Next General Meeting

CD-CAAR

Thursday, May 28, 1992 7:00 p.m.
Albany Public Library
Washington Avenue, Albany, N.Y.

Local Response to the Rodney King Verdict

There will be a report back on plans for implementing the "Action Agenda" from the the Second Annual Capital District Conference on Crime and Criminal Justice.

There will also be a report from the Mozambique Support Committee of CD-CAAR. If you would like to work on this committee which is planning to do educational work and material aid campaigns around Mozambique, call Debbie Maxwell at 393-4002 or Eileen Kawola at 438-0309.

In Memoriam - Jim Bell, former head of the New York Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, vice president of District 65, UAW, and a long time political activist in New York, died on April 1, 1992. He served as a top aid in Jesse Jackson’s 1988 presidential campaign and in David Dinkins 1988 mayoral campaign. We remember him most for his total commitment to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Rest in Peace.
Reflections on the past few weeks...Rodney King, Haiti, and South Africa... by Vera Michelson, co-chair

On Rodney King

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members and friends of CD-CAAR for your rapid response to the emergency created by the verdicts in the trials of the officers charged with beating Rodney King.

We got news of the verdicts on Wednesday night, April 29, 1992, at the close of the CD-CAAR program on Haiti. We were as stunned as anyone. The Tonton Macoutes in Los Angeles had been acquitted.

By 8:00 p.m. Thursday morning it had been decided that CD-CAAR and the NAACP would join forces to organize an emergency response demonstration the following day. It was set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday, May 1st at the Federal Building in Albany.

You can imagine that things went into motion pretty quickly and within 32 hours between 500 and 700 people assembled at the federal site to demonstrate their outrage at the Los Angeles verdict.

The ability to mobilize so quickly was due in large part to the immediate response of countless individuals and supporters. In particular we’d like to thank Suzy Pessuti, Mark Emanation, Jamie Denard, James Mosley and Mel Compos.

In addition, we feel that the collaboration between CD-CAAR and the NAACP paid off in that it provided a vehicle for a large number of community residents to respond to the crisis. We are pleased to have worked with the NAACP in the effort.

It is also important at this time to examine what the King verdict means to us locally.

Some of the recent statements by Albany’s Mayor and Chief of Police regarding the Rodney King incident were provocative and irresponsible. Shortly after the verdicts were announced, they flatly stated that it could never happen here!!!

Mayor Whalen went so far as to say that "During my administration, no citizen of this city will be subject to the type of violation of human and civil rights which has troubled us all." (Times Union 5/2/92)

Approximately one month ago James White, an African American male, who is disabled, was attacked by the police as he walked out of his apartment door. Three officers threw him up against the wall, down on the floor and then stepped on and broke his back brace. Next he was taken into another apartment where a drug raid was going on, threw him over a sink and finally handcuffed him tightly.

Mr. White was involved in no crime, he was not charged with a crime and he is not a criminal. As a result of this brutal act, Mr. White has been in excruciating pain for which he has been receiving treatment. He also has to deal with the recurring nightmare of the attack.

Cannot happen here??? Has not happened here?? The only difference between here and there is...no video.

It is easy for the Mayor to make pronouncements about an incident 3,000 miles away. His past history on this issue has proven that these utterances mean nothing. Let the "All American" Mayor show that he wants to address police abuse in Albany by doing something meaningful. A police civilian review board with investigative powers would mean more than his hypocritical words of indignation.

On Haiti

On Wednesday evening the College of St. Rose will host a diverse audience of community leaders and others as part of the college's celebration of Black History Month. Carl Marseille, Dean of the College of Arts and Science, and Barbara DuBois, Barbara DuBois, will discuss "The Haitian Student Movement and its Impact on the U.S. Government." Carl Marseille is a former Haitian student who was involved in the movement that led to the fall of the dictator Tonton Macoutes. Barbara DuBois is a former Haitian student who was involved in the movement that led to the fall of the dictator Tonton Macoutes.

On South Africa

We ask Congress to continue to monitor carefully the situation in South Africa as the government is being restored to a more peaceful and democratic society. We also ask that the video should call...
On Haiti

On Wednesday evening, April 29, 1992, CD-CAAR sponsored a special program at the College of St. Rose in Albany on Haiti called "Haiti - Deny It No More." A very diverse audience of over 150 people were in attendance for an informative, provocative evening. This was our effort to bring to the Capital District the most up-to-date information regarding the current and continuing crises in Haiti. We see in Haiti yet another example of the racism that guides U.S. foreign policy. We believe that U.S. complicity with dictators and thugs is a national disgrace. So too is the obvious disdain with which the U.S. Government is treating the Haitian people. That is why we ask Americans to DENY IT NO MORE. We call for the return of President Jean Bertrand Aristide to Haiti and the restoration of democratic rule. Fok sa change - Things must change!!

Thanks to the CD-CAAR Haitian Program Committee: Carl Swidorsky, Carl Marseille, Celia Bess Cotton, Bonnie Bowell, Merton Simpson, Anne Frazier, Sue DuBois, Barbara Allen, Dennis Nelson, Samantha Sampson, Vera Michelson.

Special Thanks to: The College of St. Rose: Arts and Humanities School, Math and Science School, Student Association, Spectrum, Education Media Department and Carl Swidorsky; Deejays at: WVCR, WRPI, WCBD; Jane Pattison of Pax Christi, who did more than her share; Guy Rouchan, for his time and ideas; Jill Ives for being there; and, the Haitian Student Association at SUNYA for general support and enthusiasm.

Program Endorsers: The College of St. Rose History and Political Science Department; Telos Society; ASUBA, SCAA, Fuerza Latino, Haitian Student Association, and the Pan Caribbean Association at SUNYA; Center for Law and Justice, Inc.; ALARM; Pledge of Resistance; Albany Branch NAACP; Pax Christi USA, Albany Chapter; Black and Latino Student Alliance SCC; Pastor Ware and the Capital City Seventh Day Adventist Church; SUNY; National Lawyers Guild (Albany Law School Chapter).

We encourage CD-CAAR supporters to call for the return of President Jean Bertrand Aristide to Haiti by calling or writing:

Assistant Secretary of State Bernard Aronson
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520
State Department Public Affairs Comment Line: 202-647-6575.

Rep. Michael McNulty
U.S. House of Representative
Washington, D.C. 20520
Capitol Hill switchboard: 202-224-3121

On South Africa

We ask CD-CAAR members to stand by us as the struggle in South Africa continues. As we have said many times in this newsletter "It ain't over 'til it's over."

The American Committee on Africa has put together a campaign to "STOP THE VIOLENCE" in South Africa. The organizing package for this campaign comes with educational sheets and a video which shows clearly how the South African government is behind the violence and what we in the United States can do about it. Any organization which would like more information about this campaign or can utilize this video should call Mabel Leon at (518) 372-1531.
And a struggle for justice on another front continues -
Redistricting in Albany County...

Excerpts from testimony given by Anita Thayer on behalf of CD-CAAR to the Albany County Legislature, April 30, 1992.

...The Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism has decided to address the County Legislature tonight on the issue of redistricting because we believe that the decision the County Legislature makes will be one of a small handful of events that will set the tone for race relations in the Capital District for the next decade. The County Legislature at this time has an unique opportunity to show respect for the Black and minority people of this City and County and to set an example of how people of different backgrounds can come together with mutual respect and a spirit of cooperation to create a more democratic society...

...Although the Coalition usually does not involve itself in electoral-related issues, we have made an exception in this case because we feel strongly that the NAACP proposal for 3 intact minority majority districts should be included in any final re-districting plans. Because race and racial relations are such central issues to the future of this country and the expansion of democracy and because the Albany Branch NAACP and their lawsuit represents the political empowerment of the Black community, we feel that particular deference should be paid to their proposal - it also appears to us that the 3 NAACP proposed districts are geographically intact and preserve as best as possible the integrity of the Black and minority neighborhoods of the City. The Voting Rights Act was enacted to further electoral democracy after years of agitation, protest and litigation by the civil rights movement of the late 50's and 60's. We ask our County Legislature to join in the spirit of that legislation and join in the spirit of the civil rights movement and not just hide behind a shield of alleged nominal compliance while ignoring the real meaning of the Voting Rights Act...
Upcoming Events of Interest in New York City

On June 7, 1992, the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (a national group with which CD-CAAR is affiliated) is having its annual Human Rights Awards Luncheon at 12:00 noon at Loews New York Hotel in New York City. The event will honor Angela Davis on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the victory of her historic case. Special presentations will be made by Sonia Sanchez and Pete Seeger. Tickets are $45.00. Interested in have a Capital District table? Call Stephanie Perez at (518) 427-8647.

On June 16, 1976, South African police in Soweto killed hundred of Black children who were peacefully protesting the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in their schools. Today violence sponsored by the regime continues to be a growing obstacle to democracy in South Africa. Since March of this year, more than 700 Black South Africans, including children, have been killed. There will be a rally to commemorate Soweto Day and to call for an end to violence and racism - in South Africa and the United States - on Tuesday, June 16, 1992 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Federal Building in Manhattan (Broadway and Worth Streets).

A letter from Cuba
(Mabel Leon, CD-CAAR Steering Committee Member has just returned from the Venceremos Brigade trip to Cuba. The following letter was given to her by three young women she met at a school there.)

Dear Mabel,

I ask that if it within your possibilities to send us your address so as not to lose correspondence between us about the beautiful friendship that has emerged today, April 30, 1992, a date that we will never forget and we wish to keep so as to communicate and interchange our ideas.

We, the young people of the school keep ourselves very happy and willing to be together forever but unfortunately it can't be because we all have tasks to do.

We want to express, once again, our great solidarity and this fraternal love that we feel. We want you to know that we will never surrender. Not even with only one of us left because after 34 years of revolution, we won't permit any stranger to step on our land.

Here we give you the three names of the girls that shared a while with you - Malinka, Rochalie and Akemy.

Long live Cuba and all the countries fighting for freedom and independence. Long live the the venceremos brigade. Socialism or death. Our slogan is to save our homeland, our revolution, our society.

We greet you lovingly and respectfully. Write to us and send us your address this very night. Take good care of yourself and keep in the struggle to the very end.

We love you. So long.
What are the real messages sent by the Rodney King verdict and the civil disorder that followed?

Metroland (May 7-13 edition) carried several responses to this question. We've reprinted those of Mark Mishler and Merton Simpson.

MARK S. MISHLER
Civil Rights Attorney and
Member of CD-CAAR
Steering Committee

Is the Criminal-Justice system racist?

I recently (pre-Rodney King verdict) asked prospective jurors from an all-white jury pool whether they agreed that white people sometimes act differently toward an African-American person than they would to another white person. My client, a young African-American man, was charged with assaulting a white police officer. Our position was that he had been attacked by the officer. The prospective jurors were uncomfortable responding to this question. I asked shy. The following exchange occurred:

Juror: I don't know why you deep trying to make a racial issue out of this case. There is nothing racial here. To me, your client is as white as the rest of us.

MSM: Do you mean that my client is as good as the rest of us?

Juror: Yes, that is exactly what I mean.

MSM: Do you understand that you have just said something prejudiced?

Juror: No, I work with colored people all the time.

MSM: Do you know that most African-Americans view being called "colored" as derogatory?

Juror: No, I didn't. You can call them anything and, you know how they are, they just laugh and call you something back.

Is the criminal-justice system racist?

This prospective juror-who happened to be a cousin of the police chief in the community where this case occurred—did not think of himself as a racist. Yet, he knew without hearing any testimony that the trial did not involve any racial issues.

How many racist assumptions are embedded in this brief conversation?

Assumption #1. Racism is not a problem in our society any more.

Assumption #2. African-Americans always blame their problems on racism.

Assumption #3. Problems experienced by individual African-Americans stem not from racism but from other sources, e.g., their own individual defects.

Assumption #4. "White" equals good, "black" equals bad.

Assumption #5. The juror and I, as white people, share certain views about African-Americans, e.g., "you know how they are."
Assumption #6. All African-Americans act in the same manner.
Assumption #7. It is appropriate to ignore clearly expressed preferences of an ethnic group as to the manner in which they wish to be addressed.
Assumption #8. Despite all of the above, the juror is not racist, and, if selected, would make sure that my client received a fair trial.

Is the criminal justice system racist?

In a post-Rodney King verdict conversation with "Mr. X," a prominent local white trial attorney, I asserted that racism was the only explanation for the acquittals of the police offers who beat Rodney King. Mr. X responded, "Perhaps everything that has happened since the verdict proved that the verdict was correct. As the conversation continued, Mr. X clarified his position. In substance, he said that African-Americans are violent and have no respect for the law.

Mr. X does not consider himself racist.

Is the criminal justice system racist?

In a suburban community populated by law-enforcement officers and others who have moved away from the nearby large city, a jury with no African-Americans members engaged in an act of civil disobedience. A choice had to be made. The jury could reaffirm the right of African-Americans to be free from the use of excessive force by government officials. Or, they could support the desire of the police to engage in an unrestrained and brutal war against the African-American community.

The choice was easy to make. The jury refused to fulfill their obligation to base the verdict on the law and the evidence. Instead, they acted as the "conscience" of their community. The members of this jury did not consider themselves racist.

Is the criminal justice system racist?

A federal agency responsible for enforcing criminal laws learned in early March 1991 of irrefutable evidence that an African-American man had been subjected to a deprivation of his civil rights by a group of police officers. No one seriously disputes that this conduct constitutes a federal crime. Legally, a prosecution could have commenced immediately. Yet, more than a year passed before the agency decided to consider prosecuting the officers.

Is the criminal justice system racist?

One more story. An "All America" mayor expressed his dismay at an injustice that occurred in another city, assuring his constituents that no citizen of his city would be subject to the kind of violation of human and civil rights that had taken place 3,000 miles away.

The people who lived in his city had trouble understanding what the mayor meant. They knew, for example, that a white police officer had been promoted after having been found to have unlawfully beaten a small, middle-aged African-American woman with a flashlight. The same officer was later found to have illegally searched the home of an African-American family. The citizens knew that this officer was never disciplined by the city for her involvement in these incidents. The citizens also knew that brutality, use of racial slurs and fabrication of criminal charged by police officers occurred frequently, yet during a 10-year period only six citizen complaints had been sustained in the police department's public affairs unit.

Is the criminal justice system racist?

The real question is, What can be done to rid our criminal justice system of the layer upon layer of racism that infects its every aspect?
MERTON SIMPSON JR.
Co-Chair, CD-CAAR

"When all else fails to organize the people - conditions will." This quote by Marcus Garvey portends one of the potential outcomes of the Rodney King verdict. There have been very few events in recent times that have so graphically illustrated the nature and scope of white supremacy in America.

As a student of history, sociology and psychology of white supremacy and institutional racism, it has taken me all of my adult life to begin to understand the complexity of racism.

As the oldest son of an African art dealer and a mother who spent 36 years teaching, primarily in Brooklyn, it was predetermined that my early world view would be Afrocentric. However, it was not until my college days at Long Island University, where I majored in social studies education and philosophy that I began to appreciate the complexity of white supremacy.

What we see in Rodney King's beating was nothing more than a modern, high-tech version of the lynching of a black man. This ritual, which was born of chattel slavery in the Americas, is symbolic of the fear that white people have of people of color. Most people, whether they are classified as white or of color, do not understand the historical distinction between prejudice and white supremacy.

Prejudice, according to Random House Dictionary, is the "unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, thought or reason." Racism is "any attitude, action of institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of their color...racism is not just a matter of attitudes: actions and institutional structures can also be a form of racism." (Racism in America and Now to Combat It, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1970).

It needs to be understood that "racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society." (What Curriculum Leaders Can Do About Racism, by Delmo Della-Dora, New Detroit, 1970).

In understanding the difference between prejudice and racism, we observe that moving the King trial to not just an all-white community, but an all-white community with more than 2,000 "police families," and the subsequent not-guilty verdicts in the face of overwhelming evidence in the video and other documentary records, is a case of white supremacy, or racism. While the act of rage and frustration by the Black people who attacked the white truck driver was an act that partially characterized by prejudice, any of the perpetrators who are caught will no doubt suffer to the full extent of the law!

The point is that without institutional racist power the trial could never have been moved and it is clear why it should not have been moved. While no responsible black leader condones the attack of innocent bystanders, the fact is that a level of justice will be extracted from the attack on the truck driver that did not occur for the white police - who, after all, are paid to protect the rights of the Rodney Kings of the world!
A report from the Center for Law and Justice
by Alice Green

By all accounts the "Second Annual Capital District Community Conference on Crime and Criminal Justice" was successful. The theme of the conference, "Separate and Unequal, Racial Bias in Policing and the Courts" proved to be a timely and popular topic. Close to 200 people attended.

Unfortunately, Don Carlos Jackson, scheduled to be the morning session's keynote speaker, was unable to attend due to the death of his mother on the day of the conference. However, a video tape was presented that showed his unprovoked beating by a white police officer in Long Beach, California and demonstrated his strong commitment to a campaign to expose racist police violence in police departments across the country. Mr. Jackson has offered to come to Albany at a later date.

In response to the panelists, a number of participants asked questions and gave comments on the problems of police brutality and other policing issues of Police Commissioner Charles Mills, Attorney Mark Mishler of Albany and Human Right Director Nan Goldsberry of Troy. Of note, James Tuffy, President of the Albany Police Union attended and began the community meeting segment of the morning session. Later, he agreed to open a dialogue with community groups on the issue of racism in policing.

After the lunch break, a brief award ceremony was held to honor the first recipients of the "Frederick Douglass Struggle for Justice Award." Award were given to attorneys Ralph E. Powe and Mark Mishler for their contributions in the area of civil rights. Both recipients are members of the National Lawyer's Guild. Mark is a member of the Steering Committee of the Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism.

The afternoon session on racial bias in the courts had as its keynote speaker Judge Nicholas Figueroa, Vice-Chairman of the Franklin H. Williams Commission on Minorities. The response panel included Judge Karen Peters of the Ulster County Family Court and local attorney, Randy Treece. General participant reaction was somewhat negative toward Judge Figueroa's presentation on the work of the Commission and his thoughts on the existence of racial bias in the courts. Some found his message confusing, because he acknowledged the existence of bias in his personal experience, yet did not strongly support the Commissions Report that found the courts to be infested with racism and the existence of two court systems in New York State, one for whites and another for people of color and the poor.

Participant evaluation of the overall conference was extremely favorable. Important suggestions and recommendations were offered for an "action agenda." They included the need for:
1. racial sensitivity training for police and judges.
2. citizen oversight of policing.
3. minority representation juries.
4. increased use of alternatives to incarceration programs.
5. a court room monitoring program.
6. networking with other communities.

The Conference planned a community strategy meeting to discuss and action agenda to be planned and carried out in the Capital District Community. (Results of that meeting will be on the agenda of the CD-CAAR meeting on May 28, 1992)
Center for Law and Justice Files Formal Complaint Against Lt. Robert Wolfgang by Alice Green

In its April 1, 1992 edition, the Albany Times Union reported that Lt. Robert Wolfgang of the Albany Police Department was critical of the Center's brochure announcing the "Second Annual Capital District Community Conference on Crime and Criminal Justice" whose theme was racial bias in policing and the courts. He charged that in the brochure the Center had accused the Albany Police Department of misconduct in the deaths of two Black males. However, Lt. Wolfgang never informed the center of his dissatisfaction or concerns.

A few days later, Harold Rubin, President of the Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations contacted the Center office making the same charge after speaking with Lt. Wolfgang.

After several Conference sponsors reported to the Center that Lt. Wolfgang had contacted them regarding their sponsorship of the Conference, Alice Green called Police Chief John Dale and demanded that the contacts be stopped. Failing to hear from Chief Dale, the Center decided to file a formal complaint against Lt. Wolfgang. A complaint was filed on April 6, 1992.

The complaint charged that Lt. Wolfgang, by contacting Conference sponsors, exceeded and abused his authority as a police official. It was further charged that the contacts were made to coerce sponsors into dropping their support of the Conference.

In a letter dated April 20, 1992, Police Chief Dale claimed that a thorough police investigation was made and the Department determined that coercion did not take place and that the officers acted lawfully. Alice Green appealed that decision to Albany: Mayor Thomas Whalen.

In the appeal letter she charged that a thorough investigation had not been done because neither she, the complainant, nor all Conference sponsors had been contacted for an interview which is customary practice by the Department. She also expressed concern that the decisions did not address the main issues of why Lt. Wolfgang made the contacts in the first place and whether his actions were proper in light of his duties, responsibilities and authority as a police official.

In a letter dated April 29, 1992, Mayor Thomas Whalen referred Alice Green back to Chief Dale for the purpose of discussing the contents of the appeal letter. He also indicated that he would discuss the matter with Alice Green after she had contacted Chief Dale.

At this point Alice Green and the Center are prepared to pursue a fair and agreeable resolution to the matter.
The Zenzeleni Community Centre Fund
A Project of the Albany Friends Meeting
727 Madison Avenue
Albany, New York 12208
(518) 439-0297 / 462-1507

Dear Friend,

Three years ago, many of you responded generously to our request for money to support the Zenzeleni Community Centre in Winterveldt, South Africa. The center, which opened in 1985, now occupies two brightly painted trailers and serves 100 children between the ages of two and six. Last spring, one of us (I.B.) visited Zenzeleni, met again with its founder Frances Baard, and saw the refrigerator and stove that were purchased with our donations.

Frances Baard and others working at the creche are hopeful about the promise of a formal end to apartheid in South Africa. But its demise will leave a brutal legacy of poverty, unemployment, and landlessness. The shortage of child care facilities will remain a particularly acute problem for black women, whose income is critical for family survival. Jobs are especially hard to find in Winterveldt, a barren rural slum located over an hour from Pretoria.

Frances Baard was a trade union activist and leader of the women's campaign against passes in the 1950s. Imprisoned during the 1960s, she was banished upon release to Winterveldt, far from her home in Port Elizabeth. Though now over eighty years old and in ill-health, she continues to organize around the needs of the local community and to work for an end to racial injustice and exploitation. But her spirit alone cannot provide the center with funds for teachers' salaries or food for the children.

Your continued support of this project can help the women of Winterveldt in their daily struggle for survival and can contribute to building the community solidarity necessary to empower people on a grassroots level.

Contributions are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to the Albany Friends Meeting and designated for the Zenzeleni Centre.

Thank you once again for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Levinger

Iris Berger

This letter was printed in our March newsletter but due to computer difficulties it was difficult to read. Please take time to read it this month.
Important Notice:
The next meeting of CD-CAAR will be at the Albany Public Library on Thursday, May 28, 1992 at 7:00 p.m.

Note: Our regular meetings are the 4th Thursday of every month. There are no regular meetings during the summer months. You will receive notification of any special meetings - and on-going committees will continue to meet. If you are interested in working with CD-CAAR, or for more information, call 432-4623.

Justice

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise:
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.

Langston Hughes