is racism that exists in North Ottawa County. When I came to this community it was very white, and I was concerned about. . .some of the intolerance that seemed to exist in the community.

An African American family who moved to the community— later, I found out, they left that community because they felt it was too intolerant and there was no support there for them. I said that can't happen, that should not happen. This is the 1990s.

For those of us that live in that community and who are upset by racial intolerance, we felt we needed to rise [against it]. After doing the Institute for Racial Health, I started seeking out some of the other people in the community. . .to try and affect some positive change.

Some of us got together and decided we were going to do something instead of just talking and intellectualizing the whole issue of racism. . . . We formed an alliance which has been together for 1 year. Approximately 30 people that sit on the alliance, including migrant people, Latinos, African Americans, Ameri-

[23] Ibid., pp. 234–35.

[24] Ibid., pp. 236–37.

[25] Ibid., pp. 241–42.

can Indians, and many Caucasian, people working together to try and effect some positive change.

One of the first things that we have done is a Calling All Colors Conference for middle school students at Grand Valley State University, a whole day of racial dialogue and ethnic activities. I believe that we need to start the dialogue about racism much sooner than adulthood. I think it needs to start early, and then I think it needs to be between groups of, diverse groups as opposed to isolated groups.

Another program we started was a migrant issues committee. This was because we have a large migrant population in our town and they are, I believe, undervalued both economically and in terms of socially. I would like to see this model of people working cooperatively together and collaboratively to try to effect change. I think we need to work together on racism. We as white people have a responsibility, people have a responsibility to try and effect some change.[26]

Molly Shorewell:

I am Molly Shorewell from Grand Rapids. I would like to read a letter about an experience that I had at one of our local grocery stores.

"Dear [Sir]: Since my family and I moved to the Northeast end of Grand Rapids I have been a regular shopper at [your store] and I've enjoyed its convenience. However, last Friday, June 13th, while I was at the store something happened that upset me so much that I will no longer be able to conduct my business there. I felt it was important to write to you to explain what happened.

"At about 4:30 Friday afternoon I began checking out my groceries. There was a women in front of me paying for her things, when another cashier came up to my cashier with a check from one of her customers. Without any hesitation this cashier explained to my cashier that she had a customer who had prewritten a check and that she didn't know if she should cash it because she didn't know the customer and that the customer was black. My heart sank with sadness to think that a fellow customer was being judged solely by the color of her skin.

"Why would your employee think that it was acceptable or necessary to mention the customer's skin color? The cashier's insinuation, through her behavior, is that this is an acceptable way to refer to her customers at [your store]. I can assure you that in no way that I feel that this cashier acted in an appropriate way.

"I'm still highly offended that this clearly racist act happened. Needless to say, I was infuriated to know that I had just witnessed something so horrible and archaic. I went home and I cooled down and I called the manager and told him of my experience in his store. The manager. . . assured me that in no way is he a racist. I told him that he may not be, but that he's got a racist for an employee working for him.

"The manager apologized and assured me that he would get to the bottom of this and I told him that I planned on boycotting the store and that I would be complaining to the Grand Rapids Urban League about this and his response was that he thanked me and that was it. He never asked me for my name, my phone number. He never said he'd get back to me and I felt that he didn't take me seriously at all.

"You should be aware that this is not the first time that I've witnessed a racist act in this store while shopping. Last winter I was in several aisles with a grandmother and her two grandsons. They were a perfectly adorable family, with the boys trying to get grandma to buy them stuff their mom would not normally let them buy. I had even joked with grandma that they were trying to pull the wool over her eyes and we laughed. And what was happening throughout the store took me a little while to recognize, but by each of these aisles I realized that this woman had been being watched. At the ends of each aisle there was a white employee staring to make sure that she wasn't stealing anything and it just crushed me.

"So I went home and I cooled down that time and I called the manager. He assured me he would look into it and he thanked me, but he never asked me for my name and he never asked me for my number and I believe it was the same manager then as it is now. . . .

"As you know, currently in Grand Rapids much is being done to correct the issue of race and racism at our Spartan stores as well as our D & W stores. Seminars are being conducted to change people's way of thinking. Why is your [store] so behind the times? Why are your black customers being treated any differently than I am? Frequently while waiting in line to check out I have prewritten a check to expedite matters and there's never been a problem. I've even cashed checks without proper ID.

"Can you honestly say that this would be the same case for your black customers? I think not. It is my sincere hope that you address the issue of racism in your store immediately. I expect a response from you and I am providing my name and my address should you need further information. It is clear to me as a customer that your company needs to do more than walk the walk. As it stands now, I feel that your com-

[26] Ibid., pp. 244–48.

pany lacks the integrity to treat all of its customers on an equal basis and until I see or hear further, I will no longer give my business to a store that promotes racism and I will continue to encourage my family and friends to do the same so."

So that's my letter and I have not received a response from the owner.[27]

Rene McNair:

I am originally a Chicago, Illinois, native. Since I've been here I've experienced racism almost on a daily basis. I'm not here most likely to talk about racism in the work force because I haven't heard it touched on very much today. But from wages and from the perspective of how people look at you and talk to you, treat you in the work force, racism is alive and going on here in Grand Rapids.

I've had incidents where people have written me notes in my work station that were derogatory towards my race and my sex. . . . When I first started working there 3 years ago, there were people who had been there 13, 14 years, were writing down on their notebook the things that happened to them. But they never fight any of these things that happened to them because they're scared they're going to lose their job.

There is a lot of racism going on in here in Grand Rapids and people have no outlet or no help to find out information on to how to stop it or to get help to combat it.[28]

Sharon Hall:

There is certainly racism going on. . . . I, too, had to stand up for my child. I had...to stand up for my child because I knew that there was a counselor [who was] not letting the kids graduate. When it was time for my daughter to graduate, the counselor did not tell her that she had to have a government class. . . . So I had to fight and I had to go against the school system to make them have her graduate. She's not the only one. . . .

That's why we have crime and we have so much drugs and people strung out. Our young people out on the streets today because they're not letting them get their high school education or their diploma. It is sad when you have to sit here you can't even make a living for yourself. You have to watch the Ku Klux Klan come in here, [while]. . .what the black people need here are jobs and. . .we cannot get them.[29]

Richard Westerford:

I am a longtime resident of Grand Rapids. I have been in the work force and owned my own business. . . . In January I decided I wanted to make a move out of the inner city. I went and made application to an apartment and I was denied. They didn't give me an application. They just started telling me about other apartments that were available. . . .

This is what happened, and if I hadn't tried to move anyplace else [I might not] think these things would happen. Just driving around the city one sees black people everywhere, all over the city. I'm just thinking things was nice out here, and here I go. Racism is alive and well in housing. I didn't even know that. I just decided I would make a move from where I was.

I know that a lot of people who have been discriminated against, and from the way that you have to go through these complaints, it would take a person almost a lifetime. Most people just get discouraged, throw up both hands and say the heck with it, and go on about their business, but that doesn't solve the issue. You have to fight these issues and you have to fight them right on down.[30]

Concerns about the Media

Recently, the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights studied stereotyping of minorities by the news media. The Committee found that negative depictions of minorities do occur in the media and that such stereotyping adversely affects both the minority communities and the majority community. The resulting harm for race relations includes: (1) a reinforcement of negative stereotypes that impedes equal opportunity for minorities, (2) an impression that minorities make more negative contributions to a community than positive contributions, (3) an alienation of the minority community from the majority community, (4) a deterioration of potential role models for minority youth, (5) an impediment to the development of self-esteem among minorities, and (6) polarization of the racial and ethnic communities.[31]

Several testifiers before the Advisory Committee expressed similar concerns about local news coverage in the Grand Rapids area. Ingrid Scott-Weekley was explicit in her criticism,

[27] Ibid., pp. 252–53.

[28] Ibid., p. 264.

[29] Ibid., pp. 264–65.

[30] Ibid., pp. 268–69.

[31] Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota* (May 1993), p. 1.

holding that the media has played a role in perpetuating racial and ethnic tensions in the Grand Rapids area.

I. . .think the media has played quite a role in fanning the flames in racial and ethnic tension. Consistently when you turn on the news in the afternoon you see story after story depicting young African American males in particular who are on fenders, who have been arrested, who have been shackled. We see this over and over.

Most recently in the news there was a superintendent of schools over in the Muskegon area who was arrested and charged with embezzlement. Whenever the media showed this gentlemen, who happened to be a former Grand Rapids administrator, he was always shown handcuffed and shackled. On the other hand, there was also a white gentleman. . .who was arrested and charged with embezzlement and whenever he was depicted in the media, he was seen sitting at the table; you never saw him in shackles and handcuffs. I think this kind of media display continues to perpetuate myths about crime and African Americans, particularly African American males.

An article on Thursday, June 19, 1997, in the city and region section. . .of the *Grand Rapids Press*, which is our local newspaper, [had] story after story after story involving and depicting African American males in a very negative light. On the first page there is a story and large picture about [an African American police officer] found guilty in case of assault on ex-prostitute. The next page, two more stories with large pictures, negative stories depicting African Americans engaged or charged with various crimes. Another page, we see the executive vice president of our local community college, another African American, and the story involving a controversy that surrounds him. . . . The same paper, when it shows pictures of whites, [depicts] crowds engaged in activities like playing baseball, mother happy, people sitting, [people] engaged various sorts of public interest stories.

These are the kinds of issues that confront [the minority community] and the kinds of stereotypes that the media contributes significantly to. . . . Over the years there have been issues such as this that have been brought to the attention of the media. There's been a willingness certainly to listen, but to the extent that these concerns have been taken seriously and to the extent that there have been changes implemented and processes to prevent this kind of continuing and pervasive reporting of African Americans, it has not ended. The [media] is not taking [this issue] seriously, or they perhaps simply do not care. The need to get a story, to sell a story, to sensationalize a story, overrides any need to really more accurately portray what is happening. . . .

I can say that community organizations such as the NAACP, such as the Coalition for Representative Government have made contacts to engage the various media representatives in a kind of a round table discussion to actually come up with a plan that could be implemented. I personally made contact with the general manager of a local television station when our community relations commission, which is our human rights commission, held a public hearing for citizens to express their views on affirmative action and I felt that the reporting of the story was very distorted. I personally called and spoke to the general manager, and she listened but really did not seem to be that concerned about my concerns and perhaps that is what is needed. Perhaps our city leaders and our elected officials need to take steps to act upon this issue.[32]

Rabbi Lewis also expressed the opinion that indiscriminate news reporting may intensify both racial tensions and latent racism in the community.

I am concerned by the way in which the press report some of the news. I do not know if it is unique to the Grand Rapids press, but it bothers me and has bothered me for 25 years. . . . When a crime occurs or some incident occurs where there has been a beating or a shooting or robbery, the press is very quick to tell us exactly the house number, the street number, and the neighborhood.

Now, this happens across the board. However, if there is already a latent sense of racism, this only intensifies it and heightens it and makes us more insensitive to what is going on in a given area of the community. That is true whether it happens in the area that is still known as the ghetto or whether it happens out in some of the almost lily white suburbs.[33]

Mathis noted that the media are dominated by white people. As a consequence the stories that are told and reported are done so from a white perspective, leaving the minority viewpoint mute.

[At] this [Advisory Committee] meeting [on race relations] you had all kinds of news people here; all of them were white. When they get through, they will go out and write the story the way their editor tells them to write it. Then everybody says, "Look here, they said

[32] Grand Rapids Transcript, pp. 11–12 and 22–23.

[33] Ibid., p. 80.

this about us in the paper. They said that about us in the paper." Where is recourse [for the minority community]? The media is supposed to be a vehicle in which we can voice our opinions to the public. . . .

If you look on television, you hardly ever see black people in commercials or anything you look at. Radio, you do not hear anything. Look at the newspaper, go through any given newspaper, it is all full of European Americans, except when [African Americans] create crime, and once we create a crime we get our picture on the front page. This is one of the things that has to be addressed. . . .[34]

Rivas related a recent positive experience concerning media coverage of race relations, and noted that this type of reporting is important to improve race relations in the community.

Television station channel 8, one of the local television channels [in Grand Rapids], had an excellent program for a period of time. . . called "Education First." Part of the content on "Education First" was [about]. . .prejudice in Grand Rapids and civil rights. These kind of messages are what we need in our community to improve our race relations. . . .[35]

[34] Ibid., p. 147.

[35] Ibid., p. 130.

6 Committee Observations from the Forum

Framework of the Community Forum

The United States Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government charged with studying discrimination or denials of equal protection on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin. In each of the 50 States, an Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation to advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission.

To ensure its independence and bipartisanship, the Michigan Advisory Committee is deliberately constituted to include individuals representing both major political parties, the broad spectrum of political philosophies, different geographic regions of the State, and different occupations. It is independent of any national, State, or local administration, political organization, or advocacy group.

In the past 10 years the Michigan Advisory Committee has undertaken a number of studies on race-related issues. These included studies of hate crime, equal education opportunity, and problems confronting minority youth. All of those studies were conducted in the eastern part of the State.

The Michigan Advisory Committee comes to Grand Rapids, the second largest city in the State, to examine race relations issues in the western part of the State. In the experience of the Advisory Committee, Grand Rapids is unlikely to be much better or worse than most other cities, villages, and townships in the State regarding the issue of race relations. The particular degree and manifestation of racial tension in Grand Rapids might vary from that of other Michigan communities, but the essential issues concerning race in the City of Grand Rapids and the surrounding community is probably typical in many respects.

The Fundamental Dilemma

Thirty years ago, by most accounts, manifestations of racism and racial and ethnic discrimination in Grand Rapids and the surrounding community were overt and flagrant. Discriminatory practices and policies in employment and housing against African Americans were tolerated and approved. Hostility and oppressive acts against Latinos, particularly the migrant worker community, were commonplace. Alienation of the American Indian community was an acceptable social policy.

Such egregious racist behavior and attitudes are no longer agreed to or tolerated by the vast majority of people, white or people of color, living and working in the metropolitan Grand Rapids area. This is a positive development, but this does not mean that hate crimes and incidents of bigotry are things of the past, or that discrimination in employment, housing, and education have disappeared from the landscape.

Overt acts of racial and ethnic violence still occur, and these acts are serious civil rights violations. In 1996 the Grand Rapids Police Department reported eight hate crime incidents, and another three hate crime incidents in the first quarter of 1997. These numbers are smaller than those collected by the Grand Rapids Urban League in a 6-month period of 1992, during which time that group recorded 46 hate crime incidents, though few were acts of physical violence.

Similarly, housing discrimination persists in the area. Several presenters testified of personal encounters with such discrimination. The previous year the Fair Housing Center did 300 housing tests, and in 117 incidents, 44 percent of the cases, documented measurable differences on the basis of race or another prohibited variable. The Grand Rapids Equal Opportunity Office and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights continue to receive complaints and find evidence of discrimination in employment. The Hartfields testimony about their children's experiences in the public schools attests to racial inequities in education.

Still, there has been improvement from 30 years ago when Grand Rapids experienced race riots. Efforts made to implement positive change have had some effect: public housing has been built; affirmative action programs in education and employment have been implemented; civil rights enforcement agencies have been established and staffed; and civic and community leaders unanimously disclaim bigotry and racial and ethnic intolerance.

Nevertheless, gross disparities and inequalities along racial and ethnic lines persist in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Consider:

- In 1993 the unemployment rate for whites in the Grand Rapids MSA was 4.9 percent; the unemployment rate for minorities was 15.6 percent.

- Minorities remain concentrated in the lower paying and less desirable clerical and service sector jobs, while whites dominate the managerial jobs.

- Per capita income for minorities is significantly lower compared to whites, $8,086 to $15,153.

- Minorities disproportionately do not attain a high school education; 34 percent of minorities over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma while just 18 percent of whites do not.

- In Kent County, the home ownership rate for whites is 72.8 percent, but just 40 percent of African American and Latino families own homes.

After 30 years of legislated and funded equal opportunity measures, significant disparities in employment, housing, income, and education along racial and ethnic lines continue to persist in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Accepting that members of minority groups are not inherently inferior to members of the white majority, there is only one possible explanation for the persistence of such disparities given Federal, State, and local prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of race, color, and ethnicity.

Pervasive societal barriers remain in place, which preclude real equal opportunity for minorities.

Moreover, after listening to testimony on race relations and racial tensions, the Committee believes it understands where the predominant barrier to equal opportunity exists.

The Predominant Barrier to Equal Opportunity

Years ago signs hung in many parts of the country that read "whites" and "colored."

Those signs were visible instructions to society members on how others were to be treated. The signs were a visible manifestation that we were a color-conscious society, with whites afforded a preferential status. Those signs have been forced down. Ironically, the removal of those signs has, in many ways, made obtaining real equal opportunity for minorities more difficult, rather than easier.

The removal of the visible "colored" signs was considered by many to be a visible signal that racial discrimination had ended. This belief persists. As a result, in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, as well as other communities throughout Michigan, there is a strong sense of denial about racial and ethnic intolerance and injustice. The "colored" signs are down. With the signs down, most white people—by far the dominant racial group—have become unconscious and indifferent about the presence of racial and ethnic prejudice. The lack of consciousness about racial and ethnic prejudice allows individuals to honestly maintain a support for a just and equal opportunity society, without having to accept any personal responsibility either for an unjust, unfair, and unbalanced system or for working toward a resolution of the problem.

The "colored" signs are still up.

The only difference between now and 30 years ago is that today the "colored" signs hang out of sight in the minds of the citizenry. The "colored" signs are mired in the unconscious, but still influence in a negative way our dealings with color. With the "colored" signs out of sight, many go to great lengths to ensure there is no personal examination of the existence of prejudice in their own minds. Hence, there is little

open, honest, and meaningful dialogue on this subject by whites. When the term racism comes up, people run for cover, going to great lengths to avoid using the word racism and examine their own behavior.

The result becomes observable in Grand Rapids and in most other parts of the State. The minority and white communities exist as virtually separate communities, with the minority, i.e., "colored" group, relegated to the less desirable jobs and housing. Since there are no visibly hanging "whites only" signs, there is no place to determine the cause of the problem and no way to begin to root the bigotry and prejudice.

Mike Wood, a white male, reflecting on a personal grappling with his ignorance of his racial and ethnic bigotry, addressed the fundamental causes for the persistence of racism and unequal opportunity—denial and apathy. His words describe how the "colored" signs continue to exist and hang in the minds of the white community.

> The testimony I offer to the panel. . .is one of a racist.
>
> Ten years go if somebody asked me if I were a racist, I would have said, with some indignation, "No."
>
> I am convinced at this moment that if we were to ask a thousand white people if they were racist, they could be attached to a lie detector, say "No," and pass. . .
>
> That is the real problem. . .the denial and the ignorance that helps to perpetuate racism.
>
> I am not speaking out of any sense of righteousness. I would probably be as apathetic and as uninformed [today] as I was 10 years ago if it were not for my youngest daughter developing a friendship and a relationship with an African American male that produced two grandchildren.
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> One of my coworkers in the office shared with me that he and his wife are just frightened by the prospect of having their daughter experience what our daughter did.
>
> I felt rage having my grandchildren described as somebody else's worse nightmare. But it was part of the reasoning to begin to understand what racism is, how it wounds, how it destroys the very soul of the innocent. . . .
>
> I do not remember making a conscious decision to be a racist. Some of the socioeconomic and psychological viruses that I came in contact with—through my parents and my schools and my teachers and Michigan coaches and my ministers—left me with prejudices and ignorance and insensitivity that wounded others by my indifference and ignorance and apathy. . . .[1]

Committee Commendations

The admission by an individual or a community to racial and ethnic prejudice is difficult and painful. As a consequence, many individuals routinely deny any culpability for the racial and ethnic disparities that exist. Community leadership, be it political, corporate, educational, or religious, relegates the issue to the bottom of the agenda.

As long as individuals are unwilling to acknowledge their role in racial and ethnic injustice, and institutions are unwilling to make racial and ethnic justice a priority, there is little chance that the race problem will be resolved.

Several community leaders have come forward, however, and insist on forthrightly addressing the issue. The support may be late in coming, forced by outside pressures in some instances, and not as resolute as some would desire, still, some in the community have stepped forward and the Advisory Committee commends their willingness to push the issue before the community.

Local officials with the Equal Employment Opportunity Office and the Fair Housing Office were open and candid in their assessment of the racial and ethnic problems in the city. They could not have been so public about these issues unless they were confident of support from the Mayor of Grand Rapids, John Logie. Every local official who testified before the Committee mentioned their good fortune in having the support of the local administration. The mayor deserves credit.

Similarly, the U.S. attorney came forward and pledged the complete support of his office to individuals who have had their civil rights violated. In addition, during his tenure the percent of minority assistant U.S. attorneys has gone from 0 percent to 10 percent. The FBI too pledged a zero tolerance for racial and ethnic intimidation.

Complaints were heard about police harassment of the minority community. The Advisory Committee believes there is probably truth to

[1] Grand Rapids transcript, pp. 83–84.

many of the claims. Nevertheless, the Advisory Committee believes Chief Haggerty and the Grand Rapids Police Department have begun to reach out to the minority community as a valued segment of the city, and are trying to begin to provide effective and responsible policing in those communities. The chief of police deserves credit.

Pushed and prodded by the president and CEO of D&W Foods, Bob Woodrick, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce has embraced an agenda to deal with racism in the Grand Rapids community. The Committee is aware of no other Chamber of Commerce in the country that has made the issue of racism a priority. Bob Woodrick and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce deserve credit, and corporate CEOs such as Stewart Ray of Burger King deserve credit.

The Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism, specifically, and several religious denominations, in particular, have made the issue of racial injustice a social priority. Ruefully, the Advisory Committee declaims that although these efforts are good and sincere, if there is any component of the society who should be a leader on this issue, it is the religious community. There are 650 churches in the greater Grand Rapids community. For most denominations, their positions on such issues as prayer in the schools, homosexuality, and women in the clergy are clear, explicit, and publicly promulgated. If these denominations would bring the same zest and fire to racial injustice that is brought to these other issues, we would be a lot further along.

Finally, the Advisory Committee commends the individuals in the Grand Rapids community who make a stand against the subtle manifestations of racism in the community; the ones who take offense at racial jokes—and the Molly Shorewells, who take the time and make the public effort to express their disapproval of racial bigotry and prejudice. A community of Molly Shorewells would sterilize the ground in which racial bigotry is rooted.

Closing Thought

In Grand Rapids the "colored" signs are still hanging—hanging in the minds of individuals in the community, hanging in a way that few are aware of their presence, yet hanging in a way that the people of color still encounter barriers to real equal opportunity. The Grand Rapids metropolitan area, like the rest of Michigan and the rest of the United States, is not a "colored-blind" community. The people in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, as those in the rest of Michigan and in this country, see color. Only when we start to acknowledge what we see, and the impact of what we see on our behavior, will equal opportunity have a chance to be "color-blind."

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