

Part of the Solution?

City of Cambridge Unity and Justice Commission

Preliminary Report to the City Council

June 7, 1993

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Reading this Report

The content and organization of this report attempts to reflect the process in which it was developed. General information is presented first, in the Executive Summary, Attachment A, and Attachment B. Attachment C presents city-wide recommendations thematically, in categories of Education, Violence, and Law Enforcement. Attachment D contains specific community responses to questions about the appropriate role of the City, the Commission, and of individuals. Attachment E provides a closer look at the proceedings of the community meetings.

Executive Summary

- ** "The system is not on your side if you're working class."
- ** "Racism ... is denial and self-imposed ignorance."
- ** "Too many young brothers and sisters have given up hope because they don't expect a piece of the pie in the White world."
- ** "We must see ourselves as part of the solution."

These are the voices of Cambridge residents, speaking at public forums sponsored by the Unity and Justice Commission over the past 12 months. We heard from many residents -- African-American, Latino, Haitian, and white -- who are deeply concerned about the unjust treatment of their fellow residents and the lack of unity among the diverse peoples living in Cambridge. The question they asked -- and the question we now ask is -- *Will the city be 'part of the solution' ?*

In April, 1992, when four Los Angeles police officers were acquitted in the beating of Rodney King, students and staff at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) turned their anger and despair into school-wide dialogues about racism. This action inspired Mayor Reeves to create the Commission on Unity and Justice: eighteen Cambridge residents charged with finding ways to continue and expand this dialogue among diverse people in the city. In the past year, the Commission has met biweekly and has held five public forums with the racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse residents of East Cambridge, Riverside, and North Cambridge. Attendance at these events was bolstered by community outreach to schools and to all community-based organizations and churches in the city. The meetings were held in service of this mission:

to stand witness to issues of equity and justice in our city and give voice to the rich diversity of people and their points of view. In the service of building a just society, the Commission is committed to promoting and facilitating the necessary steps to creating institutional, structural, social, and economic justice.

History suggests that we can be both optimistic and pessimistic about this challenge. At the institutional level, particularly in terms of legislation, we have made great progress towards a more just society. At the personal and interpersonal levels, and where implementation of policy is concerned, we have been far less successful.

Attitudes change slowly. Although equality is the law of the land, it is not necessarily the practice of the land; many believe that there has been an

increase in covert, subtle forms of injustice. Too often, we have ignored the voices of young people, people of color, women. and poor people. As a result we have come to blame them for the oppression they experience, rather than taking a hard look at the economic and social violence perpetrated on disenfranchised people by public and private institutions.

It is in this historical context that the Unity and Justice Commission was created. And it is in the same spirit of speaking out and encouraging greater attention to the voices of the disenfranchised among us that members of the Commission are presenting this report to members of the City Council.

Recommendations

We have several recommendations for the City Council, but we want to first state what *we* are committed to doing. We will stand witness to issues of unity and justice in our city, and we will be relentless in our efforts to bring the City Council and other officials into the process, offering support every step of the way. We intend to continue meeting as a Commission; to continue communicating with neighborhood groups, advocacy groups, and individual residents, encouraging them to include issues of economic and social justice in their work, and to continue engaging in dialogue with groups that are experiencing disenfranchisement. We will periodically update the City Council on the results of such forums.

We strongly encourage members of the Cambridge City Council to do the following:

- Engage in a public dialogue about the many sources and types of violence, both individual and systemic, including economic, racial, and gender-based injustice, and to discuss ways of reducing such violence;
- Establish and participate in public dialogues with young people to hear firsthand their concerns about political and economic justice and to set an example for how other city employees can engage in respectful, cross-cultural dialogue;
- Use the prestige of the City Council to communicate to the residents of Cambridge the experiences of individuals and institutions who are challenging racism, sexism, and classism;
- Allocate funds for an assessment to determine the degree to which racism, sexism, and classism impact the distribution and availability of services and resources in Cambridge;
- Address the reality that only a small percentage of classroom teachers in the school system are members of communities of color, contributing to the dearth of role models for students of color;

- Direct the School Superintendent to assess patterns of discrimination and inequities in the public school system, including hiring; continue providing opportunities for teacher training on multiculturalism; implement a process for evaluating teachers in general and evaluating schools on multicultural practices; and accelerate the development of a multicultural curriculum;
- Support positive programs for Cambridge youth such as Positive Edge; expand Night Stop, evening programs, and teen programs;
- Support job training programs for youth as a means of diffusing the tension and alleviating the rage caused by social and economic injustice;
- Use the influential power of the Council to encourage Cambridge businesses to develop jobs programs for young people, poor and working class people, and people of color;
- Develop, with the assistance of young people, additional programs for young people in the areas of peace-making, job training, and citizen activism;
- Direct the Police Commissioner to assess patterns of discrimination and inequities in the delivery of law enforcement and public safety; establish processes for ongoing dialogue between police officers and residents of Cambridge on issues of injustice; and implement training for police officers on multiculturalism;
- Acknowledge the cultural/racial makeup of the City Council itself, and take steps to improve the diversity of the Council, and
- Monitor progress towards these goals.

Attached to this statement are summaries from each of the public forums, a list of members of the Commission, and details on the events in Cambridge leading to the creation of the Commission. We encourage you to read the full report of the Commission, paying particular attention to the comments and recommendations of Cambridge residents who participated in the forums sponsored by the Commission.

Unfortunately, in order to achieve any of the dreams described in this report, it is necessary to focus on some of the more negative aspects of community life in Cambridge. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the spirit of Cambridge is essentially a positive one. In fact, it is in this spirit that this group formed and began to lay the groundwork for the important work ahead.

During this entire process, we have been amazed and energized by the truly extraordinary youths who have come forth to share their vision of a just Cambridge. We have been gratified that city residents have felt safe enough to express their honest feelings about very tough issues. For those among us who work day in and day out on issues of unity and justice, the city's response has been an affirmation that our work is in the right direction. Already, old linkages have been strengthened and new connections and dialogues are forming.

We thank you for your time and attention.

Attachment A

Mission Statement of the Unity and Justice Commission

To stand witness to issues of equity and justice in our city and give voice to the rich diversity of people and their points of view. In the service of building a just society, the Commission is committed to promoting and facilitating the necessary steps to creating institutional, structural, social, and economic justice.

Attachment B

History of the Unity and Justice Commission

On Wednesday, April 29, 1992, a jury in Simi Valley, California found four police officers innocent of charges they had beaten and stomped on Rodney King while he was in their custody. King is an African-American man whose beating at the hands of these officers occurred on a residential street and was videotaped and telecast throughout the country. The trial had been moved from Los Angeles where the beating had occurred to predominantly white and conservative Simi Valley.

The verdict prompted disbelief then outrage across the United States, but particularly in South Central Los Angeles, where residents took to the street to protest the verdict and the racism and injustice it represented to them. Here in Cambridge, high school students brought their own anger and frustration to the halls and classrooms the following day. They expressed it in classrooms, corridors and in conversations with teachers and administrators. They wanted more opportunities to talk about the incident, the trial, the relationship between police and community, and the implications for all people, particularly people of color, of the denial of justice to a Black man. They also wanted a school-wide response.

The response of students and staff created a focus for a series of extraordinary interactions among youth and adults of many backgrounds in the city, and shaped the course of events in the city at large.

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Violence Prevention Task Force that day, attended by the Superintendent, Police Commissioner, City Council and School Committee members, school staff and community agency representatives, members planned a Community Vigil. The Vigil would be coordinated with a response from the Black Pastors' Conference and would take place on Monday, May 4 at 5:00 p.m. on the steps of City Hall.

On Friday, May 1, teachers were asked to devote class time to the issue and students were invited to meet after school in the Media Cafeteria for open discussion and planning. From 2:30 to 5:30 p.m., 40 students, 20 staff members and a range of community representatives participated in open dialogue. At 4:00 p.m., a contingent of staff and students left for City Hall to join the Mayor and other city officials in creating a city-wide response.

On Saturday and Sunday, May 2 and 3, students, staff and community members and elected officials continued a rolling dialogue about the verdict, the realities of racism in 1990s life in the United States, reactions to the

massive outpouring of rage and frustration in the streets of Los Angeles and some other cities, and the role of people of conscience in Cambridge. All involved expressed a desire to learn some lessons and take the opportunity to questions and challenge racism and injustice in our own lives.

On Monday afternoon May 4, Mayor Reeves and the Black Pastors Conference led a press conference at CRLS, followed by a silent march from the high school to City Hall. Several hundred people attended the Community Vigil at which students and adults expressed pain, fear, disgust, hope, and the need for a community-wide re-evaluation of our values and governing systems.

On Wednesday, May 6, every student and staff member had the opportunity to attend one of three panel discussions organized by Mayor Reeves and the Black Pastors Conference. The panels included historians, civil rights lawyers and activists, psychologists, urban sociologists, and police officers.

During the weekend of May 3 and 4, Mayor Reeves began to develop his plan to appoint a Unity and Justice Commission to continue the vibrant and critical dialogue begun by the students. He recognized that elected officials, community leaders and activists needed to listen and residents throughout the city needed to talk if we were to learn anything new about how to combat racism and injustice.

On Monday, May 12, Mayor Reeves appointed 18 Cambridge residents to the Unity and Justice Commission with the mission to find ways to enable the diverse individuals and communities within Cambridge to participate in the dialogue following the King verdict and rebellion. He appointed co-chairs Sylvia Saavedra-Keber and Harry Johnson.

Members:

Sylvia Saavedra-Keber, Chair
Lawrence Aaronson
Merri Ansara
Marco Bonilla
Gabrielle Britton
Jeffrey Brown
Zarrin Foster
Cathy Hoffman
William Lee

William McLaurin
Nancy Ryan
Renae Scott
Roslyn Shoy
Cooper Thompson
Sheli Wortis
Jeffrey Upton
Sharrah Williamson

Attachment C

The City-wide Response: Recommendations of the Subgroup on Education

Those attending the meeting were asked: (1) What should the city be doing? (2) What should the Commission on Unity and Justice be doing? and (3) What do you as an individual intend to do?

I. Introduction: General Concerns of the Community

- Foster multiculturalism in the schools.
- Residents should provide examples of experiences and other evidence of bias; these could be reported to the Unity and Justice Commission.
- There should be a policy that mandates an inclusive approach to education.
- The school system should publicize its statement of purpose and philosophy.
- The school system is not producing educated students. There is something wrong in the system and the issue is not necessarily money or resources.
- Bilingual students are graduating with very low English skills.

II. Individual Action

- Parents need to get actively involved.
- The community needs to be involved, be aware, write letters.
- Organize others including parents, the students.
- Speak at meetings.
- Work through the church, the community.
- Call attention to relevant and appropriate books that school libraries could/should purchase.

III. Policy Implementation

- Implement Affirmative Action hiring to ensure a diverse faculty, staff and administration.
- Do outreach in the community to recruit teachers from many cultures and language groups.
- Develop a plan to help such people become credentialled.
- Hold parents' nights in different languages.
- Incorporate teaching about human rights into the curriculum.
- Introduce new texts and literature on diversity and human rights.
- Address homophobia and teach the history of gay and lesbian oppression.
- Teachers and administrators should be expected to get involved in the

process of attitudinal change and in valuing diversity through the curriculum.

- The Superintendent should report regularly to teachers and parents on progress in meeting goals and implementing policies related to Affirmative Action hiring and valuing diversity.
- There should be a newsletter to publicize the positive, diversity-valuing things that are happening in schools.
- Take a close look at the Bilingual program; do a parents and teachers audit.
- There is a need for a clearinghouse of people and resources to help teach about many cultures; a directory should be published.

IV. Unity and Justice Commission Action

- Support efforts to foster multiculturalism in the schools;
- Teach why multiculturalism is a benefit to everyone, why diversity is positive, why people should engage in each other's cultures, and
- Work with young children and their teachers on the causes of prejudice and prejudice reduction.

The City-wide Response: Recommendations of the Subgroup on Violence

Those attending the meeting were asked: (1) What should the city be doing? (2) What should the Commission on Unity and Justice be doing? and (3) What do you as an individual intend to do?

I. Introduction: General Concerns of the Community

- Need to do more than talk;
- Concern over perceived lack of remorse among offenders;
- Disturbed/confused over "random" violence;
- Desire to learn how to educate and counsel peers on issues of violence
- Concern over violence encroaching on own neighborhoods, and worldwide;
- Tired of excuses for inaction on problems;
- Perceived connections between specific incidents and types of violence;
- Concern over links between substance abuse and violence, and
- Concern over links between economic inequity and violence.

II. Individual Action

- Recognize potential for violence in yourself;
- Recognize potential for violence in others and offer assistance, and
- Be a witness -- don't become numb or inured to violence.

III. Policy Implementation

- Make child-care resources more available;
- Strengthen child abuse prevention and education programs;
- Increase school/public discussion; make sites available;
- Implement comprehensive program addressing common root causes of violence, such as racism, economic injustice, sexism and sexual abuse;
- Invest in programs such as Youth Peace Corps, High School Graduate mentor/speaker program, public discussions, and
- Educate on the history of violence, both in America (e.g., Native American oppression) and in foreign countries, particularly those with a substantial presence in Cambridge.

IV. Committee Action

- Bring the above list of policy recommendations to the attention of the city government, and
- Follow up on the government's action on the above list, and continue to listen to the community for additional recommendations

The City-wide Response: Recommendations of the Subgroup on Law Enforcement

Unity and Justice Meeting, Law Enforcement Workshop Summary

1. Anti-Stereotyping Training

- The Police Department must regularly have training for all officers at every rank; it must be required and possibly become a regular part of the annual Police Academy.

Similar training must be incorporated into community life in Cambridge; it must become an expectation of living in Cambridge because we live in such diverse settings and we need to understand where we are; the training could be done through the Community Schools, neighborhood associations and/or by city departments.

2. Dialogue among police and citizens

- There must be more regular dialogue among police officers and citizens; every police officer, especially regular patrol officers, must have the opportunity to meet with citizens and vice-versa to share perspectives and air problems. (We did not come up with a who, when or how.)

3. Police complaint and review process

- Citizens must be informed in every way possible how to file a complaint and how the review process is conducted.
- The results of complaint resolutions must be made public; currently, people do not know how complaints are resolved or even whether they are ever resolved. It is important that people know that this system works.
- There need to be some attempts to improve the complaint and review process to make it more collegial, less grueling for those making complaints.
- We need to review the process regularly to see if it is working as well as it can and make changes when necessary.

4. What can individuals do?

- Citizens can create opportunities to listen to police concerns with the hope that this will create a greater willingness on all sides to listen and resolve differences.
- Citizens can become more aware of what is happening around them--people can read local news, talk more with their neighbors and observe what is happening around them.
- Adults need to get to know the youth around them, work with youth, help them to make themselves heard, encourage them to speak up.

Attachment D

The Community Perspective: Recommendations from Specific Area Community Meetings, by Category

Riverside/North Cambridge, East Cambridge, Cambridgeport

The following document reports community recommendations from a series of meetings in Cambridge neighborhoods. Information is provided categorically.

Education System

Ideas included:

- supporting efforts that look at patterns of discrimination and equity in the schools;
- collecting data about areas of bias and which students get access to which programs;
- creating a system for accountability to the public and for measuring progress;
- fostering multiculturalism in schools including high school study of history that recognizes the origins of civilization in Africa and other countries;
- reviewing books for elementary school children for accuracy and inclusivity;
- promoting policy that mandates an inclusive approach to education;
- reworking the language requirements in schools to promote learning of a language other than English;
- encouraging the schools to offer African languages and cultures;
- addressing the issue of physical segregation (e.g., religious, work, private clubs, etc) by having joint events which bring people together;
- working with young children around issues of the development of prejudice;
- equipping teachers and administrators to lead discussions on issues related to justice and diversity, and
- assisting in the development of a curriculum that exposes students to the richness of contemporary American cultures.

Cambridge Youth

Ideas included:

- forums in which the voices of young people, whether students or not, can be heard, other than in times of crisis;

- workshops to help young people learn to diffuse potential violence;
- summer youth concerts and dances, and
- a violence prevention hot line as part of the SAVE hot line at CRLS.

Cambridge Police Department

Ideas included:

- training about the nature of racism and how to be anti-racist;
- reexamination of the need for a police review board;
- more dialogue between police and youth dialogues;
- system for documenting police injustices;
- regular "police watch" newspaper;
- development of a specific culturally responsive agenda for the Department;
- involvement of police in justice and unity process, especially in dealing with the "us/them" issue, and
- creation of policy around all of these issues.

Community-at-Large

Ideas included:

- newsletter to let people know about incidents of injustice in the community;
- year-round multicultural forums in the community to celebrate all the international communities in Cambridge and educate residents about these cultures;
- sharing of members of own cultures with others;
- special outreach to those who would not ordinarily come to a forum;
- a challenge to neighborhood groups, no matter what their mission, to initiate programs that bring people together in culturally diverse groups;
- programs in which residents engage others who are "like us" in dialogues about diversity, racism, etc.;
- forums in which we can hear others who are "unlike us" on issues that we don't understand, and
- programs in which residents commit to meeting/talking to one "different" person each week for four weeks, and then come together and share what they have learned.

Media

Ideas included:

- challenging the local media to resume their practice of thoughtfully and thoroughly acknowledging, celebrating, and nurturing our cultural diversity and acknowledging the positive achievements of young people, particularly young males of color.

Economic Issues

Ideas included working with area businesses to:

- create jobs for youth and adults;
- expose businesses that discriminate, and
- create a job bank through which residents with job openings can hire young people in the area;
- create a project to deal with a basis for discrimination: the unequal distribution of wealth.

Strengthening Connections

The Commission should:

- connect with the Human Rights Commission;
- share and examine the resources that currently exist to deal with racism and violence and see where the gaps are;
- coordinate the activities of Cambridge's various social action committees and commissions on behalf of a common social justice agenda;
- assist in the creation of a network for the exchange of information, inspiration, resources and ideas among the many community groups in the city.

Attachment E

A Closer Look at the Community Meetings: Riverside/North Cambridge, East Cambridge, Cambridgeport

The decision to hold neighborhood meetings was motivated by the felt need both for "speak outs" and a healing process within a constructive critical context. The example set by the students at CRLS -- that of organized public meetings for the school community as well as times set aside for smaller groups of students to engage in reflection and dialogue -- inspired the Unity and Justice Commission to organize the neighborhood meetings so the residents of Cambridge could come together in a supportive and constructive setting to talk about building a just Cambridge.

The first two community meetings, in Riverside and in North Cambridge, began with opening comments by CRLS students and civic leaders who had participated in the organized activities at CRLS. Their stories proved to be an important catalyst for the discussions that followed. The third and fourth community meetings were further removed in time from the events surrounding the acquittal of the men who beat Rodney King. Each of these meetings had a different character.

Riverside

High school students from different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds presented what they had done in the high school in response to the verdict. Their presentations reflected on the contradictions in Cambridge. On the one hand, there is Cambridge's apparent acceptance of diversity. On the other, there are tremendous frustrations and problems.

A freshman in high school said he had never seen a just government. "I'm too young to be this old," he said. People commented that too many institutions in society, and in our own city, keep people segregated. Clear intentions aren't enough unless there are structures in place to enforce processes for dealing with racism.

Faculty from the high school revealed their shock that some colleagues refused to be open to discussions on lack of racial justice. People are not able to talk about their fears. "Racism is not supremacist anymore; it's denial, self-imposed ignorance."

Students were critical of the schools and their peers: "The system is not on your side if you're working class." "It's not enough to have staff who reflect students' racial and gender backgrounds. We need staff who know the heartbeat of the students." "It was upsetting that there were so many non-reactions (to the verdict)." "Some kids didn't want more discussion, after the

first few days."

Adults and young people alike spoke about racist and abusive behavior by the police force. They indicated that the police department needs to find ways to eliminate racism on the force. There was agreement that more needs to be done all over to combat racism and the divisiveness it breeds. One adult said, "Too many young brothers and sisters have given up hope because they don't expect a piece of the pie in the white world."

The general mood of this meeting was to continue encouraging neighborhood meetings and communication between people across the city; to find ways of holding institutions accountable (schools, police department, job creation programs, the media) for creating justice.

Specific suggestions for activities appear in Attachment D.

North Cambridge

Students and civic leaders alike led off the discussion. The students voiced some general concerns about the response (to the acquittal) at the high school. Some feared violence. White students feared the anger being expressed by Black students. There were teachers who were afraid to deal with the issues or who did not know how to handle the situation. A former CRLS student spoke of solutions as being "organized change." "It's taken 500 years for America to be as it is now," he said, "so it will take time for change." He advocated revision of curriculum in schools, specifically, to work for multicultural curriculum.

Residents urged individuals to take collective action through meetings: "we must see ourselves as part of the solution."

People expressed anger at the media for only reporting negatively about black youth when many black youth are involved in services for the community, attending excellent colleges and making positive contributions. Others spoke of "the despair whether you are white or black, when you feel you are at the bottom of the rung." Students and alumni described the unfair treatment of one of them by Cambridge police. He was arrested when police arrived at a local party and broke it up. He believes he was arrested for protesting police behavior which he described as illegal.

A young man said the majority of people don't have the opportunity to reach out and create solutions: "They are part of the problem and part of the solution. We need education to provide understanding. Groups need to work together, not remain isolated from one another." Some people advocated reaching out to others who are different from themselves. Others spoke of the necessity to talk openly about racism to find ways of changing.

Suggestions for specific activities are in Attachment D.

East Cambridge (7/21/92)

This was an unusual meeting, because there had been an incident the night before, in which some 20 or more youths were told by police to leave Kennedy Park. Police roughed some of them up. The police were probably called by abutters of the park who complained about noise. Some of the youths claim they were "play fighting." Shortly after, there was further disruption involving the same youths, outside the home of one of them. The youths fought with one another in the street, and neighbors called the police. One youth pulled a knife on another. There was one arrest made.

The youths at this meeting addressed the issue of having no place to go after the Teen Center closes at 9 p.m. They also felt that the police intervened in their disagreements when "we were the ones who were dealing with it." One young man felt that "There's nothing you can do. Things like this happen." The youngster who was roughed up by the police (he was thrown up against a car and his shirt was ripped) said: "They had no business I guess they thought I was being smart.... "

The discussion at the meeting focused on whether the fighting could have been avoided and whether the police were disrespectful. One youth said "We don't know how to get out of these situations. It's stupid, but we don't know what to do....People get a bad rep... and can't back out of a fight." A youth worker explained that the kids have had workshops on how to diffuse such situations. One youth said there is violence on t.v., in the media, and in people's homes. The kids turn to the streets, he said. One young man said the police were doing what they had to do -- "they had to get somebody. " The same youth said, "Wherever you put us there'll always be a problem. Adults have to learn to tolerate us. "

The mood of many of these young people seemed to be fatalistic. They did not have many ideas about how to improve the situation.

Suggestions for specific activities are in Attachment D.

Communications & Reports
from City Officers #2 5-274

Communication from Mayor Reeves
RE: the findings and report from the
Mayor's Commission on Unity & Justice

In City Council,
June 7, 1993

*Report & Recommendations
Accepted*