

11. *Choosing to Participate*

*Each time a man stands up for an ideal,
or acts to improve the lot of others,
or strikes out against injustice,
he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.*

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

OVERVIEW

The history of the Weimar Republic provides valuable insights into how and why democracies fail. Chapter 11 looks at what is needed for democracy to succeed. Over 140 years ago, Abraham Lincoln found one answer in these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” He believed that a society based on those truths should be the goal of every citizen. It was, in his view, a goal that ought to be “constantly looked to, constantly labored for, even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere.”

Choosing to Participate, published by Facing History and Ourselves, elaborates on many of the themes developed in this chapter. Some teachers use the book as the basis for a citizenship course that stresses community involvement and volunteerism.

In reflecting on efforts to build democracies in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, Czech President Vaclav Havel reached a similar conclusion. He stressed the need for a “civil society” – one that promotes “a climate that would encourage people to act as citizens in the best sense of the word.” Without that climate, democracy cannot survive. Weimar Germany is a good example. Although it had all of the trappings of democracy, it was not a “civil society.” Too many Germans were too eager to find simple answers to complex questions. And too often, those answers were rooted in false ideas about “race” and “racial” differences. Those who knew better chose to look the other way – even when their neighbors were threatened. It was easier to compromise than it was to take a stand. It was easier still to believe that individuals had no choice in the matter, especially if they were not in the habit of participating in community life.

The attitudes and values that destroyed the Weimar Republic exist in every society, including our own. Many of the issues Germans struggled with then are the same ones confronting Americans today. David Schoem, a sociology professor, says:

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically, and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.¹

Chapter 11 explores individual efforts to bridge that isolation, end our reliance on “stereotypes, gossip, rumor and fear,” and honestly confront the issues that divide us. It also considers what it takes to be a good citizen. History suggests that “people become brave by doing brave acts. People become compassionate by doing compassionate acts. People become good citizens by engaging in acts of good citizenship.”² Many of the individuals highlighted in this chapter have become good citizens by engaging in acts of good citizenship. They have no easy answers to the tough problems that plague our communities and our nation. They do, however, offer insights into the process of growth and change. And they help us understand what it takes to make a democracy work.

READING 1

“America’s Best Self”

In the course of American history, there have been many individuals who made a positive difference in their communities. Each inspired the generations that followed to demand justice, right wrongs, or simply offer a helping hand. Marian Wright Edelman is among those who were inspired by caring, compassionate women and men. As a result, she never had a doubt that she could make a difference. As a college student, Edelman challenged laws that excluded African Americans. She later helped register black voters in Mississippi and in 1965 became the first African American woman to practice law in the state. About twenty years ago, she founded the Children’s Defense Fund, which has since become the nation’s leading research and lobbying group devoted to the needs of children. Edelman has eloquently described the people who inspired her efforts:

South Carolina is my home state and I am the aunt, granddaughter, daughter, and sister of Baptist ministers. Service was as essential a part of my upbringing as eating and sleeping and going to school. The church was a hub of Black children's social existence, and caring Black adults were buffers against the segregated and hostile outside world that told us we weren't important. But our parents said it wasn't so, our teachers said it wasn't so, and our preachers said it wasn't so. The message of my racially segregated childhood was clear: let no man or woman look down on you, and look down on no man or woman.

We couldn't play in public playgrounds or sit at drugstore lunch counters and order a Coke, so Daddy built a playground and canteen behind the church. In fact, whenever he saw a need, he tried to respond. There were no Black homes for the aged in Bennettsville, so he began one across the street for which he and Mama and we children cooked and served and cleaned. And we children learned that it was our responsibility to take care of elderly family members and neighbors, and that everyone was our neighbor...

We learned early what our parents and extended community "parents" valued. Children were taught – not by sermonizing, but by personal example – that nothing was too lowly to do. I remember a debate my parents had when I was eight or nine as to whether I was too young to go with my older brother, Harry, to help clean the bed and bedsores of a very sick, poor woman. I went and learned just how much the smallest helping hands and kindness can mean to a person in need...

I was fourteen years old the night my daddy died. He had holes in his shoes but two children out of college, one in college, another in divinity school, and a vision he was able to convey to me as he lay dying in an ambulance that I, a young Black girl could be and do anything; that race and gender are shadows; and that character, self-discipline, determination, attitude, and service are the substance of life.

I have always believed that I could help change the world because I have been lucky to have adults around me who did – in small and large ways. Most were people of simple grace who understood what Walker Percy wrote: You can get all A's and still flunk life...

I and my brothers and sister might have lost hope – as many young people today have lost hope – except for the stable, caring, attentive adults in our family, school, congregation, civic and political life who struggled with and for us against the obstacles we faced and provided us positive alternatives and the sense of possibility we needed...

Too many people – of all colors, and all walks of life – are growing up today unable to handle life in hard places, without hope, without adequate attention, and without steady internal compasses to navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood.

As a result, we are on the verge of losing two generations of Black children and youths to drugs, violence, too-early parenthood, poor

Never could I have envisaged the positive changes I have seen since my youth. But my parents and elders dreamed of them and never lost hope. So neither will I lose hope that America's best self will overcome growing racial and class divisions.

health and education, unemployment, family disintegration – and to the spiritual and physical poverty that both breeds and is bred by them. Millions of Latino, Native American, and other minority children face similar threats. And millions of white children of all classes, like too many minority children, are drowning in the meaninglessness of culture that rewards greed and guile and tells them life is about getting rather than giving....

There are a whole lot of mornings when I can barely face the work I know I must do and feel discouraged and hopeless about whether America is ever going to finish the business of ensuring racial and economic and gender justice....

I am terrified by the escalating violence in our country and the apathy and ignorance that feed it. But I ask myself if I believe in my vision of America any less than the hatemongers and those who support them do theirs. And I remember everything I have been given and all the chances each of us in this country has been given to make a difference.

My life is one of the countless lives that attest to the vibrancy of the American Dream under circumstances harder than today's. The segregated world of my childhood in the 1940s and 1950s seemed impenetrable. Never could I have envisaged the positive changes I have seen since my youth. But my parents and elders dreamed of them and never lost hope. So neither will I lose hope that America's best self will overcome growing racial and class divisions.³

There was never a time when I was growing up that we were not involved and not aware. We always thought we could change the world, and that sense of empowerment is something that has to begin young.

CONNECTIONS

Marian Wright Edelman believes children must “be given a voice and a way to participate.” She goes on to say, “There was never a time when I was growing up that we were not involved and not aware. We always thought we could change the world, and that sense of empowerment is something that has to begin young.” What opportunities do young people have to speak out in your community? To participate? How might those opportunities be expanded?

Edelman tells interviewers, “One of the things I am tired of is people telling me how much they admire me, and ‘Keep it up.’ I keep saying ‘Help!’ Everybody's got to help. It's not about other people doing things. Everybody's got to assign themselves to building a more decent community, to healing our communities, and to saving our children.” Even the very young can help. “Children writing to politicians matters. We had boxes and boxes of letters and drawings from children when we were trying to pass the national child care bill, and that made a big difference. And I hope that we can do the same thing on the issue of school readiness. I hope children will invite their congressmen to come out and visit them and ask question about what their representatives are doing for kids.”

Like Marian Edelman, Jane Addams, a reformer in the late 1800s and early 1900s, also fought for laws that would protect the rights of children. She once wrote, “May I warn you against doing good to people, and trying to make others good by law? One does good, if at all, with people, not to people.” What point was she trying to make? Would Edelman agree? For more on Jane Addams and her work, see *Choosing to Participate*.

When Edelman was a child, she was surrounded by adults who affirmed her worth and protected her from the negative messages of the outside world. Noting that many kids today don’t have such adults in their lives, Edelman believes that “the good people’s silence” can be “as damaging as the bad people’s actions.” How does your study of the events that led up to the Holocaust support her view? What can ordinary people do to break the silence? For example, who in your community speaks out strongly and consistently against racism? Against hate crimes? Against injustice? Invite those individuals or groups to speak to your class. Find out how they got involved and what others can do to support their work.

Edelman sees a link between “the escalating violence in our country” and “apathy and ignorance.” From what you have read so far in this book, how are they linked? How can that link be broken?

The opening to this chapter quotes Robert F. Kennedy as saying, “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.” How do his remarks apply to Edelman? To the men and women who inspired her efforts? Who are the people in your life who send forth “tiny ripples of hope”?

READING 2

Fighting Violence and Terror

In earlier chapters, we saw that some people are fearful of changes. They are all too eager to hold *them* responsible for all the evil in the world, while *we* remain blameless. False ideas about “racial” differences often give legitimacy to those ideas and encourage violence toward the “other.” In the 1960s, for example, even as people like Marian Wright Edelman were working to end segregation, other Americans were fighting to preserve it. Some of them used violence to intimidate African Americans whenever they tried to vote, integrate public schools, or even have a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. By the 1970s, tough new laws and determined enforcement of those laws had put an end to the lynchings and murders – or so many people thought.

Then one morning in the spring of 1981, the residents of Mobile, Alabama, awoke to discover a mutilated body hanging from a tree. The lynching of Michael Donald, a nineteen-year-old African American, shocked people everywhere. A few citizens, however, chose to do more than just express their horror or offer sympathy to the young man's family. They chose instead to channel their outrage into preventing similar crimes. One of those individuals was Morris Dees, the executive director of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama.

Dees traces his interest in fighting social justice to his first court appearance as a witness for an African American farm worker. Dees, then a high-school student, recalls, "I thought all I had to do was go in there, as a white boy, and tell the [justice of the peace] what happened, and that would be the end of it," Dees said. "But the state troopers were white, too, and later I realized that the [justice of the peace] only got paid if he found Clarence (the black defendant) guilty."⁴

Years later, Dees with the help of a fellow lawyer, Joseph Levin Jr., would fight and win a case that resulted in the outlawing of that system. Justices of the peace in Alabama are no longer paid *only* if they find a defendant guilty. That case, in turn, led to the founding of the SPLC in 1971. The two men hoped the new group would change the South by fighting "a few important cases with the right facts." Both believed that the civil rights laws passed in the 1960s were meaningless unless someone was willing to challenge any violation of those laws. Aware that most people lacked the legal knowledge, time, or money to do so, they decided to take on the job themselves.

By 1981, the SPLC had initiated and assisted in a number of important civil and criminal cases, but increasingly, its main focus was the Ku Klux Klan. To monitor and investigate the Klan's activities, the group established Klanwatch. It provided the FBI, state troopers, and local police officers with the information that led to the arrest of two young men – both members of the southern Alabama chapter of the United Klans of America.

In 1983, James "Tiger" Knowles and Henry Hays were brought to trial. A legal journal summarized Knowles's testimony.

Several Klansmen from Mobile unit 9 had gathered at Henry Hays's house on the evening of Friday, March 20, 1981, to await the 10 P.M. television news for details of the verdict in a local criminal case. Joseph Anderson, a black man accused of killing a white Birmingham policeman, was being retried at the Mobile county courthouse. The first trial had ended with a jury of 11 blacks and one white deadlocked.

Knowles calmly testified that on the drive to the Hays house he was "tying a hangman's noose for the purpose of hanging somebody." Soon after they arrived a report came over the news that the jury had again failed to arrive at a verdict. Henry Hays and Knowles bolted outside and drove to a predominantly black neighborhood "looking for someone to hang," Knowles told the jury. The two men saw an elderly

black man but decided against him because he was too far from the car and was using a public telephone. Later they came upon Donald. “He seemed like a good victim and no one was around,” said Knowles.⁵

The jury found the two men guilty. Hays was sentenced to death. Knowles, who was only seventeen at the time of the murder, was given life in prison because of his age and the help he offered federal authorities. When the trial finally ended, the district attorney told reporters that the case was closed. Dees strongly disagreed. In his experience, members of the Klan rarely act on their own. Their activities are usually planned and directed by local councils. Dees also believed that even if the Klan was not directly involved in Donald’s murder, it had created the atmosphere of violence and terror that fostered the crime. Therefore he felt that the state had an obligation to put the Klan itself on trial. Since the district attorney was unwilling to do so, he developed an alternative strategy. It required the help of Beulah Mae Donald, Michael Donald’s mother, and her lawyer, Michael Figures.

In June, 1984, Dees and Figures filed a civil suit against the United Klans of America, its local councils, and several of its leaders on behalf of the Donald family and the NAACP (acting as a representative for all African Americans in Alabama). In the suit the plaintiffs charged that the murder was part of a long-standing conspiracy to threaten and intimidate blacks in the state of Alabama. They also noted that the Klan, as a nonprofit group, is liable for its members’ actions.

After three years of painstaking investigation by the SPLC and the NAACP, the case came to trial in February 1987. The two attorneys won their first victory before the hearing even began: the United Klans agreed that it would no longer harass African Americans in Alabama. The only remaining question was whether the group and its leaders were liable in the death of Michael Donald.

Dees and Figures maintained that the murder was just one in a series of crimes directed by the Klan. James Knowles’s testimony supported that argument. Under oath, he described the propaganda that led him to believe that he not only had a right but even a duty to kill African Americans. He also testified that top Klan officials issued the orders that resulted in Donald’s death. Knowles concluded his testimony by pleading with the all-white jury to hold him and the other defendants responsible for the murder. He then asked Beulah Mae Donald to forgive him for killing her son.

The jury found the defendants guilty and awarded the Donalds \$7 million in damages. The verdict sent a powerful message to the Klan and similar groups. From then on, any organization that encouraged its members to commit hate crimes would be held accountable for those crimes. Indeed, the verdict almost destroyed the United Klans. When it could not raise enough money to pay damages, the court turned over the group’s assets and the paychecks of its leaders to the Donald family.

The goals of the SPLC are based on a strong commitment to the First Amendment to the Constitution. That amendment protects not only freedom of speech but also freedom of assembly – the right to form groups and associations. Therefore even though the SPLC opposes aims and methods of the Klan, it supports the right of individuals to join the Klan if they wish to do so. It attacks the group only when it promotes hatred and violence. Therefore the SPLC continues to keep a close watch on the Klan to make sure that the group stays within both the letter and the spirit of the law.

CONNECTIONS

Compare the Klan to the Nazi party. How did each use propaganda to win members? Rituals and uniforms to create a sense of belonging? Hate as a way of uniting *us* against *them*? Terror as a weapon?

At the time of the murder, some people were wondering how far the nation had come in its struggle to ensure equal rights for all Americans. How would you respond? In answering, take into account the way the Southern Poverty Law Center took advantage of the new laws to pursue justice. Would the verdict in either the criminal or civil suit have been possible in the early 1900s? In the 1950s or 1960s?

How did Beulah Mae Donald channel her rage and grief? Why were she and her children willing to risk their lives by challenging the Klan? Why was Dees willing to do so? Would they have been able to work together in similar ways in the late 1800s? In the early 1900s? (Consult *Choosing to Participate*, Part I of Chapter 2, for more information.)

Members of the Klan hide behind hoods and costumes when they burn crosses and commit other acts of violence. How do you account for their secrecy? Their use of terror as a weapon? Make an identity chart for a member of a Klan.

Although Morris Dees supports the right of the Klan to speak and assemble peacefully, he has formed a group to closely monitor the Klan's activities. How do you account for his position? Do you agree?

How does the First Amendment to the Constitution help build the kind of “civil society” Havel defined in the overview to this chapter?

The SPLC is one of many groups working for social equality. Among those groups are the NAACP, particularly its Legal Defense Fund, the Urban League, the Anti-Defamation League, and a variety of local associations. Learn more about the goals and tactics of one of these groups and share your findings with the class. You may be surprised to find out how many independent associations there are in the United States. Each provides avenues for civic participation that go well beyond voting.

→The documentary, *The Klan Youth Corps* offers insights into the ways the Klan has used propaganda to indoctrinate young people. Compare the way the Klan indoctrinates young people with what you have read about Nazi indoctrination. Describe the range of decisions made by youth shown in this film. What are the consequences of their choices?

→Available from the Facing History Resource Center is the comprehensive television documentary *Eyes on the Prize*. The first six segments focuses on the years from 1954-1965. *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads* covers the period from 1965 to 1985 and focuses on shift in strategy and in the nation's temperament.

READING 3

Breaking Isolation

In times of political, social or economic stress, many people look for someone to blame. For many years, C. P. Ellis was such a person. He tried desperately to find someone that he could hold responsible for his troubles. As a result, he was attracted to groups that offered simple answers to complex questions. He says of those years:

I was workin' a bread route. The highest I made one week was seventy-five dollars. The rent on our house was about twelve dollars a week. I will never forget: outside of this house was a 265-gallon oil drum. What I would do every night, I would run up to the store and buy five gallons of oil and climb up the ladder and pour it in that 265-gallon drum. I could hear that five gallons when it hits the bottom of that oil drum, splatters, and it sounds like it's nothin' in there. But it would keep the house warm for the night. Next day you'd have to do the same thing.

I left the bread route with fifty dollars in my pocket. I went to the bank and I borrowed four thousand dollars to buy the service station. I worked seven days a week, open and close, and finally had a heart attack. Just about two months before the last payments of that loan. My wife had done the best she could to keep it runnin'. Tryin' to come out of that hole, I just couldn't do it.

I really began to get bitter. I didn't know who to blame. I tried to find somebody. I began to blame it on black people. I had to hate somebody. Hatin' America is hard to do because you can't see it to hate it. You gotta have somethin' to look at to hate. (Laughs.) The natural person for me to hate would be black people, because my father before

me was a member of the Klan. As far as he was concerned, it was the savior of the white people. It was the only organization in the world that would take care of the white people. So I began to admire the Klan.

I got active in the Klan while I was at the service station. Every Monday night, a group of men would come by and buy a Coca-Cola, go back to the car, take a few drinks, and come back and stand around talkin'. I couldn't help but wonder: Why are these dudes comin' out every Monday? They said they were with the Klan and have meetings close-by. Would I be interested? Boy, that was an opportunity I really looked forward to! To be part of somethin'. I joined the Klan, went from member to chaplain, from chaplain to vice-president, from vice-president to president. The title is exalted cyclops.

Ellis recalled how he felt the day he took the oath.

After I had taken my oath, there was loud applause goin' throughout the buildin', musta been at least four hundred people. For this one little ol' person. It was a thrilling moment for C. P. Ellis.

It disturbs me when people do not really know what it's all about are so very critical of individual Klansmen. The majority of 'em are low-income whites, people who really don't have a part in something. They have been shut out as well as the blacks. Some are not very well educated either. Just like myself. We had a lot of support from doctors and lawyers and police officers.

Maybe they've had bitter experiences in this life and they had to hate somebody. So the natural person to hate would be the black person. He's beginnin' to come up, he's beginnin' to learn to read and start votin' and run for political office. Here are white people who are supposed to be superior to them, and we're shut out.

I can understand why people join extreme right-wing or left-wing groups. They're in the same boat I was. Shut out. Deep down inside, we want to be part of this great society. Nobody listens, so we join these groups.

As tensions mounted between African Americans and whites in Ellis's community, both groups attended city council meetings and school board hearings. At one meeting, Ellis was unexpectedly asked to co-chair a committee. He laughingly remembered:

A Klansman and a militant black woman, co-chairmen of the school committee. It was impossible. How could I work with her? But after about two or three days, it was in our hands. We had to make it a success. This give me another sense of belongin', a sense of pride. This helped this inferiority feelin' I had. A man who has stood up publicly and said he despised black people, all of a sudden he was willin' to work with 'em. In spite of all my hatred for blacks and Jews and liberals, I accepted the job. Her and I began to reluctantly work together. (Laughs.) She had as many problems workin' with me as I had workin' with her.

One night I called her: “Ann, you and I should have a lot of differences and we got ‘em now. But there’s somethin’ laid out here before us, and if it’s gonna be a success, you and I are gonna have to make it one. Can we lay aside some of these feelin’s?” She say: “I’m willing if you are.” I said: “Let’s do it.”

My old friends would call me at night: “C. P., what the hell is wrong with you? You’re sellin’ out the white race.” This begin to make me have guilt feelin’s. Am I doin’ right? Am I doin’ wrong? Here I am all of a sudden makin’ an about-face and tryin’ to deal with my feelin’s, my heart. My mind was beginnin’ to open up. I was beginnin’ to see what was right and what was wrong. I don’t want the kids to fight forever.

As C. P. and Ann went out into the community, they found that people were not responding to their message.

Some of ‘em was cussin’ us out. “You’re sellin us out, Ellis get out of my door. I don’t want to talk to you.” Ann was gettin’ the same response from blacks: “What are you doin’ messin’ with that Klansman?”

One day Ann and I went back to the school and we sat down. We began to talk and just reflect. Ann said: “My daughter came home cryin’ every day. She said her teacher was makin’ fun of me in front of the other kids.” I said: “Boy, the same thing happened to my kid. White liberal teacher was makin fun of Tim Ellis’s father, the Klansman. In front of other peoples. He came home cryin’.” At this point – (he pauses, swallows hard, stifles a sob) – I begin to see, here we are, two people from the far ends of the fence, havin’ identical problems, except hers bein’ black and me bein’ white. From that moment on, I tell ya, that gal and I worked together good. I begin to love the girl, really. (He weeps.)

The whole world was openin’ up, and I was learnin’ new truths that I had never learned before. I was beginnin’ to look at a black person, shake hands with him, and see him as a human bein’.

The amazing thing about it, her and I, up to that point, had cussed each other, bawled each other, we hated each other. Up to that point, we didn’t know each other. We didn’t know we had things in common.

We worked at it, with the people who came to these meetings. They talked about racism, sex education, about teachers not bein’ qualified. After seven, eight nights of real intense discussion, these people, who’d never talked to each other before, all of a sudden came up with resolutions. It was really somethin’, you have to be there to get the tone and feelin’ of it.

At this point I didn’t like integration but the law says you do this and I’ve got to do what the law says, okay? We said: “Let’s take these resolutions to the school board.” The most disheartening thing I’ve ever faced was the school system refused to implement any one of these resolutions. These were recommendations from the people who pay taxes and pay their salaries.

When the school board refused to hear the committee's recommendations, Ellis decided to run for the board. Although he lost the election, the race changed his feelings about himself and others.

The whole world was openin' up, and I was learnin' new truths that I had never learned before. I was beginnin' to look at a black person, shake hands with him, and see him as a human bein'. I hadn't got rid of all this stuff. I've still got a little bit of it. But somethin' was happenin' to me.

It was almost like bein' born again. It was a new life. I didn't have these sleepless nights I used to have when I was active in the Klan and slippin' around at night. I could sleep at night and feel good about it. I'd rather live now than at any other time in history. It's a challenge.

As Ellis took charge of his life, he went back to school to earn a high school diploma. He also helped form a union at work, even though "my daddy was anti-labor, too."

I tell people there's a tremendous possibility in this country to stop wars, the battles, the struggles, the fights between people. People say: "That's an impossible dream. You sound like Martin Luther King." An ex-Klansman who sounds like Martin Luther King. (Laughs.) I don't think it's an impossible dream. It's happened in my life. It's happened in other people's lives in America.

When the news came over the radio that Martin Luther King was assassinated, I got on the telephone and begin to call other Klansmen. We just had a real party at the service station. Really rejoicin' 'cause that son of a bitch was dead. Our troubles are over with. They say the older you get, the harder it is for you to change. That's not necessarily true. Since I changed, I've set down and listened to tapes of Martin Luther King. I listen to it and tears come to my eyes 'cause I know what he's sayin' now. I know what's happenin'.⁶

CONNECTIONS

In the overview to this chapter, David Schoem referred to isolation as a "human and national tragedy." How did the isolation Schoem describes shape the values and beliefs of C. P. Ellis? His opportunities for knowing others? For learning their ways? What does it suggest about the kind of leaders needed in a democracy?

Schoem writes that as a result of our isolation we learn "to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge." How did "stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear" shape Ellis's attitudes? At what point did his attitude toward Ann change? Toward African Americans as a group? Why did they change? What does the change suggest about the way groups that regard one another as enemies can be brought together?

As an African American, Marian Wright Edelman was taught that segregation is “not about you; it’s about them.” How does C. P. Ellis’s story support that view?

Earlier, Albert Camus was quoted as saying “I know that the great tragedies of history often fascinate men with approaching horror. Paralyzed, they cannot make up their minds to do anything but wait. So they wait, and one day the Gorgon devours them. But I should like to convince you that the spell can be broken, that there is an illusion of impotence, that strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it.” How did Ellis break that “illusion of impotence?” What opportunities are there in your life for overcoming that illusion and breaking the spell?

Draw an identity chart for Ellis when he joined the Klan. Draw a similar chart after he left the Klan and then compare the two charts. What differences seem most striking?

Why did Ellis and his fellow Klansmen need someone to blame for their troubles? Why would they regard the “black person” as the “natural person to hate”?

READING 4

Role Models in a Democracy

Too many young people today are growing up the way C. P. Ellis did – “unable to handle life in hard places, without hope, without adequate attention, and without steady internal compasses to navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood.”

The Reverend Michael Haynes is among those who have devoted their lives to helping those young people find their way. He began his career in social work as a youth-group leader and summer-camp counselor at a settlement house in a predominantly African American neighborhood. Haynes later recalled the philosophy he learned there:

Too many people...are growing up today unable to handle life in hard places, without hope, without adequate attention, and without steady internal compasses to navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood.

My mandate...was to spend as much time as I could with these kids, to guide their lives, to be concerned about what’s going on in their schools, to get to know their families and to guide their leisure lives. In those days, settlement house workers in the black community were responsible for those kids. They were ours. There was no 9-to-5. I had to hang with them.⁷

Haynes took those ideas with him, when he joined the staff of Norfolk House, a Boston settlement, in the 1950s.

...Norfolk House was looking for a link between the white kids still in the neighborhood, already tense about the arrival of blacks, and the blacks who were entering a new environment. That's when the Exquisites began. The neighborhood houses had weekly parties and dances, basketball and football leagues, tutoring and arts and crafts. Kids just naturally flocked there. It was the perfect place to begin.

We would get a group of about 10 to 15 kids, wherever there was a nucleus of kids who hung around who seemed to have some kind of potential, and we would form a club and concentrate on them. We started at the junior high level and followed these kids everywhere they went – to college if they went to college and to jail if they went to jail.⁸

Carl McCall met Haynes at a local pool hall. McCall, who had skipped school that day to hang out, still recalls their encounter:

He wanted to know what I was doing there. Right away, he told me I could be doing more than that. And he was a friend, father figure, mentor from then on. He encouraged and assisted me in applying to college, put me in contact with people who could help me get scholarships. And while I was in school, I'd get \$5 from Mike every now and then to get my laundry done.

Mike Haynes is a very special and terribly unselfish individual. He was just there for a lot of people. He encouraged us to get involved in the community and church and made sure we met people in politics, in business, people who were doing important things. And when we got to meet these people, most of them were black – they looked just like us. That was hard to forget.⁹

We recognized how dependent upon each other we really were... We learned there was nothing wrong with needing each other. And there was nothing wrong with achieving.

As a result of Haynes's efforts and his own determination, McCall finished not only high school but also college. And after earning a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth, he went on to study at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He later became president of the New York City Board of Education.

Albert Holland also belonged to the Exquisites. Now a superintendent within Boston School Department, he recalls that "there was nothing like being an Exquisite. I felt I belonged to an organization that had some goals and direction. It was something to be proud of. Mike got us into the Exquisites and then used the group to steer us. Even when we were away from home and needed lifting, we could pick up a phone and he'd be there. But the key was exposure. He made sure we saw success."¹⁰

Peter Parham, yet another member of the group, is the executive vice president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. He has also served as special assistant to U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy and as Director of Human Services for the city of Washington, D.C.

In all of the positions I've held, I drew upon strength I'd gotten as an Exquisite. I believed I could do anything, and I had a huge family reinforcing that idea. I can remember writing speeches for Sen. Kennedy and calling Mike for help, or Al Holland coming down from Boston to help me with fund raising for the 20th anniversary March on Washington. We recognized how dependent upon each other we really were. One might have talent in one area, say academic, but we learned that in order to be able to give something back, other talents were needed. We learned there was nothing wrong with needing each other.

And there was nothing wrong with achieving. I remember the trip the Exquisites took to Washington in 1963, and when I came back 13 years later as an assistant to Sen. Kennedy, there was clearly a bridge. I had no plans to end up working with him, but it wasn't beyond my dreams and perceptions. When you talk about making a dream reality, you first have to think it's possible. The Exquisites made my dream possible.¹¹

Not every member of the Exquisites had success. Some got into trouble and lost their way. One of those young men, now a counselor for public housing residents, was in and out of prison seven times before he put his life together. He credits Haynes with his turnaround.

I was tired of people telling me when to do things and how to do them, tired of being considered a leader behind prison walls when I knew I should be a leader on the outside. I was scared to come out, but I made the decision to go straight from Walpole [maximum security prison] to a treatment program. I didn't call Rev. Haynes to tell him I was getting it together, I wanted to show him. I'm continuing his work in my own way.¹²

Norfolk House and the Exquisites no longer exist. The settlement house closed its doors in the 1970s because of funding problems. Michael Haynes reflected on the consequences of that loss:

I think we're paying the price now for the loss of the settlement houses – the violence, the inability to reach out and influence kids. Some of the community and youth leaders are beginning to realize that these components are missing and are trying to reestablish them. I think we're losing two whole generations of kids. The prisons reflect it.¹³

CONNECTIONS

In what ways did Michael Haynes and his staff address Marian Edelman’s concern that “Too many people – of all colors, and all walks of life – are growing up today unable to handle life in hard places, without hope, without adequate attention, and without steady internal compasses to navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood”? How did the group keep members from feeling shut out, the way C. P. Ellis did?

Carl McCall says of Michael Haynes, “He encouraged us to get involved in the community and church and made sure we met people in politics, in business, people who were doing important things. And when we got to meet these people, most of them were black – they looked just like us. That was hard to forget.” What is a *role model*? How does a role model help young people “navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood”? Was Michael Haynes such a role model? To what extent were the people the Exquisites met through their association with Haynes role models? Who are your role models? How do they help you navigate “morally polluted seas”?

Compare the Exquisites with the Klan Ellis joined. How does each group satisfy the need of its members to belong? To be a part of something? What differences seem most striking?

At the end of the reading Michael Haynes discusses what the closing of places like Norfolk House means to young people and to the community as whole. Do you share his concerns? To find out more about the work of settlement houses, see *Choosing to Participate*, Chapter 3, Part 1.

Haynes says of the young people he worked with at his first job, “They were ours. There was no 9-to-5.” How is his sense of responsibility similar to that of the adults Edelman recalls from her childhood? How important is that sense of caring and responsibility to a community?

READING 5

American Dreams and Urban Realities

In Chapter 1, we saw that people everywhere live in groups. In groups, they meet their most basic needs and satisfy their yearning to belong. If they do not feel welcome in the larger society, many tend to form smaller groups of their own. Not surprisingly, those groups often challenge the values and beliefs of the larger society. Gangs are a good example. Young people, particularly those who belong to minority groups, have been forming them for hundreds of years. In the 1920s, members were primarily

Young people are motivated to join gangs to “meet” the same developmental needs that all youth are seeking – a sense of connection, belonging, and self-definition.

European immigrants and their children – usually Poles, Italians, Irish, Slavs, and Jews. Today, most gang members are African Americans, Latinos, or Asians. Members continue to be, in the words of one researcher, “tough and resourceful kids, who have committed violence and had violence committed upon them. Most of their bodies show the scars. In their world, a youngster proves manhood by fighting other gang members or by fearlessly confronting outsiders.”

The reasons for joining a gang have not changed much over the years. In 1989, Leon Bing published a study of two of Los Angeles’s most prominent gangs – the Crips and the Bloods. When she asked members why they joined, one young man told her:

I wasn’t in it at first. I was just young, about 12 years old, and I started talking about gangbanging [activities of a gang] and all that. Then they started breaking my stuff and all that, you know, so you figure, well, what’s the use, it’s protection. So you thinking about it and then somebody socks you when you not looking and then you fight ‘em back and you end up in their set [a neighborhood affiliate of the Bloods or Crips].¹⁴

Other members offered other reasons for joining:

Li’l Monster: Say we’re white and we’re rich. we’re in high school and we been buddies since grammar school. And we all decide to go to the same college. Well, we all on the same street, all those years, and we all just decide to –

Rat-Neck: --join the gang.

Tee: What I think is formulating here is that human nature wants to be accepted. A human being gives less of a damn of what he is accepted into. At that age – 11-to 17 – all kids want to belong. They are un-people.¹⁵

Bing also asked members what gang life meant to them.

Tee: It’s the same everywhere. A sorority, a fraternity, the Girl Scouts, camping club, hiking club, LAPD, the Los Angeles Raiders, are all the same. Everything that you find in those groups and institutions you find in a gang.

Bing: So are you saying there’s no difference between the motives of you guys joining a gang, and say, a young WASP [White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant] joining a fraternity?

Rat-Neck: You got a lot of gangbangers out there who are smart. They want it. They got what it takes. But the difference is they got no money...

Bing: And how do drugs figure into this?

Li’l Monster: Wait a minute. I just want to slide in for a minute. I want to set the record straight. People think gangs and drugs go hand in hand, but they don’t. If I sell drugs does that make me a

gangbanger? No. If I gangbang, does that make me sell drugs? No. See, for white people – and I am not saying for all white people, just like what I say about black people is not for all black people – they go to college, the stepping-stone to what they want to get. And some black people look to drugs as a stepping-stone to get the same thing.

B-Dog: They want to live better. To buy what they want. To get a house.

Rat-Neck: Not worry about where the next meal comes from.

Tee: To live comfortable and get a slice of American pie, the American Dream.

B-Dog: There it is.

Tee: The army came out with a hell of a slogan: “Be all you can be.” And that’s it.

We all want the same thing. We’ve been taught by television, the silver screen, to grow up and have a chicken in every pot, two Chevys, 2.3 kids in the family. So we have been the same thing that you have been taught, but there is certain things that we can hold on to and other things that – we see them, but we cannot reach them. Most of us are dealing with the reality of surviving as opposed to, “Well, my dad will take care of it.”

Bing: Are you saying that gangbanging is just another version of the American Dream?

Li’l Monster: It’s like this. You got the American Dream over there, and you reaching for it. But you can’t get it. And you got dope right here, real close. You can grab it easy. Dealing with the closer one, you might possibly make enough money to grab the other one. Then you throw away the dope. That’s a big if.¹⁶

Martin Sanchez Jankowski, a sociologist, studied thirty-seven gangs in Los Angeles, New York City, and Boston over a ten-year period. He, too, interviewed members on a wide range of topics, including the role that violence plays in their lives. An 18-year-old Puerto Rican from New York told him, “Yeah, I smashed the windshield of this white preppy’s Jag [Jaguar automobile]. I dropped a brick on it... I did it because I hate those a – . They got everything ‘cause they’re white and their fathers were rich and bloodsuckers. And you know, after I do it, I feel a little better that I made them hassled just a little.”¹⁷

A nineteen-year-old who belongs to an Irish gang in Boston said:

“I torched the inside of that blue’s [blue blood’s] car, so what? I hate them, just like I hate the niggers. They think we’re scum. You know they keep us in these low-paying jobs and these row houses and go off to their fancy houses in the suburbs which they bought by ripping us off from good wages. Hell, I won’t be getting a job to get me out of this because I won’t get the opportunity, they’d rather give it to the niggers. So I think they’re scum, and when I get the chance to make it a little hard for them, I take it! And you know what? I feel better afterward.”¹⁸

An eighteen-year-old New Yorker told Jankowski: “See, I and a lot of other guys have inflicted a lot of hurt on people over the years, but we was commanded at various times by the gang to inflict hurt on people. We did it and did it mercilessly... Nobody felt guilty about it because since the whole gang thought it was the right thing, it was the right thing. Plus it was an order and you have to follow orders.”¹⁹ A sixteen-year-old Mexican American in Los Angeles stated:

Check it out, I got me a lot of shooting in and I hit a lot of people... Yeah, I can remember when I first was told [by the gang] to shoot somebody. I was nervous, but I had this automatic rifle, and when I started to shoot, man, it was easy. That’s what makes it easy, it’s fast and there’s nothing personal in it like when you use a knife... Hey, you know what I like about carrying this pistol, you get respect no matter who you are or how big you are cause it evens everything up.²⁰

There are well over 10,000 of these kids in L.A. These are American kids! They’re drifting into gangs at eight or nine, some become killers at 12. I wondered. What do they think? What makes them hate each other?

Both Bing and Jankowski tried to put their findings into perspective. Bing wrote:

I’d heard a lot about the gangs and the drive-by shootings. But I’d never read anything about these guys as people. There are well over 100,000 of these kids in L.A. These are American kids! They’re drifting into gangs at eight or nine, some becoming killers by the time they’re 12. I wondered. What do they think? What makes them hate each other?

They’re killing each other, and its getting worse all the time. Their lives are so desolate, they have so little hope, and they are taking it out on people like themselves. Their parents, some of them, are on crack or other drugs. They have nothing you would recognize as family life, too little food, no future. Many of them are abused as children. Nobody cares about them. They are afraid to walk to the store alone, or to go to their friend’s house without protection.

...[All] the time homeless children turn up in gang neighborhoods knocking on doors, saying, “I want to claim. I want to be from this ‘hood.” And the gangs let them in...gang members are among the quietest people you will ever meet. You know, gangs are like families. Little kids get disciplined in gangs. When a little kid drifts into a gang, he doesn’t just get a gun thrust into his hands. He’s gonna get homeboy love, which is pretty potent.

[These] kids are not monsters. They are growing up against all odds in poisonous soil. I cannot judge them. And I cannot fix it for them, this horrible world they live in. All I can do is describe it. And try to stop the denial [by American society].²¹

In the conclusion to his book on gangs, Jankowski wrote:

...Much too often we have thought of gang members as the lowest of the lower class, individuals with low intelligence, psychological

disorders (like sadism) and or no initiative to work for a living. This view is simply not accurate. A great range of individuals are in gangs, but the vast majority are intelligent and quite capable of developing and executing creative enterprises.²²

CONNECTIONS

The individuals quoted in this reading cannot possibly speak for the thousands of young people who belong to gangs. They do, however, offer some insights into why some young people are attracted to gangs. What reasons do members give for joining? How are those reasons similar to those given for joining such groups as the Exquisites? The Klan? How are those reasons different?

Write a working definition of the word *gang*. What positive meanings does the word have? What negative meanings does it have? One gang member compared a gang to other groups in American society. How valid is his comparison?

Review the comments of the gang members who told of why they committed violent acts. What do their explanations have in common? Can you understand *why* they did what they did? What is the difference between understanding behavior and excusing it?

At the age of fifteen, poet Luis Rodriguez joined an East Los Angeles gang. He soon learned that the companionship and respect the gang offered came at a very high price. By the time he was eighteen, he writes, “25 of my friends had been killed by rival gangs, police, drugs, car crashes, and suicides.” In the fall of 1993 Rodriguez reflected on what young people can learn from his experiences with gangs. He told an interviewer from *Teaching Tolerance*:

One of the things I keep coming back to is a sense of control. I think what happens when you join gangs is you end up in prison, and prison is the place where everything is controlled; nothing belongs to you. Right now they have more control than they'll ever have in their lives, and they need to know how powerful and beautiful it is to have that control within yourself and be able to make choices.

They need to know they have options and that they can do something about their community. When I ask them what they want to change, they usually say they don't like the violence, they don't like bullets flying through the windows. They want to be able to fix the streets which are crumbling, they want to fix the schools. I tell them that's good; we can do something about it. We can make our own history.

To me, the most important change is internal – when you change within yourself to get through some of the terrible things happening outside of you. But you have to be working on the things outside of you, too. Even with my son Ramiro – we have built up a very strong relationship, but I know that as soon as he walks out the door, he

confronts society. So we have to do things about society, too. It can't just be an individual thing. We have to work together.

According to Rodriguez, what do people need to understand about the consequences of their choices? Many gang members are aware of statistics like those Rodriguez cites. Why then do they often find it hard to accept the need to change their behavior? What does Rodriguez see as the relationship between the individual and society? Do you agree?

It would be wrong to assume, however, that most urban teens or most Latinos or African Americans belong to gangs. Most, in fact, do not. What differentiates gang members from non-gang members? How might a research – based answer to that question be helpful in developing a program to stop gang activities and prevent violence?

It goes without saying that both Leon Bing and Martin Jankowski condemn the violent acts committed by gang members. Yet both try to understand what causes the violence. Bing says of gang members, these “kids are not monsters” but they are growing up in “poisonous soil.” What does she mean by that statement? How does she explain why young people join gangs? Is she right to say that most Americans try to deny problems posed by gangs?

Several gang members refer to the American Dream. Jankowski notes that their vision of that dream mirrors the values of American society as a whole. “[The] vast majority of gang members are quite energetic and are eager to acquire many of the same things that most members of American society want: money, material possessions, power, and prestige. Indeed, because they want the ‘good life,’ they energetically seek entrepreneurial opportunities that might lead them to it.” How do you think Marian Wright Edelman would respond to that vision of the American Dream? How might the Reverend Michael Haynes respond? How do you respond? Leon Bing says that she cannot judge gang members. If she cannot, who can judge and condemn their violent acts?

Gang members do not see themselves as empowered in the way Haynes empowered the young men he worked with. How might gang members be made to feel that they can make a difference in their own lives? How can they learn to feel that they are a part of a larger community? Think about those questions as you continue reading the chapter.

→The video *Beyond Hate*, a useful companion to this reading, is available from the Facing History Resource Center. Also available is a video interview with Carl Washington, a minister who was awarded the Reebok Human Rights Award in 1993 for his efforts at arranging a truce between the Crips and the Bloods in Los Angeles.

READING 6

Breaking the Bonds of Hate

How does one break out of the cycle of anger and violence that marks gang life? Virak Khiev, a Cambodian immigrant, offers one answer:

Most Americans believe the stereotype that immigrants work hard, get a good education and have a very good life. Maybe it used to be like that, but not anymore. You have to be deceptive and unscrupulous in order to make it. If you are not, then you will end up like most immigrants I've known. Living in the ghetto in a cockroach-infested house. Working on the assembly line or in the chicken factory to support your family. Getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning to take the bus to work and not getting home until 5 P.M.

If you're a kid my age, you drop out of school to work because your parents don't have enough money to buy you clothes for school. You may end up selling drugs because you want cars, money and parties, as all teenagers do. You have to depend on your peers for emotional support because your parents are too busy working in the factory trying to make money to pay the bills. You don't get along with your parents because they have a different mentality: you are an American and they are Cambodian. You hate them because they are never there for you, so you join a gang as I did.

You spend your time drinking, doing drugs, and fighting. You beat up people for pleasure. You don't care about anything except your drugs, your beers, and your revenge against adversaries. You shoot at people because they've insulted your pride. You shoot at the police because they are always bothering you. They shoot back and then you're dead like my best friend Sinerth.

Sinerth robbed a gas station. He was shot in the head by the police. I'd known him since the sixth grade from my first school in Minneapolis. I can still remember his voice calling me from California. "Virak, come down here, man," he said. "We need you. There are lots of pretty girls down here." I promised him that I would be there to see him. The following year he was dead. I felt sorry for him. But as I thought it over, maybe it is better for him to be dead than to continue with the cycle of violence, to live with hate. I thought, "It is better to die than live like an angry young fool, thinking that everybody is out to get you."

...When I was like Sinerth, I didn't care about dying. I thought that I was on top of the world, being immortalized by drugs. I could see that my future would be spent working on the assembly line like most of my friends, spending all my paycheck on the weekend and being broke again on Monday morning. I hated going to school because

I couldn't see a way to get out of the endless cycle. My philosophy was "Live hard and die young."

I hated America because, to me, it was not the place of opportunities or the land of "the melting pot" as I had been told. All I had seen were broken beer bottles on the street and homeless people and drunks using the sky as their roof. I couldn't walk down the street without someone yelling out, "you f-ing gook" from his car. Once again I was caught in the web of hatred. I'd become a mad dog with the mind-set of the past: "When trapped in the corner, just bite." The war mentality of Cambodia came back: get what you can and leave. I thought I came to America to escape war, poverty, fighting, to escape the violence, but I wasn't escaping; I was being introduced to a newer version of war – the war of hatred.

I was lucky. In Minneapolis, I dropped out of school in the ninth grade to join a gang. Then I moved to Louisiana, where I continued my life of "immortality" as a member of another gang. It came to an abrupt halt when I crashed a car. I wasn't badly injured, but I was underage and the fine took all my money. I called a good friend of the Cambodian community in Minneapolis for advice (she'd tried to help me earlier). I didn't know where to go or whom to turn to. I saw friends landing in jail, and I didn't want that. She promised to help me get back in school. And she did.

[American friends and teachers] opened my eyes to a kind of education that frees us all from ignorance and slavery.

Since then I've been given a lot of encouragement and caring by American friends and teachers who've helped me turn my life around. They opened my eyes to a kind of education that frees us all from ignorance and slavery. I could have failed so many times except for those people who believed in me and gave me another chance. Individuals who were willing to help me have taught me that I can help myself. I'm now a 12th grader and have been at my school for three years; I plan to attend college in the fall. I am struggling to believe I can reach the other side of the mountain.²³

CONNECTIONS

Compare Virak Khiev's view of the American Dream with those of the gang members quoted in Reading 5. How are they similar? What differences seem most striking? What is your view of the American Dream?

What does Khiev mean when he writes that his teachers "opened my eyes to a kind of education that frees us all from ignorance and slavery"? What kind of education does that?

According to Albert Camus, "strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it." How does this reading support that view? What part did Virak Khiev's friends and teachers play in stopping fate or even reversing it? What part did Khiev play?

Jane Addams once said that “one does good, if at all, with people, not to people.” Would Virak Khiev agree?

→A video interview with Arn Chorn, a survivor of the Cambodian Genocide, is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 7

Pride and Prejudice

On April 29, 1992, a jury acquitted a group of Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King, an African American. Many people were shocked by the verdict. After viewing a video of the beating that a bystander made, they were convinced that the police had acted improperly. Within hours of the announcement, angry African Americans took to the streets to express their outrage. Gregory Alan-Williams, who is also an African American, witnessed the rioting. He later described how he felt as he saw the overturned cars, smashed windows, and smoldering fires:

I understood clearly what was happening and why it was happening. A part of me wanted it to happen, spurred by the remaining shards of self-righteous indignation that scraped at my insides. But if I had raised my hand against another, when my rage was spent, and I could no longer recall with sufficient clarity the justifications that had driven me to such brutality and horror, what would I do? How would I survive the shame and self-hatred which would overtake me as the battered faces of my brothers bled and pleaded in my memory?²⁴

At an intersection, Alan-Williams saw a Japanese American try desperately to drive through the area only to be stopped by a barrage of bricks and bottles. Even after the man lost consciousness, the attacks continued. As Williams watched, he recalled an incident that took place when he was one of two black students in his junior high school:

I was a few feet from the auditorium doors, engaging in some good-natured banter with another student, when some hard object – like a rock – slammed against my mouth: the flesh burst into bleeding pulp against my teeth. The strength of the blow, combined with the downward incline of the aisle, sent me reeling backward into the

students behind me. They parted like the Red Sea. I fell over some seats, righted myself, and touched two trembling fingers to the pain in my mouth. I could feel the flesh hanging from where my bottom lip had been.

Dazed and bleeding, I staggered back and forth across the aisle, unable to understand what had happened. I caught a blurry glimpse of

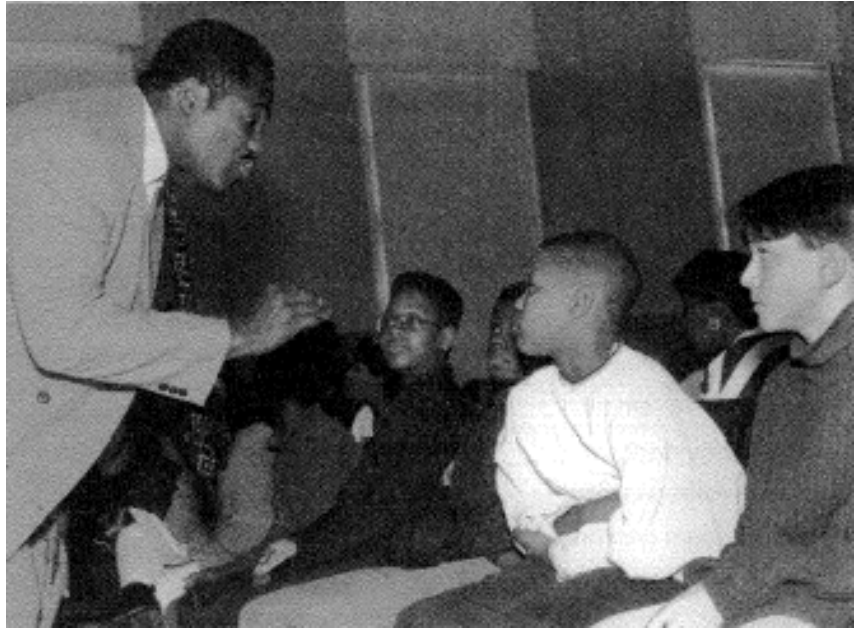
someone standing laughing in the middle of the aisle. I couldn't make out his face but he was huge... Some kids were standing at the edges of the aisle, others had gathered up ahead and were watching from the double doors of the auditorium. A few joined my assailant in laughter... I was hoping desperately that someone upon this "enlightened landscape" would help me. Help me get away from the huge laughing figure, away from my shame and those who watched as I staggered about, bloody and afraid.

A few days later, as I sat, stitched and swollen, in the vice principal's office, I came to understand what had happened, for the vice principal said that I had come to his school "walking too tall" and holding my head "a little too high and many of the students resented it. So," he said to my mother, "of course, what could you expect?"...

Now the vivid memory of that beating and abandonment, some twenty-five years ago, propelled me into the intersection. I remembered too well the feelings I had had, the hurtful words and images – I could not accept this attack, the suffering of this human being. It seemed that he and I had become one, that his suffering and mine had fused, and with one loud and silent voice now cried for help within this single irretrievable moment.

My conscience heard our cry, and carried me forward to preserve justice for him and to reclaim justice for myself.

I moved neither slowly nor quickly, not in anger but in extreme sorrow. Sorrow for those who were seeing, but who could not see; sorrow for the ones who saw but who had lost the ability to feel.



Gregory Alan-Williams speaks to Facing History students.

It seemed that he and I had become one; that his suffering and mine, present and past had fused, and with one loud and silent voice, now cried for help within this single irretrievable moment.

Sorrow for the hated and for those who nurtured hate with their silence. Although the man in the intersection was being robbed of his existence, my sorrow was not for death, but for the prevailing misery of life and grew from a remembrance of the ache that comes with knowing that one has been exiled from the human heart.²⁵

CONNECTIONS

What does Alan-Williams mean when he says that in helping the man attacked by the mob, he was reclaiming “justice, for myself”?

How does Williams’ story reflect Maya Angelou’s belief that the “courage to confront evil and turn it by dint of will into something applicable in the development of our evolution, individually and collectively is exciting, honorable”? (See Chapter 1, Reading 5.)

After the riots in Los Angeles, two African Americans were brought to trial for pulling Reginald Denny, a white truck driver, from his cab and battering him. At their trial, the prosecutors featured the story of four other African Americans who came to Denny’s rescue. Columnist Meg Greenfield commented “as one who has watched some of the rescuers’ testimony and been absolutely knocked out by it.” She wrote that “what they did...was not about being a member of any particular race. It was about being human and moral. Remember human and moral?” What is she saying about the way each of us is connected to other human beings? About the importance of that connection?

→A videotape of a talk by Alan-Williams at the Ninth Annual Facing History Conference is available from the Facing History Resource Center, as are classroom sets of his autobiography, *A Gathering of Heroes*.

READING 8

Finding Alternatives to Violence

In many schools throughout the United States, students are learning to deal with the anger Khiev and Alan-Williams describe in more positive ways. In one program, for example, students are taught to analyze their behavior and weigh the consequences of their actions. As part of that curriculum, they watch a videotaped argument between two students, David and Lisa. David wants Lisa to go to a party with him. When she refuses, David pressures her to change her mind. He reminds her that as his girl-

friend, she is obligated to spend time with him. Their increasingly angry voices attract a group of onlookers. Some are David's friends, while others support Lisa.

David's friends fan the argument by suggesting that Lisa is interested in someone else. At the same time, Lisa's friends tell her that she does not need a domineering boyfriend. Then, as the tension builds, Leon walks into the room and initiates a conversation with Lisa who clearly enjoys the attention. Her behavior provokes David who, in turn, demands that Leon leave. Leon refuses. Once again, David's friends fuel the quarrel by urging him to take action. He responds by shoving Leon aside. The video ends with Leon grabbing a chair just as David seems to be pulling a knife from his pocket.

As students watch the quarrel build in intensity, many laugh nervously even though they know it is a simulation. After all, the scene could easily have taken place in their own school or in thousands of others around the country. The program, called *Violence Prevention*, was developed by a physician, Deborah Prothrow-Stith. Used in over five thousand schools in forty-eight states, it grew out of her belief that violence has become a national public health emergency. Statistics bear her out.

- The United States ranks fifth in the world and first among industrialized nations (including nations at war) in recorded homicide rates.
- Serious assaults increased 400 percent in the nation's cities from the mid 1970s to 1990.
- In the past 30 years, the death rate has decreased for every age group except one – 15-24 year olds.
- In the 1980s the arrest rate for juveniles accused of violent offenses shot up 27 percent. The increases hold true for young people of all races and social classes.
- Homicide – the intentional killing of one person by another – is the second leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds. For African-American males in the same age group, it is the leading cause of death.

It hit me – all we did was stitch them up and send them out, stitch them up and send them out. We did nothing to prevent more violence... We never sent a suicide attempt home to just try it again. We offered counseling, support – we always did something to prevent them coming back in again. But victims of violence? We did nothing.

Deborah Prothrow-Stith's interest in violence prevention began in the early 1980s when she worked in the emergency room at two Boston hospitals. In an interview, she recalled:

It hit me – all we did was stitch them up and send them out, stitch them up and send them out. We did nothing to prevent more violence. Now that wasn't true of any other disease or injury we treated there. We never sent a heart attack victim home to just have another heart attack. We taught him about diet and exercise and stress. We never sent a suicide attempt home to just try it again. We offered counseling, support – we always did something to prevent them coming back in again. But victims of violence? We did nothing.²⁶

The doctor's experiences convinced her that something had to be done. "Young Black boys are overrepresented in homicide statistics. They're five percent of the population and forty percent of homicide victims. But what's becoming obvious to us is that, if you think homicide is the tip of the iceberg, it's not just a poor, urban problem. The homicide rate is higher in poor urban areas, but the assault rate [in suburban middle-class areas] isn't very different."²⁷

Prothrow-Stith believes that American society as a whole has allowed itself to become "infatuated with violence." The media in particular has glamorized violence so that many young people see it not only as a legitimate way of resolving conflicts but the only way of doing so. Again, statistics support her view. A study by the American Psychological Association revealed that "the average child witnesses 8,000 murders [on television] by the time he or she graduates from elementary school and sees more than 100,000 other acts of violence." And TV is not the only place that young people are exposed to violence. They also see it in movies, video games, books, and magazines. Other studies suggest a link between aggressive acts and an individual's exposure to violence. Students who spend many hours watching brutal acts on TV are more likely to commit spontaneous acts of aggression than those less exposed to violence.

Prothrow-Stith found that television had another effect as well: Many young people did not connect the pain of an injury with a violent act. Marcy Kelly of Mediascope, an organization that monitors violence in the entertainment industry, echoes that observation. "Many young people who wind up in hospitals having been shot say they are surprised that it hurts because it doesn't hurt on television." Prothrow-Stith also found that many teens "knew from their own experience of suffering and grief how much violence can hurt, but they had no idea how to avoid it. Don't you have to fight if someone insults you? they asked. Unless they spend a lot of time at church, or their parents actively taught them nonviolent methods of resolving conflicts, their teachers were television, movies and other kids."²⁸

Such conversations convinced the physician that a violence-prevention program ought to emphasize the importance of analyzing the consequences of every action. In the one she developed, students learn to weigh the risks involved in using violence to settle disputes. They are also introduced to other ways of resolving differences and to techniques that help them channel their anger into more positive actions. For example, students are expected to watch each video several times. And each time they are instructed to look for ways of defusing the situation. This technique encourages them to reflect on what causes conflicts to escalate. They become particularly aware of the roles friends can play in a crisis. They also come to realize that fear of what a friend may say can lead an individual to take more extreme action than he or she might otherwise consider.

Prothrow-Stith believes that her techniques empower students to break "the cycle of violence" even when they are confronted with flagrant injustice. She offers an example to underscore her point.

One young Black man told me he was angry because he saw his best friend stabbed in an argument. It took the ambulance 20 minutes to get to the scene of the stabbing. His friend was dead on arrival.

He was angry at the ambulance driver's tardiness. I gave him a litany of reactions: slash the tires of the ambulance, beat up the driver, hold his anger inside and do nothing, beat up a sibling or a pet or write a letter of protest to the company that owns the ambulance.

He said he wouldn't do any of these.

Then I said: "I hope you are so angry that you decide to finish high school and become a professional ambulance driver." I told him he had a right to be angry but anything less than this would be self-destructive.

The suggestion opened up a new possibility. He expressed immediate relief that he had an option in a long term struggle. He told me the suggestion made him feel less trapped.²⁹

CONNECTIONS

Prothrow-Stith and other researchers maintain that American society glamorizes violence. Test their opinion by critically viewing television programs popular among your friends. Look for scenes that involve threats of violence or actual violence. What prompts the violence? How do the actors respond? Do they regard the violence as an out-of-the-ordinary occurrence or as a matter of course? Compare your findings with those of your classmates. What patterns or trends do you see?

Much of *Facing History and Ourselves* has focused on the consequences of seeing the "other" as an enemy. How does the tendency to label them as enemies promote acts of violence?

Reread the description of David and Lisa's quarrel. What factors contributed directly to the fight? What factors contributed indirectly? For example, what part did gender play – what is considered appropriate behavior for males and females in our society? What other factors were involved? Then list ways a fight might have been prevented.

Prothrow-Stith knows that her curriculum is only a beginning. Why does she feel it is important for students to learn less violent ways of resolving conflicts? How do those feelings affect the advice she gave the young man who lost a friend?

→The video *Facing History and Ourselves: Chicago Students Confront Hatred and Discrimination* shows how a group of students views violence. Compare their views to your own. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center. Also available is a videotape of a presentation Deborah Prothrow-Stith gave at the Ninth Annual Facing History Conference.

READING 9

Students Organize

Wellesley, Massachusetts, is an attractive, prosperous suburb ten miles west of Boston. On the surface it seems far removed from the violence associated with large urban areas. Yet, on the night of October 7, 1989, the people of Wellesley discovered that hate crimes are not limited to inner-city neighborhoods. That night someone painted racist graffiti on dozens of cars, homes, and shops. The next morning, residents awoke to such messages of hate as “Hitler’s Children,” “Nazi Youth,” “White Power,” “The Final Solution,” “Whites Only,” and “I Hate Niggers, Chinks, and Spics.” A local reporter reflected the sentiments of most people in the community, “No one thought this could happen here. Even five days after anti-Semitic and racial slurs were scrawled throughout the town, the community is still coming to grips with a problem it believed Wellesley was immune to.”³⁰

People say it's only vandalism. This isn't vandalism. It's the message. They're not out to destroy the property. They're out to destroy the people.

Some speculated that the incident was the work of a neo-Nazi hate group outside the community. Others noted that the vandalism seemed to be random; no one group was singled out even though most of the graffiti was clearly racist. Yet many people in Wellesley did not view the vandalism as an isolated event. After seeing the business district, an African American student at Wellesley College told the reporter that she had seen swastikas spray-painted over two posters at the college just a week earlier. A passerby supported that view: “Racist feelings definitely exist here. I have had incidents happen. When people find out you are Jewish, they pull away. I just don’t think some people know how to handle differences.”³¹

Wellesley was not the only community in Massachusetts to experience a hate-related incident that summer. The Anti-Defamation League reported more racially motivated incidents in the state that summer than in the entire previous year. The number of hate crimes also rose dramatically across the country. They occurred not only in large cities but also on college campuses and in suburbs like Wellesley. Few of those crimes were the work of outsiders. Almost all were committed by people who lived in the community where the crime took place. Wellesley proved to be no exception.

A few days after the incident, the police charged two nineteen-year-olds with twenty-six counts of malicious destruction of property and two counts of intimidating individuals based on their religion – a violation of the state’s civil rights law. Both men pleaded guilty. Although the two had grown up in Wellesley and attended local schools, reporters and residents alike labeled them as “odd” or “loners.” They were said to like “heavy metal music” and one was said to sport a punk-style hair cut. People seemed to find comfort in viewing the two men as “different” from everyone else in the community.

One Wellesley resident was bothered by that response. Tory Garner, then a senior at Wellesley Hills High School, knew the vandals personally. She had grown up with them and was convinced that they were not so different from others in the community. She therefore concluded that the incident revealed that something was wrong not just with the two men but also with the community in which they grew up. In an interview, she described Wellesley as “an incredibly sheltered town. The fact that I myself thought this could not happen in Wellesley, I think that says a lot. We, the town, think we are different just because we are wealthy, that we are safe from these ‘outside attacks.’”³²

Tory Garner did not want herself or others to shrug off the incident. Therefore she, with the help of two classmates, Brian Doyle and Marissa Kramer, organized a candlelight rally to protest racism. About a thousand people attended. The students also bought a full-page ad in a local newspaper to publicly condemn hate crimes. But they did not stop there. They set out to educate themselves and others about the causes and consequences of those crimes. Doyle, as president of the student council, helped organize a special day-long workshop. Among the experts he invited was Deputy Superintendent William Johnston, then of the Community Disorders Unit, a special section in the Boston Police Department that investigates hate crimes. Johnston told the students and their teachers, “People say it’s only vandalism. This isn’t vandalism. It’s the message. They’re not out to destroy the property. They’re out to destroy the people.”

I was the type of kid who would laugh at the jokes that were prejudiced. I didn’t see the problems behind the jokes. I thought everybody was the same, and these were funny jokes. This has made me look at the deeper meaning.

By the end of the day, Doyle realized that the program was for everyone, including himself. “At times I think I actually take racism and discrimination too easily. I was the type of kid who would laugh at the jokes that were prejudiced. I didn’t see the problems behind the jokes. I thought everybody was the same, and these were funny jokes. This has made me look at the deeper meaning.”³³ Other students had a similar response. In reflecting on what she learned from the experience, Tory Garner said:

Everything I did and the reverberations made me realize so much more how individual differences meant so much. The whole thing was not about condemning those two guys but about condemning their attitudes and the things that stem from those kind of attitudes. So I believe it always makes me think a lot more about what I say. Sometimes people say or do things that offend me by way of offending other people. I think before I would have been offended, but I would not have said anything. And now I find myself when people start telling racist jokes, I say, “Could you tell this another time when I am not here or could you just not tell them.” I am not so scared of offending people when they do those things.

I have always been tagged a leader, but I never did such a thing on such a large scale. I surprised myself.³⁴

CONNECTIONS

Why did many residents think Wellesley was immune from hate crimes? Why were they wrong? What did Tory Garner and Brian Doyle learn about prejudice and discrimination in their community? In themselves?

Garner was able to convert her sense of outrage into a constructive plan of action. How do you think she learned to do so? Think back to other readings in this chapter that described role models or mentors who influenced individuals' choices. How do those individuals shape the way we respond to the world around us?

Many people will attend a rally or march after an incident like the one described in this reading. Fewer are willing to work toward preventing such incidents. How can people from different backgrounds be brought together? What kinds of activities promote an atmosphere in which diversity is respected rather than one that demands conformity? List as many ideas as you can. Then as a class, discuss ways you might implement those ideas. What risks do you take if you try to bring about change? What risks do you take if you fail to do so?

How do you account for the fact that most hate crimes are committed by men and women under the age of twenty-five?

Brian Doyle says of himself, "I was the type of kid who would laugh at the jokes that were prejudiced. I didn't see the problems behind the jokes. I thought everybody was the same, and these were funny jokes. This had made me look at the deeper meaning." What is that "deeper meaning"? What is the connection between the jokes and the vandalism? Between vandalism and hate crimes?

→A video of a talk by Deputy Superintendent William Johnston of the Boston Police Department is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 10

Taking a Stand

Tory Garner and her friends learned that it is important to speak out when someone tells a racist joke or makes a derogatory remark. But taking a stand requires courage. It is not easy to go against the group, even when you believe you are right. Monica Braine discovered just how tough it was when she protested her school's choice of a mascot.

Indiana Area Junior High, like many schools in the United States, has an Indian mascot, "Chief Tommyhawk." His picture is everywhere in the

school. It even decorates the school's floor mats. After noting that below his picture is the motto, "Our school is Drug and Alcohol Free," the ninth-grader told a reporter:

"Apparently, it's not racist mascot free," said Monica Braine, an Assiniboine Sioux, who is a freshman at the school this fall. She has stood her ground and spoken out on the mascot issue, telling the school it is wrong, but so far she is one against a tidal wave of students and community members who take pride in their "Chief Tommyhawk" and their "squaw."

"At sports events such as the football games, the cheerleaders dance around in typical stereotypical 'Indian' dances. The chief and squaw are doing the same.

"At volleyball games, the walls are splashed with posters that say Fight 'um and Go Injuns, and before they begin to play they stand in a circle and say 1-2-3 scalp 'um," she said.

"In the lunchroom they serve Big Indian Burgers," Miss Braine said.

"I had no idea this kind of ignorance existed.

"My mother has talked to the cheerleaders, and I wrote in the school newspaper that the mascots are derogatory and racist. But the administration seems to be deaf," she said.

"The entire school was furious with me and I was not popular at the time, but I stood my ground, and I learned who my real friends are. There was even a few threats by some students that they were going to beat me up."

Principal Rodney Ruddock said the mascot issue must be looked at from both points of view, those who want it changed and those who feel just as strongly that the mascot shouldn't be changed.³⁵

CONNECTIONS

How difficult is it to take an unpopular stand? To go against the group? Review Chapter 1. What advice do you think Monica Braine would offer the Bear in *the bear that wasn't*? Miriam Thaggert? Eve Shalen? What advice might they have given her?

In the previous reading, Brian Doyle, a high-school student, says of himself, "I was the type of kid who would laugh at the jokes that were prejudiced. I didn't see the problems behind the jokes. I thought everybody was the same, and these were funny jokes. This had made me look at the deeper meaning." How do his comments apply to Monica Braine's efforts to ban her school mascot? What is the deeper meaning in this case? How important is that meaning?

In 1993, the Wisconsin state assembly passed a resolution urging that public schools consider dropping American Indian logos and mascots if they are found to be offensive. A representative who opposed the measure believed

it would encourage censorship. Is he right? Or does the use of such mascots threaten what Vaclav Havel calls a “civil society”? Use ideas and information you recorded in your journal to support your point of view.

READING 11

City Year

Michael Brown and Alan Khazei shared a vision when they graduated from Harvard Law School in 1987. They wanted to create a yearlong program that would provide students with opportunities for public service. As Brown explained in an interview, “The idea behind City Year is to bring together young people from diverse backgrounds – rich, middle class, and poor, from different city neighborhoods as well as from the suburbs – for one year to concentrate on what they have in common and to work for the common good.”³⁶ To raise money for the project, they spent months seeking donations from private corporations and wealthy individuals. Their determination paid off.

The common ground is service. People have lost the sense that they can make a difference. Everything is so imposing: the homeless problem, drugs, the ghettos. What can I do as one person? This shows people that they *can* make a difference.

Once they had enough money to set up a program, the men established guidelines. Recruits were to be between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. Each was to have an “excellent attitude.” And each was expected to register to vote, obtain a library card, prepare a resume, complete a workshop on tax preparation, and if not already a high-school graduate, earn a GED by the end of the year. For nine months of community service in the Boston area, each recruit would earn \$100 a week and a \$5,000 scholarship. The first year, fifty young people signed up. By 1992, there were 220 recruits.

After observing the program, Anthony Lewis, a columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote:

The Mason School in Roxbury, a largely black area of Boston, has problems typical of an inner-city school: not enough money, an old building, children who speak different languages. But it has a determined principal in Mary Russo, respected teachers and 10 young men and women helping out as aides. They come from a service group known as City Year.

One of the City Year aides, Lucius Graham, is in the first-grade classroom. Three children – Andrea, Shamekia and Alvin – hang on to him, hugging his legs. He talks with them, then goes to the corner and helps three girls paint T-shirts with colors that glow in the dark.

Lucius, 18 years old, dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, last year. “The school had too many problems,” he said. “You were labeled as part of a gang. I went every day with a weapon to protect myself.”

How did he end up in City Year, helping in the Mason School?

“There was a City Year group building a little park in our neighborhood. The more I watched, the more I liked it.”

Now he is in high school equivalency classes that City Year offers its corps members. If he keeps up with the work, and most do, he will get a diploma.

Stephen Noltemy, 21, got his diploma that way, as a City Year corps member, and now teaches in the diploma program. He comes from South Boston, the white stronghold of working-class Boston. He was in trouble, in a halfway house, when he joined City Year.

“I didn’t care about too many things then,” Steve said. “I was angry, prejudiced, negative. I was less than zero.”

“City Year saved my life. I don’t want to sell anything to you, but there it is. I like to wake up in the morning – know what I mean?”

One day last week I watched City Year at work and talked with staff and corps members. Like Steve Noltemy, I feel I should discount it and say I am not trying to sell anything. But what I saw was impressive, even moving – and quite without what I had been half afraid I would find, the aroma of do-goodism.

Daina Sutton, 19, had a baby in 1991 and dropped out of school. The father was arrested in June 1992.

“I really didn’t want to do anything,” she said. “Except I wanted to do something for my son. City Year wasn’t a big deal at first. Now it’s everything.”

The team Daina was on started by making a garden in a run-down area. Then she helped 225 school kids train at the Boston Ballet. Now the team is at a school in East Boston, giving an environmental curriculum it helped design: “basics like what to do with litter.”

“One of the people on my team was a rich white girl,” Daina Sutton said. “I thought, I don’t want to be her welfare case. But we got really close.”

Diversity is a major theme of City Year. Teams are mixed in race, class, education. About a quarter of the 220 young people in the corps are dropouts, a third in college or on the way.

Black and white, rich and poor spoke of how daunting it had been at first to be with different people.

“It was not just skin color,” said Andre Berry, 20, a black corps member who is now on the staff as a team leader. “One girl on my team had a parent who was a brain surgeon! It was weird to me: Someone who’s got money – what’s she doing here? But she became one of my close friends.”

Lisa Schorr, 22, of Washington D.C., a graduate of Sidwell Friends School and Harvard, is a corps member this year. “I started out skeptical,” she said. “I thought the diversity would be forced and superficial. But it isn’t.”

Alan Khazei explained to Lewis why City Year works despite the initial skepticism. “The common ground is service. People have lost the sense that they can make a difference. Everything is so imposing: the homeless problem, drugs, the ghettos. What can I do as one person? This shows people that they *can* make a difference: bring life to a community under siege, build a playground, improve a school, rehab housing for the homeless.”³⁷

Michael Brown told another interviewer, “Essentially, City Year is a community of idealism.” A corps member said of his own experience:

City Year has given me a chance to do something positive with my life. Before this year, I was in a gang, hanging out on street corners. This year, I worked as a teacher’s aide at the Blackstone School in my own neighborhood, I renovated green spaces in Chelsea, and organized my own project to work with elderly people. I want to always serve the community because this year I have seen that I can be a positive role model – that I can change other people’s lives the way City Year has changed mine.

A young man from an affluent suburb near Boston agrees:

Being part of City Year has been an experience not to be matched anywhere. There are no neighborhoods, no workplaces, no social groups, no places anywhere, where such a diverse group of people work so closely together. I’ve learned a lot at City Year about Boston’s neighborhoods and its problems. But I have learned the most from my teammates.³⁸

CONNECTIONS

In Chapter 1, Reading 5, Maya Angelou spoke of the legacy her uncle Willie left. What is the legacy of City Year? How is it like Uncle Willie’s legacy? How is it unique?

Groups similar to City Year have existed in other periods of the nation’s history. Research the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s as well as the Peace Corps and Vista. How are they like City Year? What differences seem most striking? How do you account for those differences? (*Choosing to Participate* may be a useful place to begin your research.)

How do Khazei and Brown view the role of a citizen in a democracy? How are their views similar to those of people like Marian Wright Edelman? Jane Addams? Michael Haynes? What differences seem most striking?

To what extent does City Year break down the isolation and barriers that exist between individuals from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds? How might City Year serve as a model for other communities, including your own?

A number of corps members refer to the difficulties of forging friendships with people whose backgrounds are different from their own. What are some of those difficulties? Why is it important that those friendships or alliances be based on mutual respect and equality? How does the philosophy of City Year tackle the problem?

If you could design the ideal service project, what would it be like? What issues would it tackle? How would it address those issues? How would it build a sense of common purpose among participants?

Suppose you had an opportunity to ask Khazei and Brown a question. What would you ask? What other individuals or groups you encountered in the course of this curriculum would you like to interview? What questions would you ask of them?

READING 12

Individuals Can Make a Difference

When Ervin Staub wrote, “Heroes evolve; they aren’t born,” he was describing rescuers during the Holocaust. But his comments also apply to Americans like those Robert Coles, an author and psychiatrist who teaches at Harvard University, interviewed for his book, *The Call of Service*:

“I started community service in junior high,” said Doris, a woman in her middle thirties, describing the evolution of a life that brought her, a physician, to work in a clinic in a dangerous ghetto neighborhood. Her first encounter with people whose lives were different from her own was at a nursing home, on a visit with her junior high class, when she was twelve.

“I can still remember the first visit to the home: all the people just sitting there, some of them staring into space, and some staring at the television as if it was on, when it was actually off! I don’t remember anyone saying hello to us. I remember our teacher clearing her throat and her voice *loud* to get their attention. We’d done this skit, and we were going to perform for them and sing for them. We knew our parts cold, and the songs, too, but those people were scary to us at first. It was as if we’d gone to another planet! We got nervous, and we didn’t do too well. I remember this man sitting right up front – he was shaking and drooling. Today I know he had Parkinson’s disease. Back then, I believed the man was weird, dangerous, out of his mind: that was the direction of my thinking.

“The teacher took us aside when we got back to school and asked us what we felt about the trip there. We were all totally silent. She knew! Then she gave us a talk, and she apologized for not speaking

with us *before* we went there. To tell the truth, *that* impressed us more than anything – a teacher apologizing for a mistake. We didn't hear *that* all the time! We started telling her it was okay, and we'd like to go back. We were feeling sorry for her – she was upset – instead of feeling sorry for ourselves. That was a big first step in getting out of ourselves and into someone else's shoes, first the teacher's, then the old folks'."

Doris continued with an account of the work she did in high school, bringing food to shelters for the homeless, and in college, tutoring children and working on a psychological crisis hot line. In her senior year she decided that she wanted to be a physician. She took premed courses for two years after she graduated, while working intensively at the crisis hot line and a follow-up counseling center. She also volunteered at a shelter for battered women, where she encountered a most impressive husband-and-wife team of doctors who combined a career in academic medicine with a major commitment of time to a free clinic for the poor.

"I began to see what was possible by watching how others [those two doctors especially] spent their time," she explained, though she did more than merely observe. "From the beginning [of medical school] I was impatient with the usual routine of grinding away in the lab and with the books. I had learned to work with people – that's why I'd decided to go to medical school – but during the first two years there's very little of that kind of contact. So, I kept doing the [volunteer] work I'd been doing in college. When I did start seeing patients, I still wanted to be touch with the kind of people we otherwise wouldn't see. Remember, in a teaching hospital you get to see the more exotic patients, or those brought in by the staff. What about the people on the streets or in shelters? They didn't come to our hospital. I guess it was in my blood by then – to reach out. I'd been doing it so long, I had a 'reach out' reflex!"

So even during the extremely demanding and exhausting years of her residency in internal medicine Doris found a few hours each week to work with those two doctors, whom she described as her inspiration, her mentors, and her guides. She encouraged other medical students to find ways of working with the hurt and ailing people who live at the edge of society. Under her direction those students, and some college students headed for medicine, connected themselves to shelters and soup kitchens and emergency wards and neighborhood clinics to assist people whose lives had fallen apart.

When her residency was over and she was married to a high school teacher with similar concerns, she created her own version of a public service medical career. She worked in a women's shelter and in the ghetto clinic. Even though the neighborhood was dangerous, her white skin and white jacket never seemed to put her in harm's way: "I stop and talk with the kids. Some of them, boys under ten, are [drug] runners, I know. Others (teenagers) belong to gangs and are hustling

drugs – and girls. I hear it all from my patients inside the clinic and sometimes outside. Look, these may be my famous last words, but those guys know my car, and they know me and what I’m doing there, and they leave me alone. They even come up to me and ask me if there’s anything I need! You know what I said to one guy, a real powerhouse character, who drives a Mercedes-Benz and doesn’t have any job so far as anyone knows? I said, ‘I need for more and more of the children around here to grow up and go to school and graduate and go to college and make something of their lives.’ You know what he said? ‘What’s it to you, dot? Why are you so worried about the kids here?’ I looked right at him, and I said, ‘We’re all Americans. This is my country, and it’s yours, and theirs, and we’re in it together, all of us.’

“He kept looking at me, and I got nervous. I figured I hadn’t, to my way of thinking, said anything bad or wrong, but there was plenty of tension coming across, and maybe from his viewpoint I was being an outsider delivering a sermon I hadn’t the right to deliver. But I also thought to myself, This is my life that I spend here, and dammit, it’s *my* neighborhood, too, in a certain way, so I’d better keep talking with him, and anyone else, or I’m through here! Once fear makes me bite my tongue and not say what obviously needs to be said, then I might as well pack up my stethoscope and hammer and go someplace else.”

[The kids there are] only a little older than my daughter. They’re all part of the same generation. They’ll all soon be Americans living in the twenty-first century. I owe it to my daughter and my country – and to myself – to stay there.

In fact, that confrontation cleared the air, and Doris began to have rap sessions with some of the gang members who were keeping residents of the streets near the clinic in constant terror. They offered her “tons of money” for whatever equipment she wanted to buy, but she said no. They asked her once what *she* thought they should do with the money they were making. She said they should stop making it that way and try other ways of making a living. They asked her whether she minded not making more money when surely she could do so. She told them she wanted to have enough money to live a comfortable life and satisfy some of her hobbies and interests – but she had to sleep at night and have some respect for herself during the day and she did have certain values that meant a lot to her.

Such talks didn’t by any means rid the neighborhood of violence, drugs, or prostitution, nor did they lower the high crime rate, and soaring school dropout rate. But two members of a gang and their girlfriends did come to see her one afternoon and asked for her help lest they become addicts, lest they die. She was able to arrange for them to live elsewhere in the city, enroll in an educational program, and find work.

That moment brought both fulfillment and gloom, and prompted her to look inward at the purposes she cherished and tried to uphold from day to day: “When they came to see me I wasn’t as happy as you might think. I knew they were already in danger; they were being watched because they’d started objecting to certain deals the guys did, and to the use of little kids as runners. It was a matter of time, they knew, before they had their heads blown off. It was also a matter of

time before I got into trouble – that’s what crossed my mind as I sat there hearing those terrible, terrible stories.

“I talked with my husband. I talked with my mother – she was putting in a lot of time with my little daughter while I worried about these other children, whose mothers somehow hadn’t been able to bring them up to say no to self-destruction. I told her, ‘Mom, there are days when I want out – out. I want to walk away from that whole ghetto world, from my place in it, from that clinic, and never come back, never. I want to stay in our nice home and be with my husband and daughter, and with you, and maybe have a small private practice, or work in a suburban hospital and teach medical students. I get tired of the big odds against the people there – and that means the big odds against me and the work I do amounting to anything. But then I’ll think of the kids I get to know, and the progress some of them are making. They come and see me for their cold and stomachaches, and they tell me they’re doing better in school, and they try to remember what I told them – and I sure remember what they tell me. I think to myself, They’re only a little older than my daughter. They’re all part of the same generation. They’ll all soon be Americans living in the twenty-first century. I owe it to my daughter and my country – and to myself – to stay there. If I wasn’t there, I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night; and thank God, my husband is one hundred percent for me to be doing this work; and Mother; you and Dad *both* got me into this, you really did, and I thank you.’”

She was embarrassed by the emotional and sentimental tone of her remarks, which she characterized as an “outburst” – a consequence of high anxiety (and no small amount of fear) she had been experiencing.³⁹

CONNECTIONS

How does Doris illustrate Staub’s comment that heroes are not born but evolve? Who were her role models? What values underlay her commitment to others?

Create an identity chart for Doris. How is she like rescuers such as Marion Pritchard (Chapter 8, Reading 9)? Activists like Marion Wright Edelman (Reading 1)? In what ways is she unique?

Doris wonders whether her efforts will make a difference. How would you answer her question? What is her legacy to her daughter? To the children she sees everyday? To the community in which she lives? To the nation? A young lawyer who spent her childhood in Harlem and then attended a private school, Harvard College, and Harvard Law School, offers one answer to Doris’ question. She told Coles about the difference one person made in her life.

He was a frail-looking Jewish kid with thick glasses, and at first I didn't know what we'd even talk about. But I'll tell you, he saved me, that's the word, *saved*. He was kind and thoughtful, and he loved reading and he taught me to love reading. He was the one who said to me, You can get out of all this, you can, and you don't need a lot of money to do it, the way the drug dealers and pimps con people into believing. All you need is to reach for a good book: it's your passage out. Boy, do I remember that phrase, "your passage out." I just wonder how many others will take the passage; I wonder how to reach them and persuade them. At the time, I wasn't all that interested in leaving, making the passage, but he sure turned me on. Of course, you hear those voices calling you every bad name – traitor! – for making the passage.⁴⁰

Today that young lawyer does legal services work and tutors children in a ghetto neighborhood. What does her life suggest about the legacy of that "frail-looking Jewish kid"? How is his legacy similar to the one left by Maya Angelou's uncle Willie?

READING 13

The World's Conscience

Doris focuses on problems close to home. Elie Wiesel is a Holocaust survivor who has long focused on problems wherever they occur in the world. In 1986, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In presenting the award, Egil Aarvik, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said of Wiesel:

His mission is not to gain the world's sympathy for the victims or the survivors. His aim is to awaken our conscience. Our indifference to evil makes us partners in the crime. That is the reason for his attack on indifference and his insistence on measures aimed at preventing a new holocaust. We know that the unimaginable has happened. What are we doing now to prevent its happening again?

Through his books Elie Weisel has given us not only an eyewitness account of what happened, but also an analysis of the evil powers which lay behind the events. His main concern is the question of what measures we can take to prevent a recurrence of these events.⁴¹

In the early 1990s, Wiesel expressed that concern by traveling to war-torn countries to call attention to violations of basic human rights. Shortly after returning from one such trip, he was asked why students should care about events in distant places. In response, he wrote:

Dear Students,

It is because of you I went to Sarajevo. Have you seen pictures of emaciated children in Somalia? And of wandering orphans in Sarajevo? Look at them. If they don't move you to rage or compassion, look at them again.

I know: You will say, "What can we do about them? If great powers and the United Nations are helpless, what impact could our response have on their fate?"

Your question is valid but its implicit conclusion is not. From past experience we have learned that whenever people speak up on behalf of their more unfortunate fellow human beings, their protest does have an effect... But even if our efforts left the tormentors indifferent, they would still be fruitful, for they bring comfort and consolation to their victims.

In other words: It may very well be that you are powerless to change the course of history on a decision-making level but it is incumbent upon you to improve the psychological condition of those who suffer.

Find a way, any way, to give voice to your outrage at the young racists in Germany, to your abhorrence of bigotry on our own streets, to your solidarity with the prisoners in former Yugoslavia and to your determination to combat hunger in Somalia.

Do not tell me you are voiceless... There are adolescents in Somalia who will die if help does not arrive soon. They are younger than you.

It is because of young students like you – and for you – that I went to Sarajevo.⁴²

From past experience we have learned that whenever people speak up on behalf of their more unfortunate fellow human beings, their protest does have an effect... But even if our efforts left the tormentors indifferent, they would still be fruitful, for they bring comfort and consolation to their victims.

CONNECTIONS

How does Wiesel define his role in the world? What are the boundaries of his community? Whom does he regard as his neighbors? How might Wiesel respond to those who argue that one person cannot make much difference in the world? How would you respond? Why?

After reading Elie Wiesel's books, Ali Carter told the author:

I don't know what it is about hate and violence that people like so much. Whenever there is a fight at my school hundreds of kids run to see someone get beat up. I've seen kids climb in trees to get a better view. No one tries to break it up until a teacher or security guard comes around. Who knows what makes people like violence. Maybe it's television, maybe it's the violence in the streets, maybe it's human nature.

Professor Wiesel, in light of the violence we see around us, do you think that something like the Holocaust could happen in today's society?⁴³

How do you think Wiesel would answer her question? How would you answer it? Give reasons in support of your answers.

READING 14

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet know how ways leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.⁴⁴

-Robert Frost

NOTES

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⁴⁴ From *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Latham, Copyright 1916, 1969 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Copyright 1944 by Robert Frost. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

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—Bill Moyers in an interview with Margot Stern Strom, Executive Director, FHAO



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