

**Dispute Resolution and Deliberation and Racial Violence:  
A Profile of Karen Umemoto**

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This work was more of a result of my life experience than any study. I grew up at the intersection of the Harbor freeway and the San Diego freeway, the two busiest freeways in Los Angeles county. At the time I was growing up, Watts was black, and Torrance was white, and I was right in the middle, in Gardena. I call it a buffer zone community at the intersection of the freeways, because freeways are like the railroad tracks that racially divided one group of people from another.

It was along the freeway intersections that you found the most diversity of people, because that's where black and white communities—at the time I was growing up—met, and Latinos and Asians could be found as the buffers between black and white communities. So every time you'd go under one of the freeway underpasses, you'd be in a different world.

So I grew up code switching and seeing that people lead such different lives: people listen to such different music, the smells are different, the slang is different, the style of dress and the way that people soup up their cars—it's so different. My own code switching within Gardena meant that I could just be a regular, all-American, ten year old Girl Scout kid and YMCA camp counselor, but the minute I walked onto the grounds of my grandmother's church, my voice would go up an octave and my head lowered and it was, "Ah, yoroshiku," ("nice to see you after all this time") and all that.

"Code switching" is a short hand for using a different dictionary to make sense of what people are saying, or for using a different lens to see what you're seeing. So you're seeing that different actions, different words, have different meanings to different people. So for example,

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when an African-American person says the ‘N-word,’ it’s a very different thing than if I or a non-African American uses the word, right? That’s a very blatant or simple example, but that’s true for a lot of gestures and a lot of words that people may use, or even the kinds of celebrations that people see.

It’s knowing that there’s a different mind-set, that there’s a different way that people interpret the world and events and words that you need to be conscious of. I grew up doing that all the time—constantly code switching. So sometimes when someone says something, I’ll think, “Oh no, they shouldn’t have said that,” because I know that it’s not going to be received in the way that person meant.

So, anyway, I was involved in a lot of movement politics—at that time a lot of it was third world coalition politics—both as a student and as a community activist in Little Tokyo, which was undergoing redevelopment and gentrification at the time, through the struggle against evictions in little Tokyo, along with all of the other things going on in the movement at the time—the campus divestiture campaigns, and because the Soweto uprising took place at the same time, there was an anti-apartheid movement and the farm workers were on strike in California. I was a freshman at UCLA at the time. When you’re involved in one movement organization, you get asked to support all these others, so then you get exposed to all these other kind of progressive activities in the country.

I grew up at the time in Gardena where, in the 70s, people did get along better than they do now. There was a lot more integration in student government and classes and social activities. So the Girl Scout troop was mixed—everything was very integrated. I grew up in a high school where it was 25% black, 25% Latino, 25% white, 25% Asian, and while there was still some voluntary segregation, it was probably one of the most socially integrated periods and places of that time. So I really saw the best of race relations growing up in Gardena— and also during college in third world coalition politics and progressive coalition politics where you’re working with everybody.

Then I moved up to the Bay Area and finished off at San Francisco State and was involved in the statewide Asian-Pacific student union. I moved in 1978 or 79. I was in a leadership position in the statewide Asian-Pacific student union. We worked with MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan) and the African/Black student union. MECHA was

a Chicano student organization, with a network statewide. There was a statewide MECHA, and then there were individual campus MECHA's.

During the Jesse Jackson campaign I was co-chair of the LA Rainbow Coalition in the '88 campaign, as a student. It was safer to have students, because it was so politically factionalized—so I was kind of thrust into this because we weren't seen as part of any left faction. So, I was thrust into this high position as co-chair of the LA Rainbow Coalition at a fairly young age.

But through that, I continued to work with a lot of different organizations across the rainbow, so I had a very positive experience both growing up and in doing progressive movement politics. So when there were increased tensions growing in Los Angeles, beginning with some of the publicized tensions between Blacks and Koreans in South Central to some of the tensions between new immigrants and long timers in various neighborhoods, I became concerned more about the future direction that race relations were taking, at least as I had experienced it.

I got my masters in 88' in Asian-American studies at UCLA. I did my Master's thesis on the San Francisco State strike and the role of Asian students in the strike. Through that, I also studied the Black Panther movement and all of the related kinds of activities that were going on at the time. An article based on the thesis was published soon thereafter in the Amerasia Journal.

After I graduated, and even before I graduated, I was working full time at the UCLA Asian-American study center under Prof. Don Nakanishi. We were involved in a three-year battle for his tenure. Anyway, I was working there as the coordinator of student and community projects, bridging the town-gown gap, setting up internships and research roundtables to pair researcher interests with community needs, and things like that.

I really thought I needed to get more education to do the kind of work and research and policy oriented activities that I wanted to do. I felt that I had reached my maximum capacity in terms of what I could offer. I wanted to get more involved in the development of policies that had to do with issues I saw as pressing from the standpoint of local communities. One was improving race relations, and the other was really helping, or working with those historically disenfranchised: policies that would really help empower minorities and historically disenfranchised communities in terms of economic development and all that. Anyway, my

advisor suggested that I go to MIT or UCLA. So I applied and got into both and decided to go to MIT just because I had been at UCLA and wanted to broaden my life experience.

In 1992 I was in my dorm room at MIT watching TV when the news came on about the riots, the civil unrest and the Rodney King decision. I turned on the TV, and I saw LA in flames.

I grew up—and my family still lived—in Gardena, and the flames were pretty close. So I felt a real personal sadness about the whole thing, and concern for my friends and family, as well as this bigger concern that told me, “Oh no, this is really bad in terms of the racial fallout that this represented and that would also result from what happened. In a city that’s got so many problems already, this was the last thing it needed.

But I also felt that way, when I saw the videotape of the beating of Rodney King. How could this still go on?

Rodney King was the motorist who was pulled over by Los Angeles Police Department cops in a patrol car—who then called in reinforcements and, unbeknownst to them, were videotaped beating Rodney King to the point of not being able to even open his eyes. He was beaten pretty badly.

They had pulled him out of his car and beaten him with batons, and they circled around this man who was on the ground, and one by one they would poke their batons at him and hit him and kick him—and it was obvious to most viewers, in my mind, that this was “use of excessive force.”

Yet the defense lawyers were able to convince the jury that it was not “use of excessive force,” and the jury acquitted the officers in a trial. It was upon the announcement of the acquittal that LA started to burn. There were—I don’t know how many—over a hundred fires set across the city.

There were other atrocities that were also committed in the course of the civil unrest. On one hand, it was a bread riot. I mean there were a lot of stores that just got everything stolen out of them and burned.

There was a motorist, a white truck driver named Reginald Denny, who was pulled out of his truck and beaten by African-American young men, and that was also caught on videotape—as well as a story about several other African-Americans who saved Reginald Denny and picked him up and took him to the hospital.

That was in April of 1992, and I came home two months later. I had to stay in Boston until the end of the semester, and I immediately came back to LA and interned with the LA City Human Relations Commission for the summer.

So several months after the civil unrest, I felt like this was where I needed to be. This is where my research needs to be relevant, and interning at the Human Relations Commission, I thought, was important to give me a sense of what could be done. What could cities do in the face of all of this?

So I ended up going to a lot of community meetings and events and talking to a lot of people and just helping to be a kind of eyes and ears for the Commission as they tried to figure out what to do. That summer I learned how difficult it is to facilitate a deeper understanding among communities that are both geographically and mentally so far apart. I learned how we really lack an infrastructure that would help facilitate communication in these kinds of crises—whether it's big, like the civil unrest, or small, like the other publicized conflicts between Korean storeowners and African-American residents. We really didn't have an infrastructure.

I just wrote an article called "Towards the Human Relations Infrastructure" because I really feel that our cities are not equipped programmatically, policy-wise, and in the way we view cities' responsibilities—or the responsibilities of city and state government, or government in general for that matter.

I worked using the Community Coalition as a model. I have their full name, but we'll just call them the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment—I think they may have changed their name since then. I think they were a community coalition mainly comprised of Black and Latino residents but also with the involvement of some Koreans and other Asian Americans and whites working in South Central to lower the number of liquor stores and improve the quality of life. There was a group called the Multi-Cultural Collaborative that grew out of that period of time also. I found those types of models hopeful—especially the grassroots work that really engaged people in positive, forward-looking activities where people were able to build an identity inclusive of racial difference, an identity built upon making a change in a place that everybody will benefit from—so that people can have multiple identities. And in light of the beating of Rodney King and the civil unrest that followed the verdict, race was far and away the most salient identity boundary amongst most people, especially those directly in those affected areas.

So what the Community Coalition was doing really was reinforcing or bringing out the salience of other identities—so that an identity of you and I working together to get these liquor stores out that are really hurting our community would matter—whether it was as a member of the Community Coalition, or as a member of a movement, or some identification with this group of people who are trying to do something positive—so that was able to, not downplay the salience of race, but be inclusive of that identity.

The Coalition added to racial identities that were salient at the time, so there was something in that process of identity building that was inclusive. We weren't just African Americans, or Latinos, or Koreans. And knowing that there were going to be racial divides and differences and all of that, we could work through them, and we could build upon the unique contributions that people might bring with them because of differences in experience.

I lived that way. I have a Japanese-American identity, sure, but I was also a Mohican at Gardena High, and I was also a Girl Scout and a member of the Y, and so that was one of many identities that were often racially inclusive. At the same time I was involved in a lot of Japanese-American community issues too. So they were never in contradiction.

I decided, at that point, to do my dissertation on race relations in LA somehow. I returned to LA in '93 after I had done two years of my coursework, exams, and all that, and I started looking at different cases. I was going to do a comparative case study of different forms and arenas of racial conflict.

Down the street from where I lived was the housing project where there had been big fire bombings of African-American residents' homes. So I started looking into that and a number of other issues.

Anyway, this one that was close to my house became: i) most convenient, ii) most fascinating, and iii) most dangerous, so I knew that I couldn't do more than one. If I was going to choose that, I would need to focus full time on it.

It turned out that this involved a gang war between a predominantly Latino gang and a predominantly African-American gang. It started out as a fight over the drug market, and then it just spread to Venice, and then it led to this whole cycle of racial polarization. So I did a participant observation study starting from the beginning stages of the gang war.

I did two years of fieldwork in Culver City and Venice. My husband and I lived in Culver City at the time. I didn't work directly with the gangs, but I did my research and work with

several community organizations in those communities. I began my research in the Mar Vista Gardens housing projects, in Culver City, less than a mile from my house.

The two gangs there were the Shoreline Crips and the Culver City Boys. Then the Shoreline Crips were run out of the projects after the fire bombings and gun battles and everything. It was really bloody. So they fled to the protection of their cousin gang in Venice, just several miles down.

But there was a Latino gang there in Venice that was different, the Venice 13, or the V-13's. So then the V-13s and the Venice Shoreline Crips got into it too, and that's where it led to a much bigger, wider conflict.

Newspaper headlines would read 'Bloody Venice Gang War Turns to Race War.' There was just a lot of fear, racial distancing and polarization. No one was on the street. No one could walk the neighborhood. People had doors and refrigerators on their front porch so that bullets wouldn't go in the front of their homes. People bedded their kids in the bathtub at night, for fear of flying bullets.

There's a neighborhood in Venice called Oakwood where most of the violence was centered around. Anyway, I did two years of fieldwork studying that whole phenomenon, and I interviewed gang members, probation officers, police officers, ministers, community organizers—the whole gamut of people to see what was going on.

True to life in my neighborhood where I grew up, no two people had the same story of what happened, because people interpreted it in very, very different ways. So my job became finding out how people made meaning of different actions and events and how those actions, along with the interpretations of them helped to explain racial distancing and polarization over time.

Because Venice is in LA city, I was able to share with the guy that I had worked with at the LA City Human Relations Commission what I thought were some insights that I was getting—so that some of the community efforts to get a truce—and support a truce— could be supported by the city. So because I had interned there before I had begun my dissertation, I still had that connection with Ron Wakabayashi.

Ron had since then moved to the LA County Human Relations Commission, where he had a bigger staff, and one of his staff members was also doing some work in Venice around this problem. He had all these federal agencies from the FBI to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms

involved. You had guys from the FBI who had just been brought back home from Russia and didn't know North from South running around with FBI t-shirts in the middle of the day doing odd things in the eyes of people who would see them.

So anyway, there was just a lot of attention being paid to Venice. In addition, Venice is the second-most frequented tourist attraction in LA County—it relies in part on tourism. So there was probably extra attention paid to this battle. Over a ten-month period, seventeen people were killed and over fifty injured, mainly in about a one-mile radius centered around Oakwood.

So when I was asked to do this workshop in Azusa, it was based on work I did in for my dissertation. Because of my training at MIT, I also did GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping of all of the incidents that took place in Oakwood during the gang war.

I shared this map with different people, and Ron Wakabayashi said, “Hey, those are neat maps. I have hate crime data for the entire LA County. I wonder what it would look like to map those?”

I was, at the same time, trying to find out, “Where else in the county are these types of phenomena taking place?” So I got the data from Ron, and I mapped over a thousand hate crimes in LA County.

I mapped over 1300 race-bias hate crimes in particular, because he also had data on sexual orientation crimes. I mapped these by race of victim, by race of perpetrator, by types of incidents—so that this map was a map of LA County with the dots and the locations of the hate crimes. This is color coded by race of victim. So we found out which neighborhoods were experiencing more intense racial conflicts, including gang-related conflicts.

One such city like that was Azusa, which is on the eastern edge of the county. Here, there was a concentration of African-American victims who had been attacked in racially motivated crimes by those identified by police as Latino.

I showed the maps to people in the County Human Relations Commission, the City, and to the Police Department, and to others. They found it useful in various ways, especially the Human Relations Commission, who could use this information to figure out, “Where are the hot spots?” and, “How can we look at a particular area and use this data to help figure out what's going on here and where we're going to allocate our resources?” So I had done this mapping, and I was trying to figure out other applications of mapping technology for human relations work.



After he left the county, Rob Wakabayashi was recruited to work at the US Department of Justice, and he was appointed as the Western Region director of the DOJ's Community Relations Service. He knew about some of the things that I had been doing. So he had me do a training for the entire Washington, DC staff of the Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice. They have regular trainings and meetings where they bring all their people from all across the country to Washington, DC. I did a presentation on the use of GIS for identifying hate crime hot spots.

After that, I talked to him about the role of planning, because I really believe that planning can play an important role in trying to address these problems—because planning can work with people in communities to try to figure out how they want to solve the problems they're facing.

I really don't believe, with this type of problem, that any person or agency could solve the problem from the outside. You really need neighborhoods and cities organizing together with the help of external resources to figure out how they want to address the problem of racial violence.

Anyway, the City of Azusa was one of the cities that the LA County Human Relations Commission was working with, as well as Ron, because, as anyone could see from the maps, there was a big cluster of African-American victimization by, in this case, Latino gang members. There were two murders. Usually in places like this where you see a cluster, a lot of the initial incidents are name-calling and people just harassing each other, and then you have beating people up, and then you have arson, and it usually climbs the ladder of severity.

So, there were a couple of murders, and at that point the city passed a resolution to set up a task force to come up with a plan as to how the city should deal with this. So they appointed an eighteen-member hate-crime task force, and they had the charter to come up with recommendations, and for seven months they had various false starts and just internal problems within the committee. Because these were political appointments by the council to the hate-crimes task force, there were a lot of issues that people raised about who was on it, what right did they have to be on it, who did they represent, was it representative, and all that.

Ron and people at the LA County Human Relations Commission were afraid that this task force was ready to fall apart after seven months. So they asked me if I could do something—if I had any suggestions or if I could help. I suggested that a strategic planning retreat might help

get it back on track and help them produce a set of recommendations—otherwise nothing would happen.

At this point I was teaching in Hawaii, so I was not able to have any meetings prior to the event itself with principals in the task force. What I did then was to work closely with Marshal Wong with the LA County Human Relations Commission and Ron Wakabayashi of the Department of Justice. They played the role that I would have played myself in consulting with people on the front end, doing the consultation with people, clarifying expectations, working out an agenda, and making sure everybody was fine with it, and making sure people would come—all of those kinds of things.

So I was in consultation with Marshall and Ron—by phone mainly and email—and we worked out two things: an agenda for the meeting, which, of course, I didn't stick to, strictly, and a pre-retreat questionnaire. I set what I thought would be the goals of the retreat. There was a process-related goal, which was to build a stronger foundation for the human relations infrastructure. The task force had changed their name to "Human Relations Commission." So, one goal was to build a stronger foundation for the Human Relations Commission based on mutual respect, shared understanding, and common direction.

There were three stated goals. One was process-related, and two were task-related. The task-related goals were to generate innovative solutions to the problem of radicalized violence, and to develop a framework and outline for the strategic planning report and present it to the city council.

I only knew the participants based on this pre-retreat questionnaire that I sent to them, but it was very, very helpful. I asked them in advance, "In your opinion, how widespread is the problem with racial prejudice and animosity among the following: Among the Azusa 13 members in the gang? Among the adults? Among the youth? Etc.' Then I asked, 'What did they think were the major causes of animosity and what's their understanding of the history of race relations in Azusa?' Then, lastly, I asked them to list resources that might help address the problem by suggesting effective solutions that they might have. I collected this from all the members of the task force, and they were all supposed to be at the meeting.

I tallied and summarized the results of the questionnaire [and that] gave me a good sense of where the similarities and differences might lie between members of the task force. So I had some feeling of some connection prior to the event.

I flew in and checked into a hotel in Azusa. You know how to psych yourself up for an event. You've done all the preparation you possibly can. You have all your rollout paper all marked up. You have all your big sheets of paper printed out with the agenda. We had the '10 Commandments to Consensual Dialogue'—kind of ground rules, and all of those props. So that was the evening before, drawing the last lines on the graphs and making sure I had enough post-it notes and all that. But really there was more, meditating and trying to center myself. Anything can happen in these kinds of situations. After I read the results from the surveys, I realized that there were some deep differences—in terms of whether or not some people even thought there were racial tensions and what the sources of those were. This was a microcosm of the nation in terms of the differences in ideology, in attitude, in racial attitudes, and in backgrounds.

Half of Azusa is flat and half of it's on the mountain. You have million dollar homes on the mountain and you have barrios, poor, very low income, highly dense neighborhoods and apartments down below—in certain neighborhoods and apartments down below—in certain neighborhoods below, not all of them. You have some people who just don't think race is a problem, that there isn't racism—even in the face of the murders and everything else—even on the task force. Robert Blauner wrote a book, Talking Past Each Other: Black and White Languages of Race, arguing, anyway, that people have such different lived experiences and perceptions of the problem—and whether or not there even is a problem or not—that it's hard to get people into the same room face to face, confronting each other's beliefs and attitudes.

In a situation where there's so much pain because people have experienced the racism or the deaths of friends or family, it is a highly emotionally charged environment. People are so sensitive to the touch. And you could have the same type of polarized debates. So that some are saying, "The problem is that we have single mothers that don't watch over their kids, and that's why we have this problem," and, on the other hand, people will say, "It's poverty that's causing this, not single parent families."

I was anticipating all of this from within the commission itself--and all that was likely to come together, though divergent views, experiences, attitudes, and points of view--converging in one room around an issue that was so highly sensitive.

Well, I learned from Puanani Burgess how to do "Guts on the Table," which is an exercise that helps bring people together face to face in a somewhat disarmed, or in a disarming,

way. It allows people to sit and listen to one another without making assumptions about why they're saying what they're saying and jumping to conclusions about what they might mean.

So I started the retreat just giving a little bit of background about how I got asked to do this, and I commended their efforts. I really started off by saying, "I commend you for what you're doing. These problems exist in other places, but I think this is really the first place that a city is trying in some official capacity and, in some systematic way, to deal with this very serious problem that we as a whole society face. I think that what comes out of this committee can potentially serve for a model for other cities. So what you're doing is so important and very difficult."

I tried to lay out what I thought were some of the goals and to see if there was consensus around the goals for the two days and how we might go through a process together. Well, we had an evening and a day.

I thought there were two things that we needed to do on the first night, so that on the second day we could focus more on the plan. So I devoted part of the first night to this exercise that I learned from Puanani Burgess called, "Guts on the Table."

I laid out some ground rules – first that everything said in this exercise is to be kept in this room and that the identities are confidential.

Second, that once you wanted to talk to somebody about what they said during the exercise—after the exercise is over—you have to ask them permission first before raising it, because maybe that was the only place they wanted to talk about it.

Third, that if anyone wants to go to the bathroom, or leave or do something else, that we would stop the entire exercise and wait until she or he returns because everyone's story is important.

Fourth, silence is just as meaningful as words. There are times you don't want to say anything, or if you don't want to say anything at all, that's respected.

Fifth, whoever convenes or initiates 'Guts on the Table' has to go first. There's a sixth one that I can't remember off hand.

So then I gave them four questions. One was, "What is the story of your name? Second, what community are you from? Third, why are you here? Fourth, what is your gift?" —'gift' being different from skill or talent, but something you can give.

So I went first. I told the story of my name, my community, why I was there, and what I thought my gift was. It's very emotional and I felt I really needed to center myself so that I could start.

I knew that if that exercise didn't go well the rest of the retreat wouldn't go well. In fact, I visited Puanani Burgess the week before I left for LA just because I felt I needed to go through 'Guts on the Table' with her once because I hadn't done it in a long time.

You really have to let yourself be vulnerable, and we don't do that on a daily basis as faculty. So I had to get myself in a somewhat different mindset and be able to open up in front of a group in that way. So in telling the story or taking my turn, it was very emotional. I did choke up at times.

Now this could last days, just doing 'Guts on the Table'— so I did something that Puanani does, which I think is very effective—you have an amount of time that you want to spend on it, and you divide that time by the number of people there. You give everybody so many minutes based on that calculation, and then the person next to you holds a watch. When you've reached your time they hand you the watch without saying anything, and you are now holding someone else's time symbolically. So people really end, because they don't want to use up the next person's time. I think we only had three or four minutes because we had a group of about 24 people, maybe.

Everybody would speak to all four questions in about four minutes. But it's amazing what you can do in four minutes. I've done it with six people over two hours, and so this was very different.

So, backtracking a bit, when I got into the room, the room was set up just like a classroom, it was a big room, and we were only using a third of it. The chairs were lined up around round tables, almost like a banquet. I wanted a horseshoe, or a circle rather, almost a circle.

They also had chairs behind the tables for observers, and they were making a difference between Task Force members or Human Relations Commission members and observers. Other people were invited to come to observe, but they hadn't been invited to participate.

But my feeling was we need everybody's participation. If you're here that means you're concerned and you could contribute. So I had them change everything right on the spot, right before we started. We pushed all the tables back, made one big circle and invited everybody into

the circle. Some people were viewed by some of the commission members as troublemakers, and that may have been why the rows of chairs had been separated, but I rearranged them all together.

As the exercise progressed I developed my own connection with each individual there. I saw other people dropping their guards and developing connections with one another, even though there was a lot of distrust between certain members of the commission because they [had been] appointed by politicians.

Each council member, I think, appointed a couple of people. So all the divisions between council members was passed on to these commission members—not to all of them, but to many of them. There were just some council members who were more supportive of this task force than others and people suspect that someone who didn't really care just appointed someone who also really didn't care about this problem. There are all these kinds of presumptions being made, so including everyone helped to temper the assumptions that people had.

There was an African-American young man who was working for a church or some kind of agency and doing a lot of youth outreach, and some people had suspected that he was part of the problem, that he was fanning the animosities. He told a very moving story that showed that he was concerned in a very deep way about this issue and had something to offer in terms of solutions.

Another person, who people thought was a bigot, who didn't care, shared his history which was apparently very different from what people thought that person's history was. And one high public official talked about how she was a radical in the sixties and why she's come to feel this is important. A lot of people distrusted the mayor's intentions. In another instance, a Latino woman said, "I'm here because I don't believe in color and my boyfriend is black and we go around everywhere in the city scared that something is going to happen to him or something is going to happen to me..."

And then someone would say something like, "When I was in law school I clerked for a judge and this judge helped me become who I am, and this judge was a black woman judge."

So people shared things about their history that helped them connect across the color lines. This one guy said, "I have to admit, I'm a bigot. I don't like black people."

He's on the task force. I don't know if he said this in that exercise, or if it was later in the retreat that he admitted that. I don't quite remember if he told that in 'Guts on the Table' or if he told that story later on.

People felt really good about it, so that I felt good about it.

People were talking to each other. There was so much buzz after the exercise ended that people were shaking each other's hand and walking across the room to approach each other and thanking them for sharing their stories. People were feeling like they were included in this process. People who were formerly asked to sit in the chairs in the back were feeling that they were part of the process now, and others were feeling like, "Yeah, we should include these people in this process." So I was trusting that my decision to include them was the right decision.

This was halfway through the first evening. By reading the surveys I also knew that not everyone was convinced that there was really a problem.

I had spent the earlier part of the day getting a tour by the police captain of the whole city and the places where different incidents took place. I asked her to describe to me what incidents took place in what places, so that I could, through her, live through some of the experiences that people lived through. I also did an interview with an African-American family that she referred me to, so that they could tell me their stories, because two African-Americans had received death threats and couldn't participate in the retreat because of fear for their lives. So I felt like that voice wasn't going to be represented in the retreat—the African-American victims' voice.

The task force was majority Latino and some white—or maybe not majority, but maybe half Latino, half white. The African-American commissioners couldn't be there. There were other African-Americans that ended up coming who were not commissioners, but had heard about it and came. But not knowing that anyone of African-American background was going to be there, I just felt, walking into it that I needed to interview people to get their voice and to be able to share that voice at the meeting if the situation called for it.

So I did those two things beforehand. What I structured after 'Guts on the Table' was a presentation by a panel that I had asked Ron and Marshall to arrange. We talked about who we would invite on the panel—for example Captain Karen Pilack, who was the police captain of Azusa, along with a probation officer. I thought a probation officer would be really important because probation officers have access to the minds of youth that other law enforcement people don't have, and they're in touch with the people that are getting arrested for this thing, and also

we had a youth worker. So they presented on the panel. Karen Pilack does her own GIS mapping, so we had some of the Azusa maps. She presented the maps; she described the incidents and what happened, and what they've tried to do. The probation officer did interviews with the kids in preparation for his presentation to the panel and gave verbatim quotes of what they said about what they think the problem is and why this is going on. He even quoted using the 'N' word—but he didn't say 'N-word.' He said the whole word, and that created some problems later on which I can talk about. The youth worker talked about the positive side of youth and what the youth are trying to do in positive ways, because there are some people on commission that have very negative views—especially some of the people who live up high on the hill have this view about inner city “barrio” youth, an overly negative view of these kids being thugs, just violent, disrespectful kids.

The 'Guts on the Table' accomplished what I'd hoped—that they would put their defenses down, they would be more open to each other, they would give each other a little bit more benefit of the doubt, and they would see the positive, they would see the good in each other, and they would see where their aspirations were shared. I'd hoped they would see beauty in each other in whatever way that they might define beauty—that they would be able to appreciate each other's gift, because they had heard each other's stories and appreciated, I guess—and Pua said it best—the humanity of every individual and the gift that they bring to this process and problem. So it developed into appreciation for one another that didn't exist before and a greater willingness to see if people could work with each other.

The panel evened out the plane of understanding about the nature and scope of the problem, which didn't exist before—so that now people could approach the planning and the planning process based on a shared understanding of the nature of the problem.

Then we regrouped the following morning, and I showed them my maps of hate crimes throughout the County. I tried to put Azusa in a broader context so that people didn't think that there is something wrong with their community, so they could see that this is a larger phenomenon. I shared that we don't understand why it is going on in the specific places but that it has to do with things like the phenomenon of race-bias hate crime, gang related hate crime, and that also had to do with what was happening in the California prison systems—with the prison gangs such as the Mexican Mafia and the Black Guerilla Family and the Aryan Brotherhood and



the race riots that were taking place in the prisons in the late eighties and early nineties, and throughout the nineties actually.

The Azusa gang, the A-13, was connected to the Mexican Mafia. The Mexican Mafia was the Southern California prison gang that had extensive connections to most Mexican-American/Chicano gangs in Southern California. In Northern California it's La Nuestra Familia that is the counterpart. The prison gangs have heavy influence over the street gangs because street gang members always get sent to prison, and the prison gangs control the space within the walls of the prison in many ways—in terms of privileges, rights, safety, protection, and all of those things. So they exert a certain amount of control, and they're also allegedly involved in a lot of the drug trafficking. A lot of that works through the prison.

So it was really important for everyone to be able, somewhat, to depersonalize what was going on and to see that what was happening in the community was not their fault per se—to see that there were other, broader, social phenomena that were connected to this.

Then I gave them a review of, “What is a strategic planning process?” because most people don't know what a strategic plan would even look like once it's written. I wanted them to know that they can do it, that they didn't have to be a planner to be able to come up with a plan. The way that I explained what planning is was that it's a way of figuring out who's going to do what, when, where, and in what order so that they felt comfortable that they could embark on a planning process and come up with recommendations, as they were asked to do, because there was just a lot of confusion about, “What is a strategic plan?”

Then we spent the morning doing an assessment of the problems. So I shared the survey results, and we had a discussion about it. Then we did an exercise—a morning exercise on strategic actions. I had a big piece of paper saying, ‘Peace making, Peace keeping, and Peace building’ on the left column, and then across I had different areas of work that could be done—whether it's peace making, peace keeping or peace building. So there are activities that can be done that are peace making: for example, getting the violence to stop. The other is peace keeping, maintaining peace. Peace building is building the kinds of relationships and programs and activities so that the peace could be long lasting.

So they did a “How to do it,” and they had to think about, “What can law enforcement do?” “What can the schools do?” “What can community organizations do?” So they had to think, “What can the churches do?” —and consider all these categories of players.

Now you've got the walls covered with suggestions of what they can do. Then we did a kind of a Delphi technique where they voted for the top three or five that they thought were good ideas. Before that, we took a lunch break, and during the lunch break I had clustered the ones that sounded similar so that there wasn't a lot of duplication on the sheets. Then people started to rank them.

But before we did the ranking, we had a short discussion on "What ideas do you think are the best ideas?" "Which ideas are bad ideas?" and "Which ideas do you need clarification on?" But let me back up. After they put up all their ideas on post-its, I had them go back and read everybody's ideas. The good thing about post-its without names is that there's no attachment of that idea to a person—as opposed to what happens when people verbally share their ideas. So people judge the ideas on the merit of the idea as opposed to who suggested it.

Then I had them write down which ideas they thought were the best ideas, which ideas were bad ideas, and what ideas they wanted clarification on. Then they sat down.

When they sat down, I asked them, "Let's start by answering two of the three questions from this discussion, and we'll start with what you need clarification on." So people needed clarification.

Second, what do you think are bad ideas? So people said, "This thing about rounding more kids up and sending them to prison is a bad idea, because this is where the problem is coming from, it's from the prison gangs—so how are you going to . . . da, da, da . . .?"

Talking about the bad ideas didn't get other people's backs up against the wall, because they didn't know whose ideas they were. They were attacking the idea, not the person. There was no attachment between person and idea. The people who had written them didn't get defensive—they listened to what the people were saying because they didn't feel they were being attacked.

So that was good. Then on the third question, "What did they think were the best ideas?" I asked them then to put their stickers up on those post-it notes, so they could vote with the stickers for the best idea. The rest of it was just working on how were we going to narrow it down. So we narrowed it down, and they came up with a plan.

So at the end the mayor actually ran out during her lunchtime because she asked me, "Do you have a closing exercise?" And I said, "No, that's something that I have options for in my mind but I haven't really decided what the best way to close is."

She gave me an idea, and she said, “I’ll get it for you, I’ll get the supplies for you.” So at the end she had a box filled with sand and there were different jewels buried in the sand—jewels, just from a craft store.

So at the end we just went around, and everybody reached into the box of sand and pulled out a jewel and then had to say what they’re taking from the meeting, from the retreat. It was really wonderful.

I mean the self-proclaimed bigot said, “You know I came here as a bigot and I…” he almost cried. He said, “Hearing your story about what happened to you, I’ve really come to change my mind about all of this.”

There had been different periods where I just went off the agenda totally to deal with some of the personal issues that were coming up, like the “N-word.” I heard through the grapevine through Marshall that someone was really having a hard time and wasn’t going to come back because she was so offended. But she did come back after his encouragement. So I built in time to deal with those issues.

So we took a “time out.” After getting her permission, we asked her to share what offended her the previous night. She told the story about how she’s a black woman and a victim of hate crimes in Azusa as a resident and what had happened when she opened the door one day and her kids’ shoes were set on fire and how that evoked this fear and the knowledge of the lynching of Blacks and, historically, all of those kinds of things all came up. She told this story in the early part of the day, because I’d felt that we really needed to spend time to do this.

These things are going to come up all the time, and part of the success of what you do depends on how you’re able to talk about these things with each other—because they are going to keep coming up. [I said to them, too,]

"We can't ignore these things...just because we don't know how to deal with them. How we process these critical moments affects how we will relate to one another in the future. If we could model good processing of racially sensitive issues, we can take those lessons to new situations that will invariably arise. The success of this group is going to depend on how the group is going to be able to resolve many things like this that come up—and how well we can talk to each other about how these things effect us and how we want to change the way we do things."

At the closing I said, "I wish I could have taped that," because people were very moved. People said, "I didn't trust you" to the mayor or to somebody else, and, "Now I have a lot more faith." Or, "I was ready to quit this committee, and a number of us were, but I feel like this has renewed my hope, and we can actually get something done here that's meaningful."

Someone said, "Yeah, I was a bigot and . . . da, da, da —and [now] my eyes are open more to what my problem is."

The mother of the youth worker came, and she said, "My daughter—I'm afraid for her: She's trying to do something, but she could be the next victim just because she's trying to solve the problem, and I really feel like this committee is so important because it can't just be my daughter that's out there trying to do this."

So that helped reinforce each other's sense of importance of the work that they were collectively doing as well. Then I gave my own feeling of the meeting and what I was taking from the meeting and the inspiration that the group gave me and the "Aloha" that I felt and that I thought would help carry the group on.

Then that was it and they figured out a time for a follow-up gathering. I was very surprised because, after it, all one by one they came up and gave me a big hug and thanked me, and they were hard hugs, and I gave them hard hugs back.

I don't think I would have done anything differently. Maybe I would have done closer follow up about the actual production of the plan—and I wished I had done a little more to help problem-solve the rest of the process of getting the proposal passed and implemented.

It went to the City Council and there was a discussion over how much resources were going to be available to give the commission, and in the end I don't think they got quite enough in way of resources, so that was a problem. But, I don't know what exactly they got, if they got a director or if they got a staff person or something. This was in 2001.

Overall it was one of the most fulfilling things I've done. It was stressful. But actually, after I did my fieldwork for my dissertation on gang violence, very few things stress me out.

\*Editors' Note: John Forester conducted this interview in March 2002. Andy Love produced the original transcription in the Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University.