

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

"WE BELIEVE IN NEW ORLEANS"

VOLUME IV

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ACTIVISTS

AND

ALL OTHER ORGANIZERS

LISTENING SESSION

TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2007

6:00 P.M.

RUSSELL CARLL AND AQEEL ABDUL-SALAAM,
CO-CHAIRS

REPORTED BY:

DIANE W. MATHEWS, CCR

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HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

LARRY BAGNERIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DAWN SEGURA, HRC ATTORNEY

SYNTHIA DEMONS

AQEEL ABDUL-SALAAM

THERESE BADON

FR. WALTER BAER

MICHIE BISSELL

RUSSELL CARLL

RABBI EDWARD P. COHN

MICHAEL COWAN

GEORGE R. GALLIEN

KEN GRAND-PRE'

MARTIN GUTIERREZ

FR. VIEN NGUYEN

FRANCIS KING

MARGARET MONTGOMERY-RICHARD

DOTTIE REESE

DR. HANA SAFAH

JANE PARKER

CRAIG M. STEWART

PATRICIA BIVINS

- 0 -

1 MR. BAGNERIS:

2 Good evening. I am going to ask everyone
3 if they would please take their seats so that we can
4 begin.

5 Thank you.

6 Well good evening, everyone and thank you
7 so much for taking time out of your busy schedules to be
8 with the Human Relations Commission this evening. This
9 is merely a conversation with members of the Human
10 Relations Commission, but we want to hear from you. We
11 want to listen to your concerns and issues.

12 We are going to be one small family here
13 tonight. I have just been informed that when I spoke
14 with each of the individuals in these six different
15 groups that we are going to hear from tonight, that they
16 didn't realize that they were supposed to inform their
17 membership. I expected to have a full crowd but the
18 whole idea is to get from the community leaders to share
19 with us what they feel we need to do to get the City
20 fixed up and moving forward.

21 I'm delighted to have representatives from
22 the NAACP, from Eracism, from SCLC, to share with us
23 about the group's history and then we are going to have
24 a really good discussion amongst ourselves.

25 My name is Larry Bagneris and I'm the

1 Executive Director of the City of New Orleans Human
2 Relations Commission. We are going through a 13 month
3 study and this is now our fourth conversation with the
4 Human Relations Commission. We have been ecstatic with
5 the participation of the individuals that have come and
6 shared some of their ideas. We started out with the
7 African American Professional Community, then we went to
8 the Caucasian American New Orleanian Professional
9 Community, then we went to the Irish, the French and the
10 Italian group last month, which was a very interesting
11 meeting by having them share with each other.

12 Now we have community activists and
13 organizers tonight that have been around a long time in
14 this community. At this point and time I'm going to
15 turn it over to the two co-chairs, two of the
16 extinguished members of the commission, and I will let
17 them introduce themselves. I have taken up enough of
18 your time.

19 Thank you for being here.

20 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

21 Good evening. My name is Aqeel Abdul-
22 Salaam and I am a member of the Human Relations
23 Commission.

24 This is one of my partners, Russ Carll, and
25 we will be serving as co-chairs for this session.

1 MR. CARLL:

2 Good evening, everyone, this is Russ Carll.

3 Before we begin, we have other members of
4 the Human Relations Commission that are present here
5 tonight. If you would stand up and raise your hands
6 please so that everyone knows where you are?

7 (Members Comply.)

8 Thank you, thank you for being with us this
9 evening. This is our smallest group, which is fine.
10 Sometimes I think you can get more accomplished when you
11 are a small group.

12 I encourage you, if you haven't already
13 done so, to please sign in with Craig Stewart, over
14 there in the back. We do have a map in the back of the
15 room and what we would like for you to do is to indicate
16 with a dot what area of the city you are representing.

17 There is also a survey that we would
18 request that each of you complete at the end of the
19 session; that is our way of being critiqued by you to
20 let us know areas in which we can improve. Those of you
21 who have cell phones, now would be a good time to put
22 them on vibrate, thank you very much.

23 Now before we get started with the agenda
24 this evening. I am going to lay out the ground rules,
25 some of you have been here before. First off, the

1 purpose of this listening session is to hear your
2 thoughts and feelings as members of many groups that
3 make up the diversity in this city. Concerns emerging
4 in those sessions will be publicized in the larger
5 community as part of HRC's overall report and action
6 plan on enhancing respect for and inclusion of diversity
7 in New Orleans. Based on that report the HRC will make
8 specific recommendations to the Mayor, City Council and
9 say these are some things that members of the group feel
10 that ought to be changed, any suggestions, et cetera.

11 Strictly these are listening sessions and the
12 idea for the whole thing over the next year is that we
13 hope to get input from every possible diverse group in
14 this city. We feel that eventually there is going to be
15 a common bond that runs through all of these groups.
16 The purpose of each of the 13 sessions, maybe some
17 people who were here before and also some new
18 viewpoints. After all of these sessions we will go to
19 the City Council and the Mayor and say, "These are some
20 things that ought to be changed to have a more realistic
21 city as far as a city of brotherhood and not division.
22 So in that respect, we want you to be as open and honest
23 as possible so that when we put it in the report; that
24 is what we distribute. In each of these group notes at
25 the end of the year we are going to be able to compile

1 them, because I can't remember what I said two days ago
2 and what somebody else said. The reality is that it
3 will all be recorded and written down so that we will be
4 able to access the information.

5 We want to hear what you have to say. We
6 will not respond, but if you want to talk to one of the
7 commission members afterward, please feel free to do so.

8 Each of the groups will also have an
9 opportunity to state what their contribution is to the
10 City of New Orleans, in the past and from there we will
11 head on into the conversation. At this time I will turn
12 it over to Aqeel to discuss your timeframe, et cetera.

13 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

14 The conversation has very specific rules,
15 we would ask that everyone when they stand to speak, to
16 give their name, the organization that they are
17 representing. Everyone please note each person's
18 comments should be limited to five to eight minutes, so
19 that in fairness to time limits we can hear from
20 everyone.

21 MR. BAGNERIS:

22 The leadership will be eight to 10 minutes
23 and five for the general.

24 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

25 Eight to 10 for the background information

1 on your group and for each individual speaker, five
2 minutes. The forum will not respond to anything that is
3 said, which means there will not be dialogue between the
4 Human Relations Commission and the speaker.

5 Please feel free to express yourself and
6 tell us exactly how you feel.

7 We will be getting started with the NAACP,
8 Mr. Danatus King.

9 MR. CARLL:

10 I just want to say that the way the
11 speakers were picked, there wasn't any particular thing
12 to who started first. He signed in first out of
13 everybody, so he is the person to speak. He has been
14 here at least 30 years, correct, Danatus?

15 MR. KING:

16 Good evening. It is with mixed emotions
17 that I am here this evening. And I say mixed emotions
18 because on one hand I am grateful to have this forum,
19 but then on the other hand there has been so many forums
20 in the past that have not reborn any fruit. So that is
21 why I say I am here with mixed emotions, but having said
22 that, I am going to say a little bit about the NAACP New
23 Orleans branch.

24 The NAACP, and I say this without fear of
25 being successfully contradicted, the NAACP is the

1 nation's oldest, largest and boldest civil rights
2 organization. We were founded in 1909 and we will be
3 celebrating our 100 year birthday in two years. And
4 also, I make the announcement to you all that we have
5 been selected, the New Orleans branch has been selected
6 to host the 2008 Region VI Convention. So we will be
7 looking for support from everyone for that.

8 I speak about the NAACP being established
9 in 1909, but something that was surprising to me when I
10 found out, that the New Orleans branch was actually
11 chartered in 1916, so this branch has a lot of history
12 behind it. And some of us may be unaware of the role
13 that New Orleans has played in the civil rights movement
14 and as far as something historic where they are famous
15 or infamous legal decisions and in particular, the
16 Plessy decision. The NAACP has historically been a
17 pivotal cog in the history of our nation when it comes
18 down to race relations and that has not changed much in
19 the 200 years, the past 200 years.

20 The NAACP is primarily and foremost an
21 advocacy organization and we are aware of that role, we
22 go out and advocate for people, it has been and still is
23 our role. Now we do have a certain service component to
24 us, but primarily we're the ones out there advocating.

25 During Katrina our service aspect was more

1 pronounced in that period that is where we were needed
2 as far as making sure our members and other groups
3 received first of all, shelter, housing, clothing,
4 water, food and those basic necessities. In the more
5 recent period of time, we have been helping folks in
6 gaining employment, housing, education; those aspects of
7 our community.

8 We have been at the forefront, along with
9 other groups, including SCLC, tackling subjects such as
10 police brutality. Right before Katrina, there was a
11 march, it was actually in June of 2005 and that march
12 was to protest against the racial injustice that
13 occurred and is still occurring in our French Quarter.
14 We worked with the Human Relations Commission on that
15 and there was actually some testers that went out and
16 documented that, yes, there is racism in the French
17 Quarter. So if anybody doubted that, there was
18 objective testing that confirmed that. Now there are
19 also some other issues and one involving the Human
20 Rights Commission -- the Human Relations Commission,
21 that preceded Katrina that is not a closed book. It's
22 not a closed book, and I'm bringing it up, Mr. Bagneris,
23 and that is the murder of the young tourist, Levon
24 Jones, the African American tourist in the French
25 Quarter. And when Katrina occurred that kind of slipped

1 on through and got swept away. So that is something
2 that we've not forgotten and that is something that
3 needs to be picked up. It befalls not only on a private
4 establishment; it also involves the police department,
5 the New Orleans Police Department. So that is something
6 that we need to pick the ball up on.

7 And as we stand right now, I just left from
8 a meeting with the school board and the education
9 inequities in our public education system is something
10 that is race based, there is no doubt about it, race
11 based and class based. We have been fighting against
12 that and will continue to fight against that.

13 So those are some of the things that we
14 have been doing and that we will continue along that
15 path.

16 To close out, and I don't know if this is
17 the appropriate time, but there are specific things that
18 the group feels disrespected? Should that be addressed
19 now or during the discussion?

20 MR. BAGNERIS:

21 At this time we would like for you to
22 present the NAACP history and contribution to New
23 Orleans.

24 MR. KING:

25 Well I will close out on the history branch

1 and come back up during the open session. And actually
2 I will make my close out and this will be in the record,
3 I would like to invite all of you to become members of
4 the New Orleans branch of the NAACP.

5 MR. CARLL:

6 Thank you, Mr. King. Next we are going to
7 hear from Bill Knecht with the Eracism group.

8 MR. KNECHT:

9 Okay. I'm Bill Knecht; I'm a member
10 actually of the organization that is Erace. Erace is a
11 group that was formed in 1993 by Brenda Thompson, a
12 black woman and Rhoda Faust, a white woman, in following
13 the posting in the Times-Picayune about the myth of
14 race. They got together over a cup of coffee, both
15 upset about the hatred that was being expressed in the
16 letters to the editor and the various responses to that
17 article. What they were upset about was that the
18 impression was being given that all white people think
19 one way and all black people think the other way.

20 So in 1993 they basically designed the
21 bumper sticker that you see, Eracism. The purpose of
22 the bumper sticker was to show folks around the world
23 that somebody was opposed to racism. This bumper
24 sticker has been distributed, over 150,000 throughout
25 the United States and even overseas. Again, that was as

1 a symbol that there are some folks that are opposed to
2 racism.

3 And the second basic thing that the
4 organization does is to bring people together from
5 different backgrounds, in New Orleans it is usually
6 black and white, in a safe atmosphere without fear of
7 attack or criticism attack where they can get together
8 and talk about race relations and racial issues. We
9 have conducted over a thousand of these meetings through
10 the years. Before Katrina there were three meetings a
11 week in New Orleans alone. Then now after Katrina we
12 are back up to two meetings a week, every week, except
13 for holidays and Jazz Fest, whatever.

14 So those are the basic two things that we
15 do, feeling that bringing folks together in a safe
16 atmosphere is the most important action to try to
17 decrease the methodology, prejudice and violence that we
18 all have. Since Katrina, we are doing all this without
19 any federal funding, without any staff, without any
20 employees, solely funded by donations from people,
21 citizens, and from donations given for the bumper
22 sticker. We are starting to expand, besides the bumper
23 sticker, as you can see I'm excited because we just got
24 our brand new Eracism hats; that we are going to be
25 distributing to folks because some people for some

1 reason just don't like bumper stickers. So that is
2 fine, we now have pins, coffee cups, hats, sweatshirts,
3 t-shirts and so forth, just as another way to begin to
4 spread the word.

5 Also since Katrina there has been kind of
6 an opportunity for us. Although locally our cadre of
7 volunteers has decreased from probably 50 to around 30,
8 several people in the organization moved outside of the
9 area, evacuated. For example, a few of our board
10 members moved and stayed in Atlanta. So we have never
11 had any external chapters outside of the Greater New
12 Orleans area, but now we have our first chapter, Erace
13 Chapter in Atlanta, now having regular meetings like
14 they are in New Orleans, in Atlanta. They have
15 requested - we have over 1,000 people on our mailing
16 list that have supported the organization and I get
17 requests all of the time from different parts of the
18 country, how can we start a chapter in our community?
19 So we're excited about that and we have a long range
20 plan which is standing and that is to become a national
21 and even maybe an international organization.

22 What I forgot to mention was our basic
23 mission statement, which is that we believe in - Sorry,
24 I'm blocking now - our mission is simple. We believe in
25 bringing people together.

1 By the way, what you were saying? What is
2 what Larry was saying, Caucasian or European American?
3 I prefer old white guy.

4 We believe in person to person - through
5 person to person communication to show that we are
6 committed to treating fellow human beings of all colors,
7 with love and respect.

8 Can you come up here with me, Dee?

9 MS. LEWIS:

10 (Complies.)

11 MR. KNECHT:

12 You know, that is another thing that we do.
13 Whenever we go somewhere in public, it's not just some
14 old white guy thing now. We want to have, we want to
15 represent --

16 MS. LEWIS:

17 Old black woman. We do try.

18 MR. KNECHT:

19 We want to represent our organization.
20 Whenever we go to speak in public or are at a public
21 function, we always try to do a mirror image, that is
22 what we are trying to do. Which is to try to bring --

23 MR. CARLL:

24 A young, vivacious black woman.

25 MS. LEWIS:

1 It's a mirror image, an old black woman and
2 an old white man.

3 MR. KNECHT:

4 Okay? We want to show person to person
5 communication.

6 MS. LEWIS:

7 I just want to encourage all of you people
8 to come enjoy yourselves and attend our meetings. We
9 just want to kind of keep the word spread out. I know
10 that sometimes we all get kind of busy because we all
11 have a lot going on, our lives to live and there is so
12 much to do, but it is really an interesting program.

13 MR. CARLL:

14 Where are the meetings held?

15 MS. LEWIS:

16 The Saturday meeting is held at WWL - where
17 is it?

18 MR. KNECHT:

19 The WRBH at 3306 Magazine.

20 MS. LEWIS:

21 And the Tuesdays is right over there when
22 you get off by City Park Avenue.

23 MR. KNECHT:

24 Tuesday meetings are at 618 City Park
25 Avenue.

1 MS. LEWIS:

2 I can't tell you the addresses; I can tell
3 you the street it's on. I know how to get everywhere in
4 the City, but don't ask me the street address.

5 MR. CARLL:

6 Thank you.

7 MR. ABDUL-SALEEM:

8 Next we have the reverend of SCLC, Reverend
9 Norwood Thompson.

10 REVEREND THOMPSON:

11 Good evening. It just comes naturally for
12 a Rev to get up on the stage, so just let me just get on
13 the stage.

14 First of all; good evening to everybody.

15 AUDIENCE:

16 Good evening.

17 REVEREND THOMPSON:

18 I did bring some books, which I will leave
19 right (indicating) here. These are some SCLC magazines
20 and also some membership cards, we will leave that with
21 you also.

22 I would, well first I would like to say
23 what our mission statement is. In the spirit of Martin
24 Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership
25 Conference is renewing it's commitment to bring up the

1 problems of one nation, under God, indivisible, together
2 with the commitment to activate the strength of love in
3 the community for human kind. And with that, I will
4 give you a little brief synapses of our history.

5 The beginning of the Southern Christian
6 Leadership Conference, SCLC, the acronym, can be traced
7 back to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Now the Montgomery
8 Bus Boycott began on December 5, 1955 after Rosa Parks
9 was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white
10 male on the bus. The bus boycott, bus-cott, lasted for
11 381 days and ended on December 21, 1956 with the
12 desegregation of the Montgomery bus system. The boycott
13 was carried out from the newly established Montgomery
14 Improvement Association, MIA. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
15 served as the President and Ralph Hebert Abernathy
16 served as the Program Director. It was one of the
17 history's most dramatically important cases which
18 studied in the nation as well as in the world.

19 The bus-cott was also a signal to black
20 America to be given a new face of a long struggle, a
21 face that came to be known as the modern civil rights
22 movement. As the bus-cott strayed across the south,
23 leaders of the MIA and another protest group met in
24 Atlanta on January 10th through the 11th of 1957 to form a
25 regional organization and to coordinate protest activity

1 across the south. Despite the burning of the home of
2 the then church of Ralph Abernathy during the Atlanta
3 Regional meeting, 60 persons and ten state or similar
4 men announced the forming of the Southern Negro Leaders
5 Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration.
6 The issue had now been declared as civil rights
7 partnered central to democracy that segregation must end
8 and that all black people should reject segregation
9 absolutely and nonviolently. Part of the organizing was
10 done at a meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana on February
11 14, 1957. At that meeting they shortened its name and
12 the name then came known to be the Southern Christian
13 Leadership Conference with Dr. Martin Luther King being
14 founded as our founding president.

15 The Southern Christian Leadership
16 Conference has been very active and I thank God that I
17 see many of our ministers, Danatus King, and some of the
18 others from the black organizations. We have on many
19 agendas come together in a unified effort to look at
20 some of the problems that actually affect our city. The
21 Southern Christian Leadership Conference, since I am now
22 serving as the president of what we call the SCLC
23 President of the Greater New Orleans Southern Leadership
24 Conference with the west bank and east bank director.
25 We have formed many committees, we have an educational

1 committee and we just left from over at the school board
2 with Better Together, supporting the strength of Ms.
3 Brenda Mitchell and UPTNO. We have a crime committee;
4 our crime committee is chaired by our defense attorney
5 Robert Jenkins. We have a housing committee, a research
6 committee, financial committee, a women's committee, I'm
7 happy to have Ms. Thompson (indicating) who is here with
8 me who chairs that. A federal committee, a youth
9 committee with chapters in all of the universities in
10 the City of New Orleans, a CRA advisory committee and a
11 recovery and rebuilding committee. We hope to continue
12 on with MLK's Symposium on Race Relations in this city.
13 I just wanted to get that out of the way.

14 On last Saturday we had a march in our city
15 and that march was for a march for peace. We also have
16 been very involved with the Danzinger Seven, after the
17 young man and a couple of our own people got killed on
18 the Danzinger Bridge. We have been very active in
19 supporting their families.

20 We have also been very active in the
21 killing that took place in the Lower Ninth Ward, by the
22 national guards. Our national president had come to
23 town and met with the Chief of Police, Warren Riley,
24 and met with the mayor, Mayor Nagin.

25 We were also involved, I heard President

1 Danatus mention also about Razoo's, we was there. When
2 our national president came into the city and met with
3 the mayor and the chief, then they went out with mystery
4 shoppers and we found out that there was some treatment,
5 ill treatment towards black African Americans.

6 Also we had a chance to go to Boston and
7 also New York with Sheriff Harry Lee and try to see if
8 we could discover new avenues and ways to curtail crime.
9 We have been working closely also with Crimestoppers in
10 our community. And Dr. King taught us that we should
11 speak up against any injustice anywhere, and
12 particularly since we are here in the City of New
13 Orleans. As he taught us to be nonviolent, we started,
14 we participated in the gun buy back program and we have
15 taken thousands of weapons off of the streets of the
16 City of New Orleans. We have also, since coming back
17 post Katrina, been working with John Mac and some of the
18 other high schools. We have been going over there,
19 addressing the students.

20 We are hopefully, and we have gotten the
21 okay from City Hall to work along with us, to work with
22 a conflict resolution center. One of the things that --
23 the conflict resolution center is where our youth can
24 come and speak to us about anything that they may be
25 suspecting or an aspect that may be going on in their

1 school or in their community. One of the things that
2 Dr. King really taught us about and that was to belove
3 community. Well before I get to belove community, he
4 also pressed the world power. And this was Dr. King's
5 words, he said, "We have inherited a large house, a
6 great world house in which we have to live together,
7 black and white, easterners and westerners, gentiles and
8 Jews, catholic and protestant, Islam's and Hindu's, a
9 family unduly separated in ideas, cultures and
10 interests, who because we can never again live apart but
11 learn somehow to live together with each other in
12 peace." Together now, as Dr. King said, "We must learn
13 to live as brothers or together we will be forced to be
14 perish as fools."

15 We have also been, I see Mrs. Charles
16 (indicating) out there, we have been very active working
17 with the MLK Charter School. Our national president
18 came to the city and has adopted that school on a
19 national level. He took a trip to Italy and just as
20 luck would have it, he ran into another school named
21 after Dr. King. And as luck would have it in the
22 classroom, they were discussing Civil Rights Movement.
23 And now he has gone and married the two schools, they
24 will take the children from New Orleans and they will
25 go and make the trip to Italy and some of them will make

1 the trip from Italy to New Orleans, so that will bring
2 about diversity, where we can learn a whole lot about
3 diversity.

4 We have been very active in this community
5 and one of the things that we saw recently was with the
6 Don Imos situation that we saw on television.

7 Now many people don't think that African
8 American leaders speak out against the rap music and the
9 hip hop community. And I must say that we have a very
10 close contact with the hip hop community through our
11 youth chapter but we actually speak up many times on
12 things such as the derogatory language that we hear, the
13 put down on our women. We have gone to the radio
14 station and because many, many of our young people was
15 rapping at each other in a violent manner. The SCLC
16 stands for nonviolence and what we have found out is
17 that the radio announcer told us is that, "Reverend,
18 what we do is we play the songs but we bleep out the
19 cussing words." You know, but you can't do much better
20 than that, but the whole nation now will have this
21 discussion about the degeneration of women and about the
22 type of language that is filtering in our community.
23 SCLC has been very vigilant; we have gotten a long way
24 to go.

25 SCLC just celebrated here in the City of

1 New Orleans on February 14, 2007, our 50th anniversary.
2 So we really are not an old organization, we are not
3 like the mother organization, NAACP, but we are 50 years
4 old. Our national convention will be convening in
5 Atlanta, Georgia on August the 8th, August the 3rd through
6 the 8th. And I'm more than sure that many of our chapter
7 presidents will come and dialogue. There are many
8 issues, even as I speak right now.

9 As I get ready to bring my comments to a
10 close, I was elated greatly last month one Sunday while
11 I was celebrating in church, a church group from over on
12 the west bank came over and fellowshiped with me, they
13 are known as God's House. They was all white folks, and
14 they came and had a great time. I said this is the
15 epiphany of brotherhood that Dr. King wanted us to get a
16 picture of. Until we can get it right, until us of
17 sound mind can get it right, we are always going to have
18 this delusion. I was reading over a part of our history
19 where Dr. King went to jail so many times on our behalf.
20 It was on one instance where he was sitting in jail and
21 the students of a nonviolent organization called him Dr.
22 Mack. When Reverend Mason, when he came in, he told the
23 assistant, "Look if you all don't care to do it Dr.
24 King's way, you all don't want to do it our way." So he
25 came in and he said, "You all better release this man."

1 So I say this to the Human Relations
2 Commission, I had a chance to work with that committee a
3 little bit. We got to get it right in New Orleans. New
4 Orleans can make a statement to the rest of the world.
5 I came out, I guess after a statement that Ed Blakely
6 made about calling the people in the city buffoons and
7 we Shiites and Sunni's. And I think that he should
8 stick to rebuilding and let us make the comments.

9 So we've got much work to do in our city.
10 There is a lot of mistrust about people with the police
11 department. We saw what took place in Virginia Tech.
12 And we have a real crisis here in the City of New
13 Orleans, unless we of folks of goodwill really reach out
14 to try and help the meeker of people, we must evoke. I
15 think that our city has been blessed not to have the
16 turbulence that we have seen going across Seattle,
17 Cincinnati and some of the other cities. We have been
18 blessed here in the City because we all live; the people
19 live on racial tensions in the city because of dealing
20 with rational minds. It is going to be the job of the
21 Human Relations Commission, the NAACP, Eracism, SCLC,
22 Urban League and all of the other people and
23 organizations in the city.

24 I just want to thank the late Reverend King
25 because he called a meeting of all of the Civil Rights

1 organizations to come together and we came together. I
2 think it was historic of the city, of New Orleans, where
3 all of the nation came together to listen at some of
4 these other problems that are effecting our children,
5 effecting our seniors, and I'm happy to see Eracism here
6 because we need to bring everybody to the table. Once
7 we come to the table I think that we can solve the
8 problems. It won't be the Mayor, it won't be the Chief
9 of Police, but it is going to be me and women and men of
10 God and we really believe that we can make a difference.
11 So with that, God bless you.

12 I left some booklets on the side for you to
13 have and also some membership cards.

14 Thank you so much.

15 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

16 Thank you, Reverend Norwood.

17 Next we are going to hear from the second
18 line group, Ms. Barbara Keller.

19 MS. KELLER:

20 Good evening. The uniqueness of my
21 presentation is that second line is not an organization,
22 it is a traditional culture. It is part of our culture.
23 It is one of the most; it is the original culture that
24 exists for African Americans. It derives from the
25 motherland, Africa, when our forefathers and ancestors

1 were brought to this country, through no will of their
2 own. They brought some things with them such as the
3 second line. And one of the things was that Louisiana,
4 or New Orleans specifically, was the only city that
5 where there were slaves that were allowed to have
6 Sunday. They would give the slaves Sunday to be with
7 each other, to either celebrate, or to either worship or
8 whatever they wanted to do on Sunday. They would
9 congregate other right over there (indicating), as we
10 know it, what is known as Municipal Auditorium, which is
11 Congo Square. They would sit there and have a wonderful
12 time with each other.

13 And also, as you know, we were not
14 considered as human beings, we were machines, because we
15 did the work. But what happened is we were able, and I
16 say we, because it is part of me. We were able to
17 create the benevolent society. The benevolent society
18 came through the church, through the religious part,
19 where they would pay as little as a nickel a week to put
20 in a fund. The fund was used as a either sick fund or a
21 burial fund, that means that is someone would become
22 ill, then that money would come out of that money to
23 help that person buy medicine or whatever.

24 The music became a part of Second Lining
25 with the jazz musicians when they came up with the jazz

1 funeral. There is a difference between a jazz funeral,
2 where you pay respect to music and it was originated for
3 musicians. Musicians, it was originated for musicians,
4 but today anyone can have a jazz funeral. You don't
5 have to have been a musician; you don't have to have
6 been a part of the second line. You just call up, you
7 call up and if you got the money, you pay for the band
8 and you can have a jazz funeral. It was not created for
9 that purpose; it was created as an honor and to pay
10 respect and homage to a jazz musician.

11 The benevolent society, as I said, was
12 basically one thing that was created to take care of our
13 own. What happened is that the benevolent society, it
14 spilled into the street where it became a social
15 gathering because no matter who we are or what we are,
16 we are always going to be a part. We established the
17 social and pleasure part of second line. The term
18 "second line" what it means is the people behind the
19 band. The band would be first, second line would be the
20 people behind the band. But today it's different, it's
21 like the people are in front and the band is in the
22 back.

23 (Audience laughter.)

24 It's different now. As I try to tell
25 people is what it is, it's a moving party. I do feel

1 that a lot of people, not just my other sisters and
2 brothers, but my own African American sisters and
3 brothers, they do have not a respect for the culture
4 because they are not knowledgeable of the culture. If
5 they were knowledgeable to know where it derived from
6 and how deep of a history it is, they would understand
7 that it's a part of us. It's not an organization; it's
8 a part of our tradition.

9 As a child, as a sense of belonging because
10 my family was poor, that was considered a sense of
11 belonging when you belonged to a second line group. The
12 second line group would have their parade and the ladies
13 would look nice on the cars and the men, they would go
14 through the community, the parade would move through the
15 community. There was four basic elements to the second
16 line, and the reason that they had these elements was
17 that when they go through the community with the
18 umbrella to hold in the sun, they would have
19 handkerchiefs that as the people would do this
20 (demonstrating) to wipe the brows and sweat. They would
21 have the baskets and then stop, stop at your house and
22 you give me something to eat or drink, I put it in my
23 basket. Okay? And also, they had the streamer and not
24 everybody would wear that streamer, because that
25 streamer would either be that you were a grand marshall

1 or you were the parade chairman, you wore it in
2 distinction.

3 So what I'm saying, and the uniqueness
4 about what I am saying is that it's not about an
5 organization, it's about a culture. Second line is a
6 tradition, a culture or tradition of a culture that is
7 geared to us. One of the problems as it stands in New
8 Orleans now, before Katrina there was actually 54 second
9 line groups, there is only one benevolent society and
10 that is the Young Men of Distinction Junior Benevolent
11 Society. This is the only benevolent society that
12 exists and it is over 100 years old. However, there are
13 quite a few social and pleasure and marching clubs.
14 They come from all over the city; they are people from
15 all walks of life. The people have a deep love and
16 commitment for the culture. I started with my family
17 when I was a very young child. I came through, I just
18 retired a couple of years ago, but it is deep-rooted in
19 me. My children, I exposed them to have an opportunity
20 to participate, but they chose not to. I felt that I
21 needed to expose them to give them a choice.

22 So what I am saying is that we are not an
23 organization, we are part of a culture movement, we are
24 a culture people. We believe in the tradition and some
25 of the problems that we have in what has been happening

1 out there is because the people are not knowledgeable.
2 They really think that it's a bunch of folk that get
3 together on a Sunday, run up and down the street, with
4 cans, carrying on with violence and shaking their
5 booty's down, you know, but that is not the case. It is
6 a strong tradition that I guess as we get into the
7 discussion we will talk about some of the pro's and
8 con's, advantage and disadvantage of the culture.

9 Thank you.

10 MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

11 Before we get into the discussion, I will
12 actually just review for a moment. Again, the purpose
13 of the conversations, so that everybody can understand,
14 that we are having for the Human Relations Commission.
15 We are here as a listening session to hear your thoughts
16 and feelings, members of the many groups that make up
17 the diversity of our city. Members of the Human
18 Relations Commission are present to facilitate and
19 listen. We will not respond to your questions or
20 concerns. A court reporter is present to provide a
21 detailed record of what you have to say. So after the
22 session, HRC members will review the transcript,
23 identify the major things that it contains and feedback
24 to the city. This will be publicized in the larger
25 community as part of HRC's overall report with detailed

1 recommendations for city leaders, the city officials and
2 so forth and so on.

3 So everyone that would speak, we would ask
4 that you give your name and limit your comments to five
5 minutes.

6 Who would like to start? It's an open
7 forum.

8 MR. CARLL:

9 One of the things that we ask you to bring
10 to us as a group, what in your history or how do you
11 consider yourselves today as being disrespected as far
12 as an organization. I know that all of you are in
13 positions of leadership where your organization has been
14 accepted within the community. So I would like for you,
15 if you are able, to tell us that.

16 Ms. Barbara, would you like to start?

17 MS. KELLER:

18 One of the disadvantages of the culture
19 of second line that is being disrespected because
20 through no fault of their own, the people, the members
21 who actually are members of the group who pay the money
22 for the parades that we have, they are being misrepresented --
23 miss. Say it for me, please.

24 AUDIENCE:

25 Misrepresented.

1 MS. KELLER:

2 Thank you. We are being misrepresented and
3 also because, as I said to you before, they are not
4 knowledgeable. What has happened is that there are
5 cowards that use the opportunity for something that is
6 of importance and dear to us to use that to do their
7 dirty work and what has happened is that we have
8 experienced some violence along the way. If you look at
9 the record and if you look at the articles; not one was
10 a member of a group that was participating in the
11 parade. Not one, not one was a second line member. So
12 what has happened is that it has caused the groups to be
13 treated as if they were the culprit because it has been
14 said that violence is associated with the culture, which
15 is totally untrue.

16 Larry and I have discussed it, and as you
17 know, there has been some discussion of some things
18 going on at this time such as applies to the fees, the
19 fees of having the parade. The groups feel that they
20 have been discriminated against and that is for another
21 entity to settle and I'm not here to pro's or con or be
22 on anyone's side. I just hope that it will be resolved
23 in a win/win situation for all, for everyone. It is
24 total -- and another thing, it is limited. I remember
25 as a child, I know that anyone who lives in New Orleans

1 knows that we were called the Jolly Bunch. The Jolly
2 Bunch would parade from sun-up to sundown, uptown to
3 downtown. But not now, it is limited. You are limited
4 to four hours and you are limited to a concentrated
5 place. You know, those things do not exist anymore and
6 I think that is one way of being discriminated against
7 and it is a disadvantage.

8 Second line groups receive no federal
9 funds, no state dollars; it's a self sufficient culture.
10 They go to work everyday. They take care of their
11 families. They do that, but they still find nickels and
12 dimes or whatever and do what they have to do to put a
13 parade on. A lot of people don't know that and people
14 have prejudged the people that participate in the
15 culture, that they are a certain class of people. That
16 is totally untrue; they come from all walks of life.
17 Professional people, blue collar people, medical people,
18 they come just for the love of culture. For us, that is
19 one of the disadvantages of the culture.

20 Thank you.

21 MR. CARLL:

22 Thank you.

23 REVEREND THOMPSON:

24 Reverend Norwood Thompson, Jr., President
25 of the SCLC. One of the things that our organization

1 might feel disrespected is the media coverage here in
2 our city. When something good goes on, we can't get no
3 coverage. As soon as there is a murder that takes
4 place; or something bad, I guess that is what sells the
5 newspapers. We will call, normally if we call for a
6 press conference, most of the time we will get the
7 media, radio media, but as far as print media, hum. So
8 we right now will be going over to the Times-Picayune,
9 which right now seems to be the only newspaper in the
10 City of New Orleans, right now they have a monopoly here
11 for some reason. We will go and take on time to speak
12 with the Times-Picayune to find out why can't they never
13 take on coverage for some of the things we are trying to
14 rectify here in our city. That is one of the things
15 that we basically feel disrespected.

16 Another thing that we are going to look at
17 real soon would be what they call as the criminal
18 justice, is 701. People stayed back in jail 120 days
19 instead of 60 days before they could get some type of
20 prosecution on it, we will be looking into that issue.
21 And also our folks in our community still have a
22 disrespect in our police department. And so once again
23 we will go sit down and talk to Chief Riley. I'm under
24 the conclusion that Chief Riley was being disrespected
25 in his own department.

1 We, the last time that I was here was
2 because we had this big march because of this fellow
3 that was killed, Dinerral Shavers, and others in one of
4 the reverent areas of our city, and many of us adopted
5 and joined in that march. We were disturbed because
6 some folks kept saying where is Mayor Nagin, where is
7 the Mayor? The mayor was right there all of the time,
8 but they didn't want to hear him. I thought, well.
9 Reverend Rafael came up from Central City, he came with
10 a group of his own and participated and came to speak
11 out like we normally do against violence. But some type
12 of way I felt that we was used as African Americans. I
13 felt that they had another agenda. We just had had a
14 peace rally, we had a few white faces there, but it
15 wasn't like when this one white lady got killed in the
16 Quarter's somewhere. The entire community came out and
17 we came out along with them. So it was disrespect that
18 when we can come together and show brotherhood, then we
19 should all say that we are going to stand for
20 nonviolence from this day forth. It don't matter if they
21 are black, white, red, brown, whatever, we are all going
22 to stand together on that issue.

23 In that particular meeting at the City
24 Hall, I felt that it was a little disrespectful and we
25 are essentially trying to meet with the particular group

1 that is known as Silence is Violence. We are trying to
2 now reach out to them to come into the fold with us so
3 that we can all be on the same page. We are talking
4 about really trying to curtail crime in our city.

5 Once again, it's the time to sit down with
6 Police Chief Warren Riley on some issues that we think
7 also are a concern because one of the things that I
8 remember him telling us is that they got jump out boys,
9 as they call them in the community. A lot of our youth
10 think that the police department is harassing them.
11 Once again before we had to go before them when it was
12 illegal for an open container law, we had to go against
13 that. And now we find ourselves again where our youths
14 are complaining against the police department, that the
15 police officers are just harassing them. And the young
16 people are not taking it like the older people used to,
17 people in my days. We were being more conducive, I
18 guess, but the young people are not taking that no
19 longer. I don't know where they get their weapons from
20 and we are trying to get guns off of the street.

21 It is time for us to re-educate our
22 community. We need to start from the top down and from
23 the bottom up. We have to re-educate this community.
24 We are talking about rebuilding the community with
25 Greenspace; we never talk about rebuilding people's

1 lives. Now if we don't go about rebuilding people's
2 lives, all of the new structures by Trump or whoever
3 won't make a difference in this community.

4 (Audience applause.)

5 MR. CARLL:

6 Thank you, Reverend Thompson.

7 MR. KING:

8 Danatus King, New Orleans NAACP.

9 Disrespect and feelings of disrespect, when we have
10 commissions that are appointed by the mayor, the city
11 council, commissions in the city that are pre Katrina a
12 city that is 67% black. I don't know what the numbers
13 are post Katrina, but I think that that they are at
14 least 50% black now. But when we have commissions that
15 are influenced, and boards, that don't reflect the
16 community, the racial make up of the community, I think
17 that is not only disrespecting a particular
18 organization, but it's disrespecting the community.

19 Not to blow the horn of the NAACP, but when
20 you have part of the meeting of organizations that have
21 been advocating on behalf of the minority community and
22 they are not consulted when these appointments are being
23 made, I think that that is disrespect. And it's kind of
24 hard to justify that and to explain that away. When you
25 have these decisions that are made as far as the

1 directions in our institutions such as our school
2 systems are going to go into, that is really a
3 disrespect to the community, when those that are here in
4 the community, not only the NAACP but we have other
5 grassroots communities that when you have those that
6 have been appointed and you don't see any
7 representatives from those organizations. Not only do
8 you not see representatives from them, but they weren't
9 even consulted when these decisions were being made. So
10 that is the disrespect and that is something that the
11 administration has committed. The administration has
12 the power to do something about it.

13 (Audience Applause.)

14 MR. CARRL:

15 Thank you, Mr. King.

16 MS. THOMPSON:

17 Wynette Thompson, I'm with the SCLC and I'm
18 also here with SCLC Women's. As I listened at the
19 presentation my mind was strictly upon our school
20 system. I find that there is very, very racist because
21 right now most of the schools are attended by a lot of
22 black students and they don't have the proper
23 representation by our school board. It is unfair when
24 it comes down to their lunches and also with the
25 teachers that are in the system and I find that they

1 don't seem to care. I think, and my heart bleeds
2 because I can see for the white kids they have the best
3 of everything. They have everything, they have lunches
4 every day and they even took some of the schools. They
5 even took the school over on Freret Street.

6 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

7 Fortier.

8 MS. THOMPSON:

9 I think that was Fortier, it wasn't good
10 enough for the black kids, they closed it down. Now
11 that is part of Lusher. Well I think that is racism
12 thrown right in my face. You tell me that the school is
13 not good enough for the black kids, well if it's not
14 good enough, but let's fix it up and get it ready for
15 the white kids so they can be put in a magnet school. I
16 find racism when I turn on the school board meetings or
17 the city council meetings, they have people they say are
18 representing us but I don't see any SCLC
19 representatives, NAACP representatives, Urban League,
20 Eracism, but none of these people for the groups that
21 are sitting here, I don't see them. All of these people
22 are making decisions are being made for the city, for
23 the community and I don't see any of these people up
24 there. I don't see my concerns up there and a lot of
25 times they don't much get in contact with these

1 organizations for us to give opinions.

2 I also find that in this city they are
3 disrespecting my mayor. They might not like him, they
4 might think that he shoots from the hip and says things,
5 but everybody says those things. When he made the
6 statement about a Chocolate City, I was standing right
7 there next to him. I hit him on his back and I said, "I
8 got your back." And I'm standing here right now and I'm
9 telling you right now I've got his back, this is a
10 Chocolate City. I don't find nothing wrong with that
11 statement because truly, just like you (indicating)
12 said, it was 60% black at that time. If we want the
13 city back, it's got to be sixty, 66% black again.

14 So I find that right now we have a lot of
15 people who don't have the best interest of New Orleans
16 at hand, I think it's just a lot of personal issues.
17 Like they want to bring Donald Trump here, they want to
18 make it - what do you call it?

19 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

20 Greenspace.

21 MS. THOMPSON:

22 Greenspace, that's true, but also Vegas
23 South, they want to make it a gambling community. I
24 have been to Vegas. You go outside of that Vegas strip,
25 five blocks off of Vegas, that is a rundown city. The

1 only thing in Vegas is that strip. You go out beyond
2 that and there is plenty of poverty so if they want to
3 establish that in this city, they are heading in the
4 right direction.

5 They done took our schools, they've got
6 what is it five schools? It think it's five schools in
7 the public school system. I bet those people that are
8 sitting there on the school board system right now,
9 shouldn't be sitting up there at the public school
10 meeting because they voted them fresh out of a job.
11 They paid a superintendent all of that money for five
12 schools. I think he should be out of the door, along
13 with all of those people on our school board sitting up
14 there because truly our money is the one that is
15 supporting the school system and we are not getting
16 nothing for the school system. I don't have any kids in
17 the school system but I run in there for the meetings
18 because I am concerned about all of our children. Not
19 just the black kids or the white kids, all of our
20 children.

21 I just want to say that this city
22 really needs to have more African American people
23 sitting up there in leadership making decisions, because
24 this is a black city.

25 Thank you, Lord.

1 MR. CARLL:

2 Bill, did you want to make a comment?

3 MR. KNECHT:

4 Bill Knecht from Erace. At this point I
5 just want to follow up with something that the reverend
6 said here today.

7 I have been thinking for a while that New
8 Orleans, especially after Katina, was seen as this
9 racist city. From what happened with the murder in the
10 Quarter and then after Katrina, you know, then it went
11 right back to where one of our members said, "Well, what
12 is going on with racism in New Orleans?" Well I can
13 tell you that the rest of the country doesn't know of
14 the good stuff that we're doing here. The good things,
15 like Eracism was formed here, or the Plessy Ferguson
16 stuff and the good work that these organizations are
17 doing. So I wish that the city would advertise that
18 part, because I can tell you that the rest of the
19 country has racism problems as much or not worse than
20 this state because I hear about it all of the time.
21 Like I said before, we get requests from all over the
22 country about trying to help them with their racism
23 problems. So that is one point that I would like to
24 make, that I think the city could point out the good
25 stuff that we're doing here.

1 MR. CARLL:

2 Thank you.

3 MR. ABDULLA:

4 My name is Glenn Abdulla and I'm with
5 Eracism. I think we should think very deeply on
6 choosing people to run our city just based on the color
7 of our skin. We would have a hell of a lot less
8 problems and we would have more if we would pick people
9 that have moral character first and that they are
10 genuinely concerned about the people that they are over.
11 We have just been voting, not concerned about the
12 character, like Martin Luther King said, "The character
13 or the content of the person." And it just caused us a
14 great deal of trouble.

15 The school board that we had before
16 Katrina, they were doing it then. They were giving
17 people tons of money to come and run and be on the
18 school board. One of them gave his father about 100,000
19 a year and he was a janitor. You know, and then when he
20 left, he went out of town with \$50,000 a year. So let's
21 start choosing people that have some character and our
22 struggle won't be so hard. We are making our own
23 struggle hard by choosing the wrong leadership. That is
24 all I have to say.

25 Thank you.

1 (Audience applause.)

2 MS. KELLER:

3 Another thing I wanted to talk about --

4 MR. CARLL:

5 Yes, ma'am, please identify yourself.

6 MS. KELLER:

7 Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't identify
8 myself. I'm Barbara Keller. I want to talk about how
9 our culture is being capitalized. It is considered also
10 as a back street culture. Folks think it's a degrading
11 culture but it's been capitalized so much, and I'm going
12 to give you an example. Whenever a dignitary or
13 somebody important comes to this city, what do we
14 welcome them with?

15 AUDIENCE:

16 Second line. Second line, baby.

17 MS. KELLER:

18 A second line, a jazz band, a grand
19 marshall. People come from all over the world and they
20 take pictures and they take them all over and they
21 become rich. They write books and they do their thesis
22 and they do this and they do that, but yet it's a
23 culture that is not worthy. You know, where it's been
24 capitalized on over and over. What I would like to see
25 happen in the culture is that it is a product of the

1 education system. It is such a part of us, working with
2 children for over 17 years and I still work with them
3 now, not in a classroom. Children need to be able to
4 identify, they need to be able to identify something
5 that is theirs. I think we need to put this as part of
6 their education, as a curriculum; as history, the
7 culture of second line, teach it to them. Teach them
8 where it derived in the motherland and how important it
9 is. And give them a choice, they don't have to
10 participate in it, but they need to know about it. They
11 need to know about it.

12 Second Line, also the people who
13 participate in the Mardi Gras Indians and the second
14 line groups, these are artists. They are proud of the
15 mastery of their art, the things that they create with
16 their hands. We need to teach children how to sew, how
17 to make streamers and fans and all of that as a part of
18 the culture to give them a true identity and to give
19 them choices, a culture of their own choice.

20 So I just wanted to say that. I forgot
21 to tell you about the fan, that is another element of
22 the second line. The fan was used to help fan
23 themselves because of all of the heat in this city. So
24 I just wanted to speak on how the culture is being
25 capitalized and how it needs to be incorporated in the

1 curriculum. I would like to see churches teaching them,
2 because it started from the church. It started from the
3 Church of the Benevolent Society. It needs to be taught
4 in the word. It needs to be taught. I think that we
5 will have a better respect for the culture if they are
6 taught on what the true significance is, the meaning,
7 and how rich a tradition it is.

8 MR. CARLL:

9 Reverend Thompson.

10 REVEREND THOMPSON:

11 Just a final thought and thank you,
12 Barbara, you're right.

13 Reverend Thompson, Norwood Thompson,
14 SCLC. My final thought would be to the Human Relations
15 Commission, I served there very briefly. I just hope
16 that the Human Relations Commission grows some backbones
17 too, to be more vocal, to be more out front. It's nice
18 that we as citizens can support our mayor when he is
19 right and to let him know when he is wrong. But I need
20 for our Human Relations Commission to grow a more
21 stronger backbone to support us in the community. The
22 Vieux Carre' Commission insulted the Sanitation Director
23 publicly. And I don't think I heard differently from
24 the Human Relations Commission. Even though he took a
25 stand and said you owe me an apology, maybe you did.

1 Okay, maybe you did, okay. But we need more visible of
2 that; and any other type of relationship that may be
3 doing something in our city that adversely affects any
4 ethnicity, any ethnic group, the Human Relations
5 Commission needs to be involved that they are always on
6 the side of morale justice.

7 MR. CARLL:

8 Please identify yourself for the court
9 reporter.

10 MS. CHARLES:

11 My name is Cora Charles.

12 I just want to defend Dr. Blakely, he
13 didn't ask me to do this, but I have listened very
14 carefully to this man since he has been in this city and
15 being an outsider. I was an outsider at one time,
16 looking at this city and seeing all of the things that
17 are wrong. Being an outsider, he has only been here
18 less than a year when he has picked it all up and I was
19 proud of him. When he talked about the Shiites, the
20 Sunni's and the Shiites, what he was really saying is
21 that we are racists. That is what they think of that
22 war that is over there in Iraq is about. They have one
23 group that is killing the other; they don't want them to
24 have. We have that here. They don't want the black
25 folks to have a thing, when we began to climb the ladder

1 of success they stepped on our fingers, pushed us down.
2 When our people were evacuated from here, through no
3 fault of their own, they were put on planes, trains and
4 buses and sent away with a one way ticket. There were
5 politicians who said we don't want them here. One of
6 them even said, "Let's create a university over there in
7 Iberville." I said, "I dare you." Because as long as
8 these black people are out of this city, New Orleans
9 will remain on its knees. Take my word for it, you will
10 continue to see, now hiring, now hiring, now hiring.
11 Why, because those little boys and girls up at Tulane
12 and Loyola -- and I'm not a racist, honey, I'm not a
13 racist -- because I worked in those homes up on St.
14 Charles.

15 When I finished Dillard University my
16 first job was with United Negro - with United Way and I
17 worked St. Charles, the Garden District, the Irish
18 Channel. So you know who my patients were during that
19 time in this city. I went in and I took care of them,
20 gave them the best of care. Why, because I'm a caring
21 person. And that transfers today; I want those people
22 back into their home. I feel that if they would have
23 kept me out of my home, how could I be here today? I
24 wanted to come home and I wanted to come because I
25 purchased it and I dared some of those people from

1 United, whatever it was called, Bring Back New Orleans,
2 they wanted to make Greenspace where I lived and I told
3 them they were not and then I gave him a lesson in
4 geography. Because we all need to be where we need to
5 be, regardless of what other people think of us, we have
6 a role to play in this city and we need to get beyond
7 the racism. And I don't want to have to tell you what
8 happens to all of us in the end. I don't want to have
9 to tell you what happens to all of us in the end, okay?

10 MR. CARLL:

11 Thank you.

12 MS. THOMPSON:

13 Wynette Thompson. And I have one
14 comment about racism and it will take 30 seconds. I was
15 in a meeting in Baton Rouge and I think there were about
16 50 people in the meeting. And I think that there may
17 have been about five black people maybe that were in the
18 meeting and they were discussing about New Orleans and
19 this Chocolate City about it becoming a Greenspace and
20 putting up condominiums and million dollar homes and
21 what have you. The conversation came up about the black
22 mayor, how New Orleans has a black mayor on the city and
23 it's been for 40 years but it's only been for about
24 maybe 32 years and it's Mayor Nagin turn. They said
25 that as long as it's a black man running the City of New

1 Orleans it would never prosper and the only hope is to
2 have a white boy in leadership. I said when they turned
3 the city over to Dutch Morial the city was broke then,
4 it was 28 million in the red. So they said it was
5 because it was a black man and when they took over it
6 was already broke. I have a saying that whenever they
7 want to turn it over to a black person, it's already
8 broke, unfixable or something and then they complains
9 that you don't know how to run it. Well if you don't
10 have nobody white to run something or fix something,
11 well then you give it to me broken and it stays broke,
12 it ain't my fault. And that is how I feel about my
13 mayor when you talk about black people in leadership.
14 When I give you something broke and it's no good and you
15 want me to fix it and I can't fix it, don't tell me that
16 it's no good because of me.

17 MR. CARLL:

18 Any other comments?

19 MS. MARLENE:

20 Yes, yes.

21 MR. CARLL:

22 Can we get your last name, ma'am?

23 MS. MARLENE:

24 I'm a lower ninth ward homeowner,
25 taxpayer.

1 MR. CARLL:

2 Could we have you identify your last
3 name for the record.

4 MS. MARLENE:

5 I work for a city agency and I would
6 like to admire Bill Knecht, I believe, with Eracism. I
7 have been to several, several of your workshops. Okay?
8 It's pretty good. I find myself working with whites,
9 blacks and Asians, you need leadership. And yes, I'm
10 very bitter. I'm very active in my community and we
11 need some true leadership. And we have a lot of racism
12 going on and it should be investigated. I don't see it,
13 I don't see anything going on and it really hurts. I
14 can understand why people just pick up and leave and
15 find a better opportunity. But I'm not running and I'm
16 not going anywhere because I'm not finished. I'm not
17 going to let nobody run me away, but we need leadership
18 here in this city because the people in this city here
19 is sick.

20 MR. CARLL:

21 Anyone else that would like to speak?

22 MS. PARRA:

23 My name is Katherine Parra.

24 I'm sorry, I misunderstood the purpose
25 of the whole year long thing. Jane Parker who is also

1 on the commission and is a friend of mine, has been
2 telling me how interesting these meetings are. I have
3 been a social studies teacher -- I was a social studies
4 teacher for years in Catholic schools because I just
5 love to be able to say God in my classroom. I spent a
6 half a year in public school and I bit my tongue off and
7 I just couldn't do it anymore.

8 Anyway, I am a native New Orleanian and
9 I grew up in Gentilly Wood. I grew up in a household
10 that was, of course, prejudice and I was taught
11 prejudice as a child. When I was in catholic high
12 school, I went to Holy Angels, which is now closed and
13 it was a little integrated. I then began to realize am
14 I really Christian or not? Jesus would not be saying
15 things that I heard all of my life, so I had to come to
16 my own being. I like to think that I am not terribly
17 prejudiced, my husband is Hispanic, he is from Bogotá,
18 Columbia, no, he does not run drugs because when I am
19 asked that, I say, would I live like this?

20 (Audience applause.)

21 Anyway, I'm sorry, I wasn't going to say
22 anything because actually I guess my group was already
23 represented. According to that sheet of paper I am on a
24 couple of groups and I can come back at another time. I
25 would love to come every month because I want to

1 understand and maybe I just need to join Eracism, maybe
2 that is what I am looking for.

3 I want to understand and I want us all
4 to appreciate one another. I must stand up tonight to
5 say that - I am shaking right now because I've had a -
6 I've been having a difficult decision about coming back
7 here after evacuating to Baton Rouge. I'm saying I have
8 a decision but I made it since coming back. I just
9 didn't want to come back, like a lot of people didn't
10 want to come back here, but I'm a native New Orleanian.
11 We tried to by a house, five times we tried to buy a
12 house north of Baton Rouge and it didn't go through. I
13 think God was hitting me in the head and saying, you're
14 coming back.

15 Let me tell you what turned me off,
16 Chocolate City, turned me off. I voted for that man the
17 first time he ran. I supported him through Katrina and
18 people in Baton Rouge who would say something, in
19 desperation, white people mostly, who would say
20 something to me like, "Can you believe it? Man, Blanco
21 too, they are not even doing anything." I would say,
22 "Wait a minute, they were handed something in nature
23 that was, huh." And the governor herself, I supported
24 all of those people because they had terrible decision
25 to make at the time that they had to make it. But when

1 he said, at the end of the day that New Orleans will be
2 chocolate again. I thought, Chocolate? I can't go
3 back, he doesn't want me back. I own rental property in
4 New Orleans. And three months before the hurricane we
5 were in Jefferson Parish and we moved back into New
6 Orleans, three months before the hurricane. I came back
7 three months before the hurricane and I have been paying
8 property taxes. When he told me that he wanted a
9 Chocolate City and I said, "I guess he doesn't want me."
10 And then when he was in Houston and he said, to a group
11 of mostly African Americans or Blacks, I never want to
12 be using the wrong term.

13 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

14 It's all right.

15 MS. PARRA:

16 Okay, thank you. And he said, "Be
17 careful who you vote for because they don't all look
18 like us." I said, oh (demonstrating). He really,
19 really lost me. And I thought maybe he doesn't care,
20 I'm not very significant, I'm one person and my husband
21 is too, we're two people. We have children and they all
22 are grown, however five of them live in the New Orleans
23 area. I'm sorry, I don't mean to ramble. I wasn't
24 going to say anything but I thought maybe. Really, I
25 listened tonight. I want to come back, my friend Jane

1 invited me to come tonight. Jane Parker said, "Please
2 come, we need people who give energy. Get aggravated
3 and get happy." So I came and I am glad I did.

4 I am moving back as soon as my last
5 child graduates in Baton Rouge. I am on record that I
6 am coming back.

7 Thank you.

8 (Audience applause.)

9 I went to the United New Orleans Plan
10 meeting, but I went to the last meeting and I wish I had
11 went to all of them. I am angry with myself for not
12 going to all of the meetings. I met some wonderful
13 people at my table, we were old, young, black, white,
14 Hispanic, single, married, it was just fantastic.

15 And to you, thank you, I never knew all
16 of that information. I taught social studies and I
17 taught a lot about - excuse me, senior moment. I taught
18 a lot of white kids and I told them about how I wanted
19 to sit in the back of the bus and my mother would always
20 say no way, you are sitting up here. I wanted to sit in
21 the big seats in the back. I taught that to black and
22 white children. But when my mayor said that, a couple
23 of times, I do not feel included in who he wants to come
24 back. After tonight, I do feel included.

25 So thank you.

1 MR. BAGNERIS:

2 Thank you. I want to thank our two co-
3 chairs, please.

4 (Audience applause.)

5 I remind us that this was the Activist
6 Community and their job is to push beyond hope. I also
7 want to remind everyone that every time they talk about
8 the Indians, the Mardi Gras Indians, they never mention
9 that that is a salute to the Native Americans for all of
10 the wonderful work that they did to provide a safeguard.
11 That is one of the things that the Human Relations
12 Commission is going to get on next year. In fact, it's
13 going to be Super Sunday, it's going to be about
14 explaining what Super Sunday is honoring.

15 I also want to say to you that I am so
16 proud to be in this room. Unfortunately I didn't
17 mention to you that I wanted to have your crowd to come
18 here, but to have the dialogue between the NAACP, which
19 erased lynching from the map because of their hard work,
20 I salute you. I salute Eracism for bringing us all
21 together all of the time for over the years, black and
22 white. And I salute you, young man, for saying that we
23 need to vote with our heads for the most important
24 person that is qualified. And I salute you, SCLC, for
25 carrying on the work of Dr. King who said, "It wasn't

1 about the color of your skin, the content of your
2 character," and reminding us every day that there were
3 white people there on those picket lines in front of
4 Maison Blanche and at Woolworth's. I know why, because
5 I was there with those priests from St. Aug and those
6 nuns from the Blessed Sacrament. Okay? So I salute,
7 and particularly my friend from the councilwoman's
8 office that came and told us about the wonderful history
9 of the second line and the bad reputation that they gave
10 from a handful of fools.

11 So again, I want to say about the
12 challenges that you put before the commission this
13 evening, but I also want you to know that this is the
14 most diverse commission in the city's history. It is
15 made up of 50% African American, but we also have Asians
16 and we have Hispanics and we have gays and lesbians, and
17 who am I missing?

18 MR. CARLL:

19 Old white dudes.

20 MR. BAGNERIS:

21 The old white dude. We will be taking
22 this dialogue. Next week we will be hosting the
23 Hispanic community. In June, we will be hosting members
24 of the Gay and Lesbian community. July, we are going to
25 hear from the informed residents of housing development

1 so that we can get their input. In August, we will be
2 hosting members of the Asian community. In September,
3 we will be hosting the working class so we can get an
4 idea in this town how foreign it is for people in this
5 town to make a living when we were promised \$15 an hour
6 and Burger King went back to five. In October, we are
7 going to hosting members from the German and Greek
8 communities. In November we are going to do the
9 religious communities, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and
10 Christians. In December, we will get with the Mid
11 Easterner's, the Lebanese, the people that are here from
12 Saudi Arabian. And then in January, we're going to say
13 that if you didn't feel that you belong to any of these
14 groups, this is your turn to come and join us.

15 We will not leave one stone unturned
16 until we have completed the 13 volumes of dealing with
17 this gumbo that gave the world the most incredible
18 architecture; that gave the world the most incredible
19 food, which is gumbo. We showed the people how to live
20 long before they brought us 300 years ago and then put
21 labels on our butt when we became American. We have to
22 go back to our roots and that is where this commission
23 has taken us. Thank you for your attention this
24 evening.

25 The meeting is on the last Tuesday of

1 every month, we go from six to about 8:15, we have
2 refreshments in the back for you.

3 Thanks to my co-chairs, everyone who
4 participated and particularly our activist groups here
5 this evening.

6 MR. CARLL:

7 Before you go, I just want to make a
8 brief comment about the fact that yesterday David
9 Halberstam, was killed in an auto accident. For those
10 of you who aren't familiar with him, he was a Pulitzer
11 prize winning author. One of the best books that I
12 personally read within the last ten years was The
13 Children, a story about the civil rights movement in
14 Nashville in the last 1950's or early 60's about the
15 students who met in the late 50's, early 60's and went
16 on to the revolution. He called it The Children because
17 they were 18 or 19, students, their families, their
18 sacrifices.

19 For anybody who is interested in human
20 relations, anyone who is interested in the history of
21 the civil rights movement and the brilliant leaders,
22 it's a powerful book, he talks about Martin Luther King
23 and being arrested and jailed 58 times.

24 I am telling you that because it was a
25 great accomplishment for this country.

1 MR. BAGERNIS:

2 I just want to close out by stating
3 that it would not be possible for us to be here tonight
4 if it wasn't for the mayor and city council's approval
5 and support.

6 Thank you very much for coming.

7 (END OF SESSION.)

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CERTIFICATE

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I, the undersigned reporter, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct transcription of the stenographic notes of the proceedings herein, taken down by me and transcribed under my supervision, at the time and place hereinbefore noted, in the above-entitled and numbered cause(s).

I further certify that I am not of counsel nor related to any of the counsel or any of the parties, nor in the employ of any of them, and that I have no interest in the outcome of this action(s).

Diane W. Mathews