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## **Interracial Coalition Building: A Filipino Lawyer in a Black-White Community**

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## Interracial Coalition Building: A Filipino Lawyer in a Black-White Community

Victor C. Romero\*

### ABSTRACT

The United States is in the midst of a political and cultural war around race and demography that goes to the heart of America's self-definition as a nation of immigrants. Heeding Eric Yamamoto's four-part prescription for interracial cooperation via the conceptual, the performative, the material, and the reflexive, this Essay draws from the author's own experience as an Asian-American volunteer attempting to serve and lead a traditionally African-American civil rights organization in a predominantly white, rural town in Pennsylvania. Three lessons emerge from this experience. When volunteering, it is important to answer the

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\* Maureen B. Cavanaugh Distinguished Faculty Scholar & Professor of Law, Penn State Law-University Park. Thanks to Seth Trott, Natalie Alexander, Oliver Krawczyk, and their team at the Penn State *Dickinson Law Review* for publishing this piece, and thanks to Dean Jim Houck at Penn State Law for his continued support of this and all my work. Thanks, too, to the many students, colleagues, and collaborators who have helped shape my thinking on these issues over the years, with special thanks to all involved in the McGowan episode. Finally, thanks to my family—Corie, Ryan, Julia, and Matthew—for their love that grounds me. Corie was an especially careful editor of two prior drafts. All errors that remain are mine alone.

call to serve even when in doubt; lead by serving and listening to others; and respect the coalition and trust the process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	768
I. YAMAMOTO ON INTERRACIAL COALITION BUILDING .	769
II. A FILIPINO LAWYER IN A BLACK-WHITE COMMUNITY .....	770
A. <i>Conceptualizing the Conflict—the External and             the Internal</i> .....	771
B. <i>The Performative Aspect—Next Action Steps</i> .....	772
C. <i>Has Material Change Happened in Carlisle?</i> .....	776
III. THREE LESSONS: REFLECTIONS ON MY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE .....	777
A. <i>Answer the Call to Serve, Even When in Doubt</i> ...	777
B. <i>Lead by Serving and Listening to Others</i> .....	778
C. <i>Respect the Coalition and Trust the Process</i> .....	779
CONCLUSION .....	780

## INTRODUCTION

As a relatively junior U.S. law professor from the Philippines teaching in predominantly white south-central Pennsylvania in the early 2000s, I remember when the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) came to town to rally and recruit new members.<sup>1</sup> Having lived most recently with my Caucasian wife in cosmopolitan Los Angeles, I had assumed (perhaps naïvely) that a northeastern city that housed a liberal arts college, a university law school, and the United States' naval war college<sup>2</sup> would be immune from such extremist incursions. While Carlisle, Pennsylvania was never a completely comfortable place to live for an interracial couple like my wife and me, we still felt relatively safe.<sup>3</sup> So, the Klan's fall 2000 recruiting visit was an opportunity to see how I might help counter this negative presence by volunteering in our community. My goal was to use my background in law to help support initiatives that would foster unity in Carlisle, joining civic organizations committed to that purpose.

1. See, e.g., Michael Bupp, *People Urged to Stay Away from KKK*, SENTINEL (Sept. 21, 2000), <https://bit.ly/3WGfzgH> [<https://perma.cc/NB8U-2DAP>].

2. See *About Carlisle Borough*, CARLISLE BOROUGH, <https://bit.ly/3HAPY15> [<https://perma.cc/97XQ-YJNW>] (last visited Feb. 10, 2023).

3. See generally VICTOR C. ROMERO, *ALIENATED: IMMIGRANT RIGHTS, THE CONSTITUTION AND EQUALITY IN AMERICA* (2005). In this book, I have written about one particularly disturbing time when my wife and I were harassed. See *id.* at 2–3.

In this Essay, I explore that volunteer experience through the lens of Eric Yamamoto's four-part prescription for advancing interracial justice. Following this analysis, I derive three lessons I learned from my volunteering experience as an outsider to both the historically Black organization I was serving and the larger white community I was helping: It is important to answer the call to serve, even when in doubt; leadership can best be achieved by serving and listening to others; and it is imperative to respect the coalition of community members and to patiently trust the process rather than worry about the outcome.

## I. YAMAMOTO ON INTERRACIAL COALITION BUILDING

In his book, *Interracial Justice*, Yamamoto identifies four aspects of what he terms "race praxis inquiry" as a means for promoting interracial conflict resolution: "the conceptual, the performative, the material, and the reflexive."<sup>4</sup> The conceptual aspect of the framework reminds us to examine the particular interracial relationship not just in terms of the specific conflict, but in a broader sociolegal context.<sup>5</sup> As such, both the details of the conflict as well as the history between the parties are relevant in determining what approach to take in conflict resolution.<sup>6</sup> The performative element focuses on what concrete action steps might be taken, placing specific emphasis on the promotion of anti-subordination.<sup>7</sup> Put differently, any action taken to resolve a conflict must not perpetuate existing inequalities.<sup>8</sup> The material aspect emphasizes that any action plan must effect actual change in the lives of the subordinated.<sup>9</sup> The concern here is that action steps that are merely symbolic will not lead to long-lasting change.<sup>10</sup> And finally, the reflexive element requires participants to reflect on the consequences of the action-taking, viewing the process as reiterative and not just a one-time fix.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, vigilance and persistence are paramount in the struggle to promote anti-subordination.

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4. ERIC K. YAMAMOTO, *INTERRACIAL JUSTICE: CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION IN POST-CIVIL RIGHTS AMERICA* 130 (1999). This paragraph is a lightly edited version of my summary of Yamamoto's work in an earlier article. See Victor C. Romero, *Asian American Allyship*, 11 *IND. J.L. & SOC. EQUAL.* 162, 182 (2023).

5. YAMAMOTO, *supra* note 4, at 130.

6. *Id.* at 130–31.

7. *Id.* at 131–32.

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.* at 132.

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.* at 132–33.

While Yamamoto's case studies centered around interracial conflicts between minoritized communities,<sup>12</sup> his four-part conflict resolution prescription provides a useful framework for examining and reflecting upon my own experience as an Asian immigrant in a Black-white community.<sup>13</sup> The next section recounts my story, focusing on the first three of Yamamoto's four framework terms—the conceptual, the performative, and the material—as lenses through which to understand what unfolded.

## II. A FILIPINO LAWYER IN A BLACK-WHITE COMMUNITY

Some 20-odd years ago, I was elected the second vice president of the Carlisle, Pennsylvania chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The passage of time has blurred my memory somewhat, but having focused my academic career on the rights of minoritized people and immigrants, and having already served as vice president of the local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapter since 1996, I recall attending a few meetings of the NAACP to see how I might be able to help. I also became a member of the Social Justice Committee of the local Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), to learn more about community issues.<sup>14</sup> Although my wife and I had moved to rural central Pennsylvania from Los Angeles five years prior, it soon became clear to both of us that the Black-white divide was alive and well, and it made sense to find concrete ways to try to use my training as a lawyer to volunteer.

Once the KKK came to town in the fall of 2000, the more progressive elements in the Carlisle community came together to host a peaceful counter-rally, an alternative celebration of the town's commitment to unity through diversity. A month-long planning process culminated in what was called "The Unity Celebration," a three-hour festival of song and speech, attended by over 3,000 folks, dwarfing the KKK rally.<sup>15</sup> After that successful venture, the Carlisle

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12. To wit, Yamamoto opens the Prologue of his book thusly, "How do communities of color heal their racial wounds?" *Id.* at 1.

13. In solidarity with minoritized folks, I have chosen to capitalize "Black" and "Brown" except when quoting others, although I appreciate this view has its detractors. See, e.g., The Grammarian, *A Year After Decision to Capitalize 'Black,' Shades of Gray Remain for Readers*, PHILA. INQUIRER (July 21, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3Hft5Sy> [<https://perma.cc/32H4-G7MS>].

14. As true then as it is now, the YWCA has as its mission slogan, "Eliminating Racism, Empowering Women." See YWCA, <https://bit.ly/3kLeuqL> [<https://perma.cc/CA3Y-QXJZ>] (last visited Feb. 10, 2023).

15. Christopher Maier, *Unity Rally Web Exclusive*, DICK. MAG. (Winter 2001), <https://bit.ly/3HcoGA7> [<https://perma.cc/2LXG-SCLR>].

Unity Steering Committee (CUSC) was formed with the goal of ensuring the town's ongoing commitment to unity so that The Unity Celebration wasn't merely a symbolic, one-time event. Elected as Chair of the CUSC, I recall that my goal was not to create controversial new initiatives that might have the unintended effect of sowing discord, but instead to meet regularly with other like-minded community leaders and organizations—like the local NAACP and the YWCA—to see what work was already being done and to advance such initiatives.

#### A. *Conceptualizing the Conflict—the External and the Internal*

Let me pause my story for a moment and re-introduce the first of Yamamoto's prescriptive elements in seeking interracial conflict resolution—the conceptual—and apply it to Carlisle's KKK rally/Unity Celebration and its aftermath. To conceptualize this state of play is to examine the particular interracial relationship both specifically and more broadly.<sup>16</sup>

Focusing on the particular conflict—the KKK's rally and the community's response—Klan leaders at the time claimed that they were protesting local police officers' failure to respond to drug problems in the Carlisle schools caused by “undesirables.”<sup>17</sup> Placed in a broader sociolegal context, however, some progressive leaders wondered whether the KKK chose Carlisle because of its significance as a county seat.<sup>18</sup> Opting to stage its protest in front of the courthouse in the town square, the Klan peddled a pretextual law-and-order message when the hate group's true concern was the “undesirable” nature of the community's diversifying demography, as the number of Black, Asian, and Latinx residents had increased incrementally over the last ten years.<sup>19</sup>

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16. YAMAMOTO, *supra* note 4, at 130–31.

17. Maier, *supra* note 15 (quoting Klan leader Rick DeLong, who claimed that the Carlisle “community has a lot of drugs and undesirables”).

18. *See id.* (“[Dickinson College associate vice president Rusty Shunk] point[ed] out that Carlisle is a county seat[—]a favorite soapbox for Klan groups in recent years. And he mention[ed] that downtown Carlisle offers ‘all of the trappings of power-pillars, flags, the courthouse.’”).

19. *Id.*

Carlisle, like many mid-sized American towns, is in a state of flux, welcoming an increased diversity to its community. With an 89.9 percent Caucasian population, Carlisle's pie chart includes 6.4 percent African-American, 2.1 percent Asian and 1.3 percent Hispanic. These numbers represent a gradual shift in the face of Carlisle: just 10 years ago, 92.2 percent of borough residents were Caucasian, 5.7 percent African-American and 1.6 percent Asian, with 1.1 percent also listing Hispanic origins.

*Id.*

To conceptualize the KKK/Carlisle conflict as one pitting external bigots against a unified community would be naïve, however, as my family's lived experiences in Carlisle suggest that the town's racial politics were more fraught than the auspicious Unity Celebration might have implied. To pick but two examples: During my first year of teaching in Carlisle, my wife and I were verbally harassed and threatened walking down a quiet town street simply because she is white and I am not;<sup>20</sup> similarly, in conversations with white students about their weekend adventures, I was told about a local bar they had visited where they believed I'd be unwelcome. And so, for the community to be vigilant about promoting unity as an ongoing concern rang true to me. But even setting aside my personal experiences, I believe the KKK must have thought it had support among some community residents, otherwise why bother to travel from Warren, Pennsylvania—about six hours away<sup>21</sup>—to recruit? Properly conceptualizing the conflict as not just external (the KKK versus a unified Carlisle), but also internal (that racial divisions exist within Carlisle itself), assisted community leaders in helping us take stock of what next steps to take.

#### *B. The Performative Aspect—Next Action Steps*

In assessing the Carlisle progressives' next steps following the highly successful Unity Celebration, consider Yamamoto's second framework factor: the performative aspect. As noted above, Yamamoto's performative element focuses on what concrete action steps might be taken, making sure that any action taken to resolve a conflict does not perpetuate existing inequalities but promotes anti-subordination.<sup>22</sup>

Returning to my story, by the time I was chosen to lead the CUSC in early 2001, my concurrent involvement with the local NAACP and YWCA—as well as my own lived experiences with racism—helped frame CUSC's agenda. My inclination was not to reinvent the wheel, but to listen and follow the lead of more established leaders and organizations, supporting and promoting their ongoing efforts as necessary. While this course may seem more passive than performative, my experience is that effective action and intervention often require patient listening and careful timing. Sometimes leading is best done by listening and supporting rather than by charging ahead with one's own agenda, especially when one

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20. See ROMERO, *supra* note 3, at 2–3 (relating the harassment story).

21. Maier, *supra* note 15 (noting that the Klan group hailed from “Warren, Pa.—nearly six hours from Carlisle”).

22. YAMAMOTO, *supra* note 4, at 131–32.

is new to leadership, as I was at the time. Little did I know that looming changes at the NAACP and a school building-naming controversy would provide opportunities for concrete next steps that were more performative than passive.

Apart from chairing the new CUSC in 2001, I also found myself at the center of a leadership transition within the local NAACP. The president at the time, a prominent local attorney, asked to resign his post because of pressing professional commitments. I was the second vice president at the time, and so I assumed that the first vice president would ascend to the top leadership role. When that individual declined the post, I remember experiencing a crisis of confidence: Who was I—a Filipino immigrant, a Carlisle outsider—to assume I could lead the town’s NAACP, widely regarded as the leading national Black civil rights organization? From my own reading and teaching in constitutional law, I had learned about how instrumental the national NAACP had been in dismantling the Jim Crow south, under the leadership of (eventual Supreme Court justice) Thurgood Marshall.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps none too subtly, I voiced my concern to the group, but the chapter’s members firmly supported the succession plan. I could only hope that the decision to volunteer and step up to a leadership position I felt ill-equipped to assume might create opportunities and synergies, given my new role in the CUSC and prior involvement in the YWCA’s Social Justice group.

As fate would have it, an opportunity for performative, concrete action soon materialized. In 2001, the Carlisle Area School Board (CASB) found itself embroiled in a controversy surrounding the naming of a high school building.<sup>24</sup> The crux of the matter involved interest around re-naming the “West Building,” one of several in the high school complex, given that other structures were named after prominent community members, including the current superintendent.<sup>25</sup> The initial recommendation was to rename it after the Carlisle school district’s existing director of finance, whose name was controversially advanced by a two-to-one vote of the

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23. See generally MARK V. TUSHNET, *THURGOOD MARSHALL AND THE SUPREME COURT, 1936–1961* (1996) (describing Marshall’s role in battling Jim Crow-era segregation laws before the U.S. Supreme Court); JUAN WILLIAMS, *THURGOOD MARSHALL: AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY* (1998) (documenting Marshall’s leadership in the *Brown v. Board of Education* litigation, among other triumphs).

24. For a comprehensive, detailed account of this episode from the perspective of the then-school board president, see Fred Baldwin, *Naming Carlisle High School’s McGowan Building*, 37 CUMBERLAND CNTY. HIST. 18, 18–32 (2020). I have relied heavily on Baldwin’s recent account to help refresh my recollection of these events.

25. *Id.* at 18–20.



school board's property committee over that of alumnus Clyde Washington.<sup>26</sup> Washington was a popular African-American football player at Carlisle High School and a former University of Pennsylvania assistant coach who tragically succumbed to a brain tumor at the age of 36.<sup>27</sup> After the finance director withdrew from consideration<sup>28</sup> amid the growing tension, Black leaders—including the sole Black school board member—galvanized community interest in re-naming the West Building for a person of color, a first for the district.<sup>29</sup> Although supportive of the athlete Washington's nomination, the then-school board president wondered whether an African-American educator might be a better choice.<sup>30</sup> While Clyde Washington supporters would have preferred their champion, honoring a Black Carlisler became the overarching goal, and so the search for a noteworthy educator ensued.<sup>31</sup>

In my capacity as CUSC chair and NAACP president, I soon became involved in working with both the Black community leaders and the white school board president to help identify and advance a name that could garner majority support from the predominantly white school board. Based on the excellent research of a prominent local Black educational historian, Ruth Hodges, five names emerged, from which one was advanced: Emma Thompson McGowan, an African-American schoolteacher who taught in Carlisle's segregated schools, whose influence led several of her students to become teachers themselves. Despite the Black community having settled on McGowan's candidacy, there were no guarantees that the growing coalition would successfully persuade a majority of the predominantly white school board, some of whom preferred that the West Building retain its long-standing name.<sup>32</sup>

Fortunately, both the white school board president, Fred Baldwin, and the lone Black school board member, Linda Manning, supported the McGowan nomination, actively working behind the scenes to secure both public and board support. As the final vote rested with the school board, I sent the following via email to Dr. Baldwin as the critical decision day neared: "As I understand it, the

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26. *Id.* at 20–21.

27. *Id.* at 21.

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.* at 22.

30. *Id.* at 23 (noting Baldwin's recollection: "It seemed that at least a two-thirds majority of the board might be willing to re-name the West Building after an African-American, especially if that person had been an educator.").

31. *Id.* at 22–23.

32. *Id.* at 23–24 (describing the Black community's mobilization and the author's participation therein).

only significant alternative [now] to McGowan's nomination is the status quo. I think this would be bad for two reasons: First, you miss an opportunity to foster unity in a town in need of it . . . and second, not naming the building sends the message that the Board applies a double standard: it's quick to name a building after the current superintendent, but will go out of its way not to name it after a deserving teacher."<sup>33</sup>

Evoking Yamamoto's "performative" parlance, I believe the coalition's broader goal was anti-subordination—the uplift of a minority class through this public honor and recognition. My particular objective in this email was to advance that goal strategically, by appealing to shared values of unity and equity, as our desired outcome was not a foregone conclusion by any means. I am happy to report that, while not unanimously, the school board eventually approved the McGowan nomination in the spring of 2002, and three years later, the Emma Thompson McGowan building was officially dedicated. As Dr. Baldwin observed, "By fits and starts, the school board moved toward an admirable decision because Carlisle's African-American leaders seized an unexpected opportunity."<sup>34</sup>

In hindsight, was Yamamoto's performative factor satisfied here? One might quibble with my initial decision as CUSC chair not to follow up The Unity Celebration with another large event or initiative, but my thinking was premised on the idea that there was already good work afoot and that leadership in this instance was best practiced in a supporting role. My volunteer experiences with various local civil rights groups suggested that this approach could work. What I was not prepared for was the possibility of leading a second community group, a historically prominent African-American organization, at that. What I learned, though, was my training and experiences—as a lawyer, as a teacher, as a community volunteer—and my willingness to serve were enough. Indeed, being a non-native Carlisle who was neither Black nor white provided me with an opportunity to work with both the Black leadership and the predominantly white school board and community activists to reach a result most could embrace. So, yes, the action steps taken to build trust through coalition-building—and perhaps the serendipitous circumstance of simultaneously leading the CUSC and NAACP—put me in a position to help advance the cause of anti-subordination during the McGowan building episode, even if I was unsure of

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33. *Id.* at 27–28 (quoting Romero email to Baldwin).

34. Baldwin, *supra* note 24, at 29.

where the initial leadership decisions and willingness to step up might lead.

C. *Has Material Change Happened in Carlisle?*

The third part of Yamamoto's framework—the material—insists that any action plan must effect material change in the lives of the subordinated.<sup>35</sup> The concern here is that action steps that are merely symbolic will not lead to long-lasting change.<sup>36</sup> Dr. Baldwin aptly described the McGowan episode as a “significant, if long overdue, recognition of [the African-American community's] role in [Carlisle's] history.”<sup>37</sup> But has this achievement led to material change or was it merely symbolic?

To put this particular event in a larger context, in Dr. Baldwin's estimation, the McGowan building is likely the only public building in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania named for a person of color. This is both good and bad news, from the perspective of significant change. On the one hand, the Carlisle school board's decision stands as a solitary, significant achievement. Some 20-odd years later, the McGowan building stands alone for being named after a Black person. On the other, the fact that the McGowan building still stands alone suggests that, while significant, this achievement has been largely a symbolic one.

It appears that the lives of Black citizens of Carlisle have not improved much over the last 20 years. A 2021 news report stated that “Black households in the borough [of Carlisle], on average, have an income of about 54 cents for every \$1 made by a white household.”<sup>38</sup> And in 2019, the KKK made its presence felt in Carlisle via the distribution of recruitment leaflets in the community.<sup>39</sup> Carlisle's Black residents still bear the economic and psychological burdens of second-class citizenship, of being “undesirable” within their own community.<sup>40</sup>

As with many longstanding civil rights struggles that currently vex our nation, the fight for equality in Carlisle, Pennsylvania continues some 20 years after my volunteer experiences there. Even

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35. YAMAMOTO, *supra* note 4, at 132.

36. *Id.*

37. Baldwin, *supra* note 24, at 29.

38. Charles Thompson, ‘Can We Talk About Race?’: Carlisle Considering Commission to Study Sources of Racial Problems, PENNLIVE (Mar. 11, 2021, 6:36 AM), <https://bit.ly/3RcoVzF> [<https://perma.cc/9GNN-4DPD>].

39. See Rachael Franchini, *KKK Flyers in Carlisle Under Investigation*, DICKINSONIAN (Feb. 7, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3kKHu1F> [<https://perma.cc/Z33L-LP3T>].

40. See Maier, *supra* note 15 (noting KKK leader's reference to “undesirables”).

recognizing that the naming of the McGowan building was largely a symbolic one, I share the view of Dr. Baldwin that it was nonetheless a significant recognition of the important contributions of Carlisle's African-American residents to their community, and I am grateful for having been a small part of that process as a volunteer.

### III. THREE LESSONS: REFLECTIONS ON MY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Yamamoto's final prescription is that we reflect upon Carlisle's interracial conflict and the community's coalition-building experience.<sup>41</sup> In this section, I draw three lessons: (1) Answer the call to serve, even when in doubt; (2) lead by serving and listening to others; and (3) respect the coalition and trust the process.

#### A. *Answer the Call to Serve, Even When in Doubt*

The first lesson stems from my succession to the local NAACP presidency in 2001, after the president resigned and the first vice president demurred. This may not have been clear from my earlier description, but even as I reflect on this 20 years later, I remember the feelings of doubt and dread as I sat in that fateful 2001 NAACP meeting when our chapter president tendered his resignation—doubt, for I was uncertain I had the tools to lead, and dread, for I feared the possibility of disserving and dishonoring such a noble civil rights organization. While I had been willing to serve as second vice president, I had done so cognizant of my limitations stemming from my outsider status, racially and culturally. When the president resigned and the first vice president demurred, my initial impulse was to follow their lead out of respect for the organization's stature and history.

And yet, we know the end of this story: The membership supported my succession to leadership, despite my misgivings, and I am grateful that they were open to a non-Black, non-Carlisle native serving as their president. Their trust helped give me confidence that, consistent with the CUSC's and my desire to build a strong social justice community, together we could take a leap of faith forward, one step at a time.

In reflecting on the McGowan episode in particular, I am also grateful that the NAACP was willing to let me serve as president, for it helped me serve as a liaison with other social justice groups as well as the Carlisle school board leadership. By volunteering during that time, I was able to draw upon the hours of listening and rela-

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41. YAMAMOTO, *supra* note 4, at 132–33.

tionship-building spent following The Unity Celebration to gain the trust of different stakeholders and help build what turned out to be a successful and persuasive case to the school board.

To be clear, my role was minimal. I neither provided the expertise regarding possible African-American educator nominees, nor did I have decision-making power as a non-school board member. What I could do, however, was use my volunteer position to help advance a cause that promoted social justice. As someone who sometimes still thinks of himself as just a kid from Manila, I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to have played a small part in this effort.

### *B. Lead by Serving and Listening to Others*

The second lesson stems not only from my Carlisle volunteer experiences, but also from principles of servant-leadership espoused by Robert Greenleaf, who writes, “The servant-leader is servant first . . . . Becoming a servant-leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.”<sup>42</sup> Greenleaf asserts that all leaders fit along a spectrum between the poles of pure servant and pure leader; my goal was to be more of the former than latter.

Through my earlier volunteer work in the Carlisle community, I had discovered many established organizations already working on various civil rights and social justice issues. So, when I was elected to lead the CUSC and then the NAACP, I knew that I wanted to serve more than lead. I wanted to build relationships with other like-minded leaders and organizations and support them along the way. I saw myself more as a facilitator than a leader because I wanted to advance existing work and bring social justice workers together rather than assume I had all the answers as to how best to move this work forward. Even before the high school building-naming opportunity arose, I had spent many hours in meetings with groups and individuals, listening to and learning about different perspectives from those who were already hard at work in the community. Many times those meetings may not have resulted in tangible next steps, but I would like to think they led to each of us in the room gaining a slightly better understanding of the work we

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42. Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, in *INSIGHTS ON LEADERSHIP* 15, 18–19 (Larry C. Spears ed., 1998).

were all doing and the diverse perspectives and experiences we brought to the table. I'd also like to think that the time invested in listening and learning provided an opportunity to build relationships, something that would be invaluable during the McGowan episode.

So, when it came time to work toward helping the school board name a Carlisle high school building, the hours I volunteered in meeting diverse leaders and within diverse groups paid off in fostering the trust necessary to work collaboratively together. As a Filipino-American law teacher working with Carlisle's Black leaders and predominantly white school board, I saw my volunteer role as helping advocate on behalf of the growing coalition of social justice workers to take advantage of this golden opportunity to advance anti-subordination by honoring Carlisle's African-American residents. Serving their interests—which I believed served the entire Carlisle community's interests as well—by listening and learning, then persistently nudging and persuading, turned out to be just the right approach. A heavy-handed, top-down leadership style would likely have been unsuccessful, especially given the racially-charged politics around the naming issue.

### *C. Respect the Coalition and Trust the Process*

Our final lesson follows from the first and second. If, as a volunteer with doubts, you answer the call and then proceed to serve with a listening ear, then you will be able to find your place within the larger coalition and trust the process. Despite my doubts, I did have both formal training and experience in law, a bit of experience in teaching (and therefore communicating) with others, and a bit less in serving in various volunteer capacities (at the time, as vice president of the ACLU). Still, that did not make me confident I could serve as the leader of both the CUSC and the NAACP during the post-Unity Celebration period. Fortunately, the opportunity to serve as a bridge between the Black community and the predominantly white school board during the McGowan episode turned out to be a worthwhile way to use my training and experiences to volunteer toward a concrete and achievable goal.

Furthermore, serving as a volunteer liaison between the Black and white communities played to my strengths as a lawyer and aspiring servant-leader. In listening to both the desires of the Black community leaders and the procedural constraints under which the school board was operating, I was able to help the former understand and navigate various practical hurdles that may have infuriated some and frustrated others.

Two specific examples come to mind, both of which are a testament to the political acumen of board president Baldwin. First, when Dr. Baldwin expressed concern that former athlete and alumnus Clyde Washington would be less attractive to the school board than a Black educator, I recall that some Washington supporters were disappointed, including Mr. Washington's nephew, Jim, whom I knew personally. The late Jim Washington was a former Marine and community leader, often championing initiatives for neighborhood kids in particular. I would like to think that the broader goal of recognizing an African-American appealed to Jim's sense of service to his community, notwithstanding his understandable disappointment in not seeing his relative honored.

And second, when Dr. Baldwin shared with me the procedural hurdles that slowed down the naming process and his strategic guidance as to how the Black community might be most effective, I would like to think that as NAACP president, I was able to help our members understand these issues better. Specifically, Dr. Baldwin was extremely helpful in suggesting that the community agree on a single Black educator, rather than to advance five names, which caused us to take a hard look at the nominees and then unify behind the strongest candidate. As a teacher of teachers, Emma Thompson McGowan was the Black community's clear choice, and all, including Jim Washington, rallied united behind this outstanding nominee. Dr. Baldwin also provided advice with respect to the scope and timing of the board's committee and full-board meetings, providing clarification on what he felt would be helpful presentations and comments during each and by whom.

Dr. Baldwin's counsel helped me better fashion my own communications within the coalition and to the broader community, via emails and newspaper editorials. Applying my lawyer training to this volunteer service helped me understand these substantive and procedural hurdles, and with Dr. Baldwin's friendly guidance, facilitated my support of the NAACP and the Black community.

## CONCLUSION

Many believe that Americans live in an irreparably divided nation. The sad reality is that we've long been divided by race both in law and in fact, a legacy of African slavery and the long shadow of Jim Crow.<sup>43</sup> My volunteer experience in Carlisle reflected that real-

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43. See generally RICHARD ROTHSTEIN, *THE COLOR OF LAW: A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF HOW OUR GOVERNMENT SEGREGATED AMERICA* (2017) (highlighting the myriad ways the government at the federal, state, and local levels has en-

ity. While I am thankful for the opportunity to have led the Carlisle NAACP and participated in the McGowan episode, an important chapter in the town's educational history, I harbor no illusions that working for a more just society in the United States is approaching a satisfactory end. What I do believe, then and now, is that it is important to serve others when we can, despite our misgivings, despite our doubts. By serving first and listening to others, we can build interracial relationships that work. By investing in the coalition, we can patiently navigate hurdles, trusting the process. It is through this incremental, bridge-building volunteer work that barriers are overcome, and progress is made. By voluntarily sharing our talents acquired through training and experience, we can play an active role in helping make the United States "a more perfect Union."<sup>44</sup>

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forced American racial segregation through law, focusing specifically on housing segregation and its concomitant effects on education and income differentials).

44. U.S. CONST. pmbl.



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