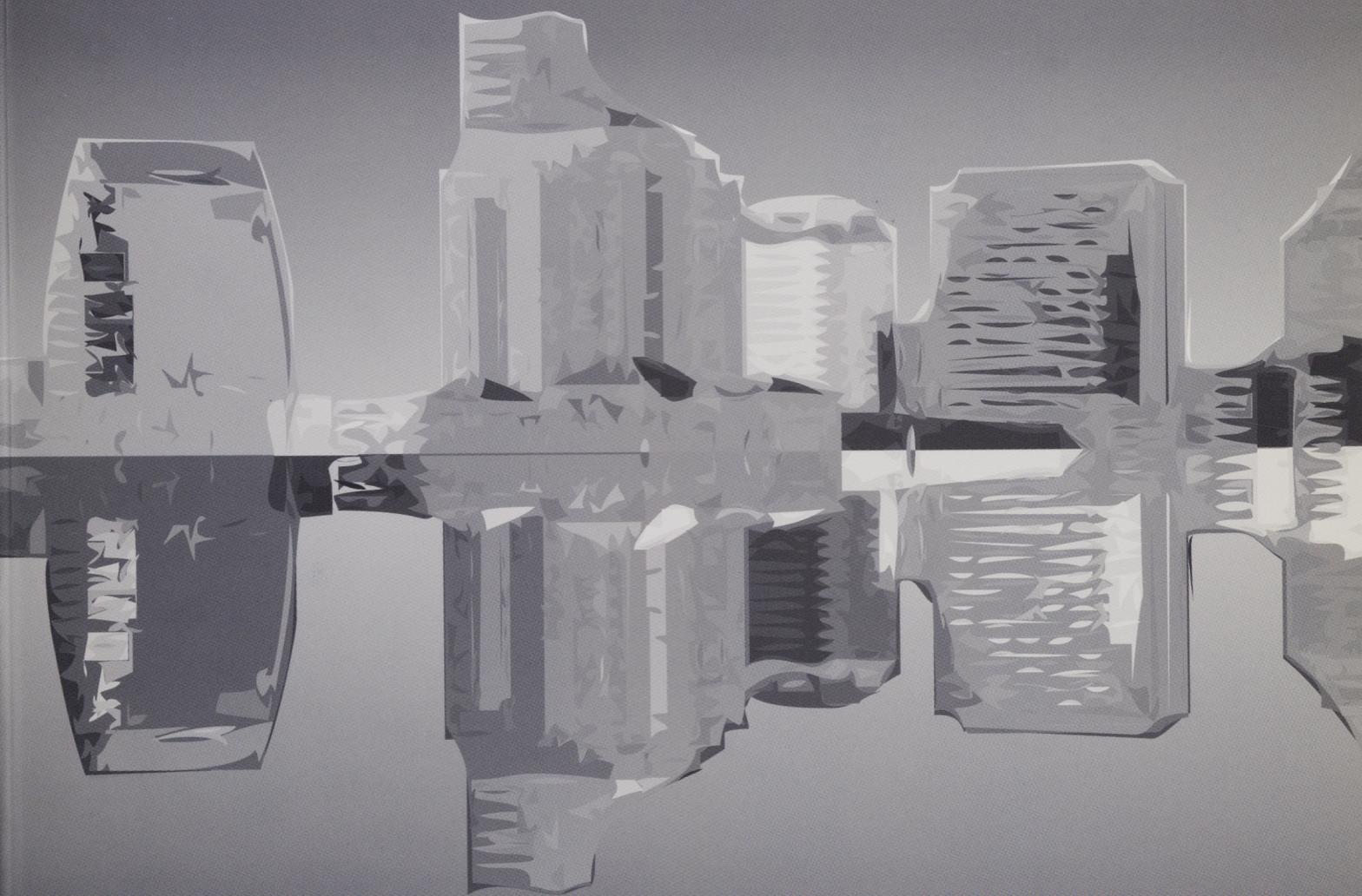


# Ethnic and Race Relations in Austin, Texas





Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs  
Policy Research Project Report  
Number 137

## **Ethnic and Race Relations in Austin, Texas**

Project directed by

Richard L. Schott

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# Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vii
Foreword .....	ix
Executive Summary .....	xi
Chapter 1. Introduction .....	1
A Note on Research Approach .....	1
Chapter Progression .....	2
Chapter 2. Ethnic Minorities and the City of Austin: A Retrospective View .....	5
Segregation Policies .....	5
Desegregation Efforts in the Post- <i>Brown</i> Era .....	8
The “Gentlemen’s Agreement” .....	11
Chapter 3. Ethnic Group Relations, Tolerance, and Discrimination .....	15
Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Relations in Austin .....	15
Perceptions of Interethnic Tension .....	17
Ethnic Tolerance .....	18
Patterns of Discrimination .....	22
Summary Comments .....	24
Chapter 4. Ethnic Community Views of the City of Austin and Its Services .....	27
Ethnic Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward the APD .....	27
Ethnic Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward City Services .....	32
Concluding Observations .....	37
Chapter 5. Current Reconciliation Efforts in Austin .....	41
The Austin Human Rights Commission (AHRC) .....	41
The Council for Community Reconciliation (CCR) .....	43

Citizens' Review Board.....	45
The Citizens' Police Academy.....	46
The Religious Community.....	47
Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	53
A Context for Ethnic Relations.....	53
Major Findings.....	54
Recommendations.....	56
Appendix. Policy Research Project Interviewees .....	59

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Responses to Question “How would you rate the quality of the relations among the various ethnic groups in the Austin area?” .....	16
Table 3.2 Responses to Question “In your view, is there ethnic tension between:” .....	18
Table 3.3 Responses to Statement “A residential neighborhood should be made up mostly of people from the same race or ethnic group.” .....	19
Table 3.4 Responses to Statement “A residential neighborhood should be made up mostly of people with a similar amount of money and education.” .....	20
Table 3.5 Responses to Statement “People should have the right to keep certain racial, ethnic, or religious groups out of their neighborhoods.” .....	21
Table 3.6 Responses to Statement “I would be opposed to a member of my family marrying a person who is not from my ethnic group.” .....	21
Table 3.7 Responses to Question, “In the past year, have you experienced discrimination because of your race or ethnicity?” .....	22
Table 3.8 Sources of Discrimination among Those Who Reported It .....	23
Table 4.1 Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the Austin Police Department?” .....	27
Table 4.2 Responses to Question “In your opinion, do all ethnic groups receive the same treatment by police in the Austin Police Department?” .....	29
Table 4.3 Responses to Question “Do you favor or oppose the creation of a citizens’ review board to monitor the Austin Police Department and study citizen complaints?” .....	31
Table 4.4 Responses to Question “Overall, how satisfied are you with the various services provided by the City of Austin?” .....	32
Table 4.5 Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the utility services (water, electricity, trash pickup) of the City of Austin?” .....	33
Table 4.6 Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the parks and recreation services of the City of Austin?” .....	34
Table 4.7 Responses to Question “In your opinion, do all ethnic groups receive the same quality of services from the City of Austin?” .....	34

Table 4.8 Responses to Question “How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement? ‘My views on city issues are reflected in the decisions made by the Austin City Council.’” ..... 36

Table 5.1 Disposition of Discrimination Cases for Fiscal Year 1998-99 ..... 42

## Foreword

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs has established interdisciplinary research on policy problems as the core of its educational program. A major part of this program is the nine-month policy research project, in the course of which two or more faculty members from different disciplines direct the research of ten to thirty graduate students of diverse backgrounds on a policy issue of concern to a government or nonprofit agency. This “client orientation” brings the students face to face with administrators, legislators, and other officials active in the policy process and demonstrates that research in a policy environment demands special talents. It also illuminates the occasional difficulties of relating research findings to the world of political realities.

This report presents the findings of a study of ethnic and race relations in Austin, Texas, conducted by faculty and students in the LBJ School of Public Affairs during 1999-2000. The project, funded by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, the LBJ School, and the City of Austin, examined citizens’ assessments of the quality of race relations, ethnic groups’ perceptions of each other, discrimination reported by these groups, and measures of ethnic tolerance. Based on survey research and community interviews, the project also studied the perceptions of the City of Austin and its services held by various ethnic groups and presents recommendations made as a result of the study.

The curriculum of the LBJ School is intended not only to develop effective public servants but also to produce research that will enlighten and inform those already engaged in the policy process. The project that resulted in this report has helped to accomplish the first task; it is our hope that the report itself will contribute to the second.

Finally, it should be noted that neither the LBJ School nor The University of Texas at Austin necessarily endorses the views or findings of this report.

Edwin Dorn  
Dean



# **Executive Summary**

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

This report on ethnic and race relations in Austin, Texas, was prepared by faculty and students at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. Funding came from the LBJ School, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the City of Austin and is based on a scientific random sample survey of Austin residents and interviews with community leaders.

The sample accurately reflects the population of Austin, with a margin of error of 4 percent. The current Austin population comprises Whites (54%), Hispanics (28%), African Americans (13%), Asians (4%), and other (1%), with these proportions shifting toward majority-minority status by 2008. Interviews were held with some 60 individuals, most of them from minority ethnic groups.

## **Chapter 2. Ethnic Minorities and the City of Austin: A Retrospective View**

After Reconstruction ended in the South in 1877, most southern cities maintained racial segregation through the adoption of “Jim Crow” laws and restrictive housing covenants. In Austin, the Master Plan of 1928 encouraged the settlement of Blacks and Hispanics in East Austin through the selective provision of city services and utilities. Real estate and banking practices also helped concentrate persons of color there.

Until the middle of the 20th century, Blacks and Whites in Austin remained largely segregated in their places of residence, their public housing, their transportation, their libraries, their hospitals, and their schools and social life. The same pattern applied to Hispanics beginning in the 1920s when Mexican immigration began to increase substantially.

In the 1950s, with the admission of Blacks to The University of Texas Law School and early school desegregation, segregation began to erode. The implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 accelerated this trend, and most public facilities were integrated by the late 1960s. Local initiatives, such as the creation of the Austin Human Relations Commission in 1967, the short-lived Fair Housing Ordinance of 1968, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Ordinance of 1974 indicated a more active policy by the Austin City Council on behalf of civil rights. However, minority representation on the council and the “gentlemen’s agreement,” providing for one Black and one Hispanic council seat, remain controversial.

## **Chapter 3. Ethnic Group Relations, Tolerance, and Discrimination**

Survey data indicate that most Austin citizens find the state of race relations in the city to be only fair to poor. They also perceive a good deal of tension among the various ethnic

groups. More than 60 percent of Blacks, Hispanics, *and* Whites characterized the state of ethnic relations in Austin as only fair or poor. Two-thirds of the respondents perceive substantial tension between Whites and Blacks, and a majority see tension both between Whites and Hispanics and between Blacks and Hispanics.

There is a lack of trust on the part of many minority community leaders, especially Blacks, of the White majority. Minority leaders expressed frustration that most Austinites seem to care little about the city's minority groups and ignore or cover up the issue of race relations in general. They also expressed the fear that progressive Whites have abandoned the civil and human rights struggle in favor of environmental protection issues.

Discrimination against minority individuals continues. Blacks reported more frequent instances than did other groups and were also more likely to report multiple instances. Whites identified the most frequent discrimination as coming from African Americans and Hispanics, while both African Americans and Hispanics reported that Whites were the primary source of discrimination against them.

By contrast, survey data indicate that most respondents appear to be quite tolerant. The overwhelming majority rejected the notion that neighborhoods be ethnically uniform or have the right to exclude persons on the basis of their ethnicity or beliefs. In most questions pertaining to neighborhood composition and social relations (such as ethnic intermarriage), Hispanics and Asians were more conservative or restrictive in their responses than Blacks or Whites.

#### **Chapter 4. Ethnic Community Views of the City of Austin and Its Services**

The great majority of survey respondents reported general satisfaction with city services such as utilities and parks. However, Blacks consistently reported the least satisfaction with service provision. A small majority of respondents overall felt that city services were provided equally to all ethnic groups. However, nearly two-thirds of Blacks felt that service provision was *not* equitable. Several community leaders expressed the view that the quality of service provision in East Austin lagged well behind other areas of the city.

A majority of respondents reported satisfaction in general with the Austin Police Department (APD). Again, community leaders were much more critical of the APD; nearly all of them expressed concern or anger about the differential treatment of citizens by the APD. More than two-thirds of the sample believe that the APD is biased in its treatment of minority groups. Leaders emphasized the seeming overpolicing of East Austin and the different ways in which individuals inside and outside East Austin are dealt with.

There was overwhelming support for the establishment of a citizens' review board, with nearly 90 percent of the respondents favoring its creation. This support came from all ethnic groups. Leaders referred to the strong distrust of police officers by various

minority groups as a main reason for the board's creation; all interviewees who mentioned a review board, including former officers, favor it.

## **Chapter 5. Current Reconciliation Efforts in Austin**

Several organizations play a role in trying to mitigate ethnic and racial tension. The Austin Human Rights Commission, which was created in 1967 as the Austin Human Relations Commission, is in charge of enforcing the city's civil rights and human rights ordinances. However, its caseload is quite small; only a fraction of cases filed are resolved in favor of the complainant, and community leaders suggested that Austinites seem unaware of its existence and mandate.

The Council on Community Reconciliation (CCR) was formed shortly after Mayor Kirk Watson and religious leaders issued the "Commitment to Racial Reconciliation" statement in December 1998. Composed of community and religious leaders and city officials, the CCR has developed programs designed to reduce prejudice and racist beliefs among the citizens of Austin. It also trains individuals in conflict-management techniques and offers mediation in incidents of ethnic conflict. Another group associated with the CCR is Austin Clergy Committed to Racial Reconciliation (ACCRR).

Religious groups and their leaders also play a substantial role in reconciliation initiatives. They are active in the ACCRR and the Pastors' Prayer Fellowship and helped draft the "Commitment to Racial Reconciliation" document. Their work provided a base from which the mayor assembled the task force that later became the CCR.

In March 2000, the council-appointed Police Oversight Focus Group recommended the creation of a citizens' review board to monitor the APD. Its recommendations included authorizing the city manager to hire a special police monitor and staff. The monitor and review board would hold regular meetings, inform citizens of how to submit complaints, and monitor the APD's internal investigation of those complaints.

The Citizens' Police Academy, which was started as part of the community policing initiative, introduces Austin citizens to the inner workings of the APD. Three academy sessions are offered per year, with each session involving approximately 35 hours of instruction. Classes are held once a week in the evenings, with a different topic being considered each week.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Major Themes**

Perhaps the broadest conclusion that can be drawn from our study is that race relations remain a serious problem in Austin, a finding that seems incongruent with Austin's image as a progressive, enlightened city with few social problems. However, both the survey data and interviews confirm this view.

By contrast, survey data indicate that most residents of Austin appear to be tolerant. The great majority of respondents, for example, rejected the notion that neighborhoods should be uniform or have the right to exclude persons on the basis of their ethnicity or beliefs.

Survey respondents gave very high marks to the quality of services provided by the City of Austin, and most felt that the city generally provides equal treatment to various ethnic groups. Black respondents, however, are a notable exception to this view.

Relationships with the APD are problematic. Although a majority of respondents rated the APD's performance as satisfactory, more than two-thirds believe that the APD does not treat various ethnic groups equally. Racial profiling and racial discrimination on the part of APD officers seem largely taken for granted by minority community leaders.

Of all the issues studied, none had such a strong resonance among both survey respondents and community leaders as the creation of a citizens' review board. Almost 90 percent of respondents from all ethnic groups favored its creation.

Several broader themes are also salient. One is the continuing estrangement of minority groups in Austin from the dominant White culture. Of the groups we examined, African Americans were by far the most alienated. They reported more frequent discrimination and were consistently more negative in their evaluations of city services, especially the APD, than other groups. Among minority leaders in general, we found a sense of mistrust, frustration, and suspicion of what is perceived as the White-dominated power structure of Austin.

There was also hope that Whites might reengage with the struggle for civil rights and social equity. Much of the energy of progressive Whites, in the view of many minority leaders, has shifted from social equity to environmental protection. Currently, minority leaders see little interest on the part of the majority in addressing the enduring issues of discrimination and inequity.

It is often hard to disentangle issues of race from issues of income, but some leaders worry that the current emphasis on income distorts or downplays the importance of ethnicity. They see this as an attempt to "explain away" race relations problems by couching them in economic terms.

Finally, many of the leaders we interviewed noted that East Austin was historically designated for people of color and that today it still remains underserved. Some charged that city policies, especially in economic development, have exacerbated tension among ethnic groups by leaving Blacks and Hispanics to fight over the crumbs. There is also increased tension between these two groups, heightened by the relative growth in the number of Hispanics and the relative decline in the number of African Americans.

## **Recommendations**

1. The City of Austin should establish a citizens' review board to oversee the Austin Police Department.

2. The City of Austin should better publicize the existence of its antidiscrimination ordinances, make better known the existence of the Austin Human Rights Commission, and inform citizens of its role in handling discrimination complaints.
3. The City of Austin should explore ways to involve the private sector and educational institutions more deeply in efforts to improve race relations in Austin.
4. The City of Austin should study the race relations policies and programs of other cities to determine whether there exist successful ethnic conflict-reduction initiatives that might be adopted.
5. The City of Austin should expand public awareness of the Citizens' Police Academy and increase participation in its programs.
6. The City of Austin should review membership on its various advisory boards and commissions to ensure adequate representation from ethnic minority groups, especially Asians and Native Americans.



# Chapter 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a student-faculty research team from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs that studied ethnic and race relations in Austin, Texas, during the academic year 1999-2000. The LBJ School, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the City of Austin supported the research. The City of Austin is the client for the project. This report, however, reflects solely our findings; the city was not involved in the design of the project nor in its findings and conclusions.

We were drawn to this topic from a concern with ethnic and race relations in general and an interest in how they play out in Austin in particular. After a flurry of activity during the civil rights decade of the 1960s, public attention to the issue has diminished substantially—especially after the dismantling of court-ordered school integration beginning in the 1980s. The pendulum now appears to be swinging back to a renewed interest in minority rights, minority education, and attention to the economic and social plight of much of the minority population in the United States. This interest is especially salient in view of the fact that Texas, as well as other states, will have a majority-minority population as early as 2008. The current Austin population comprising Whites (54%), Hispanics (28%), African Americans (13%), Asians (4%), and other (1%) may shift to majority-minority status slightly earlier.<sup>1</sup>

## A Note on Research Approach

### Research Design

Our work used both qualitative and quantitative methods. To explore general trends in attitudes and opinions about race relations held by the Austin public, we conducted a random sample survey of residents inside the city limits of Austin. (A random sample means that the respondents are chosen in such a way as to ensure that their answers, within certain limits, reflect those of the overall population.) This survey, conducted by the Survey Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin, was designed to include sufficient members of various ethnic and racial groups (except for Native Americans, whose population is very small) to allow valid comparisons among them.

The size of the sample was 631, which proved sufficient to provide an accurate picture of Austin residents. The margin of error of the poll was plus or minus 4 percent, meaning that the percentage given in a table may actually vary as much as four points from the number stated. A 4 percent deviation, however, is unlikely and represents a worst-case scenario.

To explore our subject in more detail, we conducted some 60 field interviews with community and education leaders in all ethnic communities—African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and White. Given our focus, members of minority groups were more frequently interviewed than Whites. A list of those interviewed appears in the appendix.

These interviews gleaned information on the positions and attitudes of various community leaders but do not necessarily reflect the views of their communities at large. Indeed, when compared to the sample group, leaders sometimes held opinions that are more extreme or more strident than those held by their communities or that might even be at odds with them. Leaders were interviewed to provide a more in-depth and complex perspective than could be gained through survey research, but no claim is made that they are representative of their communities.

### **Interpreting the Data Tables**

Most of the tables that appear in this report are cross-tabulations, which are intended to show how the various ethnic groups—African American, Asian, Hispanic, and White—responded to the questions asked. The percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and reflect the proportion of ethnic groups answering in a certain way, as well as the group averages.

Beneath the tables is a small “*p*” with the sign “<” and a number, such as “0.001.” This notation is a statistical test of the credibility of the data displayed in the table. Briefly, it reflects the probability that the data in the table occur by chance. Thus “ $p < 0.001$ ” indicates that the probability of the table being in error (due to chance) is only one in one thousand. It is generally accepted in social science research that a probability of 5 percent or less is an acceptable margin of error. Most of our tables have a much lower probability, indicating high validity of the relationships discussed. The letter “*n*” in a table indicates the number of respondents represented in it.

### **Terminology**

The distinctions between “races,” such as Black and White, and “ethnicity” have become blurred. Traditionally, Blacks and Whites have been considered “races,” while “Hispanic” has been considered an “ethnicity.” Some sociologists argue that the term *race* is no longer valid or useful and prefer the term *ethnic status*. Rather than adopting the awkward term *race/ethnicity*, we use both words interchangeably.

### **Chapter Progression**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides some historical background on the relations between minority groups and the City of Austin. It examines the impact of Jim Crow laws and early segregation in Austin and the City of Austin Master Plan of 1928, which set aside East Austin for minority populations. It also considers early steps toward housing desegregation beginning in the 1950s: the work of the Austin Human Relations (later Human Rights) Commission, minority representation on the city council, and the early provision of city services.

Chapters 3 and 4 present and analyze the data acquired from our survey. Chapter 3 examines ethnic and race relations in Austin, including perceptions of racial and interethnic tension, measures of ethnic tolerance, and views of desired neighborhood composition. It also studies the amount and sources of incidents of discrimination

reported by the sample members, as well as their frequency. Chapter 4 considers attitudes toward public services provided by the City of Austin, the concept of a citizens' review board for the Austin Police Department (APD), and the question as to whether all groups receive equal services from the city. We also explored whether citizens felt that their views were adequately represented on the Austin City Council.

In Chapter 5, we review the various efforts toward ethnic and racial reconciliation that are now afoot in Austin. These include the Council for Community Reconciliation, the concept of a citizens' review board for the APD, the Citizens' Police Academy, and the role of religious groups.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents our conclusions and recommendations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Telephone interview by Richard Schott with O'Neil Provost, Project Manager, Office of Survey Research, The University of Texas at Austin, July 27, 2000.

## Chapter 2. Ethnic Minorities and the City of Austin: A Retrospective View

After Reconstruction ended in the South in 1877, most southern cities, including Austin, maintained racial segregation in an attempt to preserve the social structure of the *antebellum* period. This effort included the adoption of “Jim Crow” laws by many states beginning in the 1880s. In addition, most localities, including Austin, adopted ordinances to ensure the continued separation of the races. Both the Jim Crow laws and the City of Austin Master Plan of 1928 played important roles in regulating racial interaction in transportation, education, entertainment, housing, and most other aspects of social life.

### Segregation Policies

#### Jim Crow Laws

The practice of segregating Blacks and Whites after Reconstruction ended was commonly termed “Jim Crow.” (The exact origin of the term is not clear; however, entertainer Thomas D. Rice used it in a song and dance called “Jim Crow” in 1832.)<sup>1</sup> The routine growth of Jim Crowism began in the early 1880s after the withdrawal of Union soldiers and the return of White domination in state legislatures. Most of the state Jim Crow laws that reestablished segregation in Texas were passed between 1889 and 1907.<sup>2</sup> These laws, sometimes justified by the White majority as an instrument of “protection” for people of color<sup>3</sup>, permeated most aspects of social life and provided for the segregation of the races

on passenger trains and streetcars and steamboats, in factories and theaters and parks, prescribing separate seating and work-space, toilets and water fountains, waiting-rooms and ticket windows, entrances and exits. Texas required the racial separation of patients in mental hospitals; ten states including Texas specified segregation in homes for the aged, the orphaned, the poor, the deaf, the dumb, and the blind.<sup>4</sup>

However, many of the Jim Crow “laws” were actually discriminatory practices carried out informally and by custom without the sanction of legislation. These laws and their associated practices meant that Blacks could not live beside Whites, go to school with them, shop with them, dine with them, or go to the same theaters, swimming pools, water fountains, and rest rooms.<sup>5</sup>

(One Black Austinite recalled her experience with segregation on Austin public transportation early in the 20th century. “The back of the bus is where we had to sit. They had the ‘colored’ sign, and you sat behind the sign. If there were not enough seats for Whites, Blacks had to give up their seats.”)<sup>6</sup>

Because these laws were enacted before the large increase in Mexican immigration to Texas, they applied specifically to African Americans and not Mexican Americans. For this reason, other persons of color, including Hispanics, were not subject to the laws' provisions. However, by the late 1920s, Mexican Americans increasingly found themselves considered "non-White" although the census classified them as White until 1930. Because many Jim Crow laws and practices were left up to local interpretation and enforcement, Hispanics were often unsure how they would be treated in public places in Austin.<sup>7</sup>

One of Austin's discriminatory ordinances, passed in 1906, required segregation on streetcars and mandated separate train compartments for each race. In reaction, Austin Blacks engaged in the first organized demonstrations against segregation. They were forced to suspend their protests, however, when the Texas Legislature mandated streetcar segregation through state law in 1907. Again, in the 1920s, some African Americans protested segregation by sitting in the front of streetcars. This action prompted the Austin City Council to provide for stricter enforcement of the ordinance by authorizing fines against African Americans who violated it and giving streetcar operators the authority to remove offenders physically from the car.<sup>8</sup>

Blacks were also segregated in Austin's libraries and hospitals. Historian Anthony M. Orum noted:

Brackenridge Hospital, the large public hospital, had separate facilities for the two races, relegating the care of Black patients to the basement and the quarters behind the main hospital. When a Black physician had a patient sent to Brackenridge, the physician could not treat him there because he was not a member of the local medical society. The society did not allow Black doctors to belong. Black patients also received worse care at Brackenridge than Whites.<sup>9</sup>

At Brackenridge, African Americans (and, later, Hispanics) could be treated only in the "Old Building" annex of the hospital. The building was overcrowded, plagued by rodents, dimly lit, and poorly ventilated; it was condemned in 1917 when the state inspected it to approve fire insurance and found it "unsuitable for hospital purposes."<sup>10</sup>

Blacks also faced segregation in public accommodations. On Congress Avenue, Blacks were prohibited from using restrooms or water fountains. According to one source, "sometimes they [Blacks] would be compelled to urinate, even defecate, on the walk, in the gutter, or by the side of a building, because no business on Congress Avenue dared to let them use the restrooms."<sup>11</sup> In most areas of West Austin, Blacks were unable to shop, eat, obtain lodging in hotels, or enter movie houses because of segregation.

African Americans were also forbidden to use the main library. To accommodate Blacks in East Austin, the George Washington Carver Library was established in 1933. Before its creation, African American residents were limited to the libraries of the two Black colleges, Huston and Tillotson.<sup>12</sup>

Miscegenation was also forbidden. The Texas Penal Code provided that any White or Black who intermarried either in or outside the state of Texas would be confined to the penitentiary for two to five years. Texas law did not prohibit marriage between Mexican Americans and Anglos, though intermarriage was infrequent in early-20th-century Texas. The miscegenation statute was finally held unconstitutional in 1967.<sup>13</sup>

### **The City of Austin Master Plan of 1928**

In 1928, consultants to the city proposed a plan to provide for anticipated growth and to serve as a basis for the establishment of policies concerning land use, public works, education, zoning, transportation, and parks and boulevards.<sup>14</sup> The City Planning Commission and Austin City Council adopted this plan in 1928, and it served as the official template for city growth until 1954. The plan provided for racial segregation but with a different twist. In order to override the Supreme Court decision that had outlawed racial zoning in *Buchanan v. Warley* in 1917, the consultants designed an approach to “produce the same result by the selective provision of racially segregated [city] services.”<sup>15</sup> The consultants advised:

There has been considerable talk in Austin, as well as other cities, in regard to the race segregation problem. This problem cannot be solved legally under any zoning law known to us at present. Practically all attempts of such have proven unconstitutional. In our studies in Austin we have found that the Negroes are present in small numbers, in practically all sections of the city, excepting the area just east of East Avenue and south of the City Cemetery. This area seems to be all Negro population. It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will be the recommendation of this district as a Negro district; and that all the facilities and conveniences be provided the Negroes in this district, as an incentive to draw the Negro population to this area. This will eliminate the necessity of duplication of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities for this area.<sup>16</sup>

In essence, by concentrating various services for Blacks in East Austin (east of East Avenue, now IH-35), the plan used service delivery to accomplish what zoning laws constitutionally could not.<sup>17</sup> The same plan also designated much of the East Austin area for industrial zoning and allowed industries to abut residential areas.<sup>18</sup> The plan’s provisions helped maintain the city’s perpetuation of segregation and thus served to buttress Jim Crow laws and practices.

### **Housing**

In the 1930s, three segregated housing projects were built in Austin: one for Whites, one for Blacks, and one for Mexican Americans.<sup>19</sup> In the 1950s, the city council voted to locate a large public housing program in East Austin.<sup>20</sup> When additional units for Whites and Hispanics were later built outside East Austin, housing designated for Blacks was still located there in order to further concentrate African Americans in the area.<sup>21</sup> Since these facilities were constructed where ethnic groups were already concentrated, they reinforced segregation.<sup>22</sup>

Restrictive covenants, which were in wide use from the early 1920s until 1960, also helped maintain segregation. The City Planning Commission and the Austin City Council approved numerous subdivisions that excluded African Americans and Mexican Americans. Of the covenants adopted during this period, “87 specified that housing must be occupied by either persons of ‘strict Caucasian blood’ or ‘White race only’; another 22 prohibited residents of ‘African descent,’ and six more excluded ‘Mexicans.’”<sup>23</sup> (Two of these covenants allowed African Americans and Hispanics to live in the subdivision if they were employed as domestic servants and living in servants’ quarters.)

Segregated housing was further reinforced by real estate agents, who steered ethnic minorities to certain neighborhoods. Brokers and bankers also discriminated against minority individuals when it came to offering them loans. Blacks found it very difficult to acquire financing because there were few lending institutions willing to offer them loans. Regardless of income, Blacks often had to be “referred” to lenders by a White client. There were also loan ceilings; before World War II, it was nearly impossible for Blacks to obtain loans for more than \$2,500. Blacks were inherently seen as bad security risks, and the banks often charged them higher interest rates.<sup>24</sup> Lending institutions also adopted the practice of “redlining” certain areas where minority buyers could not secure loans.<sup>25</sup>

In 1968, the city council passed Austin’s first fair housing ordinance. However, a number of prominent realtors and bankers forced a public referendum on the issue, and Austin voters subsequently rejected the ordinance.<sup>26</sup> Austin finally adopted a Fair Housing Ordinance in 1977, which prohibited discriminatory housing and lending practices based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, physical handicap, or status as a student.<sup>27</sup>

## **Desegregation Efforts in the Post-*Brown* Era**

Emboldened by the Supreme Court’s decision ending school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Austin branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other ethnic organizations brought successful court actions that began chipping away at the foundations of segregation. Blacks had gained admittance to The University of Texas Law School in 1950; soon afterward the city streetcar ordinance was abolished; Blacks gained entrance to city parks, swimming pools, and the Main City Library; and the city ended its policy of excluding Blacks from serving in the fire department.<sup>28</sup>

Protests against the remaining segregation grew. In 1956, following the Rosa Parks incident in Montgomery, Alabama, a Black Austinite, Howelen Bunton Taylor, boarded one of the city buses and refused to sit in the back of the bus reserved for “colored.” Mrs. Taylor was arrested and later tried in civil court. Although the case was later dropped, the judge claimed that the principle behind the *Brown v. Board* decision should also be applied to the state statute concerning buses. However, the city continued to enforce the state statute that required segregation on public transportation.<sup>29</sup>

In the mid-1960s, however, many other facilities, such as restaurants, hotels, motels, hospitals, commercial schools, The University of Texas dormitories, and bowling alleys, remained segregated.<sup>30</sup> Harry Akin, a successful restaurant owner and advocate of racial integration, took the first step toward integration by allowing all persons entrance into his restaurant. Many others soon followed his action.<sup>31</sup>

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a major turning point in the history of civil rights both nationally and locally. It guaranteed Blacks access to accommodations in such places as motels, hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, and other places of amusement. It also provided for the termination of federally funded programs found to be discriminatory and established a Community Relations Service in the Justice Department to support implementation of the act.<sup>32</sup>

Although major federal laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 established equality for minority groups by law, implementation was often delayed. In 1968, the Austin branch of the NAACP was still using legal action to gain local enforcement of the public accommodations provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, local measures such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Ordinance of 1974, which prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, religion, skin color, sex, national origin, age, and physical handicap in both the public and private sectors, finally brought an end to Jim Crow in Austin.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Austin Human Rights Commission**

In 1964, the Austin NAACP urged the city council to create a human relations commission to hear discrimination complaints—especially those concerning employment practices and public accommodations. Despite the presentation of petitions of support, the council tabled the proposed ordinance. In response, the NAACP held a speak-in at the council chambers for one week in April 1964. When efforts to reach a compromise began, it became apparent that city council members preferred voluntary compliance while the NAACP favored an ordinance providing for penalties against those who were found to be discriminating. On May 11, the council voted to establish a Human Rights Commission without the power to penalize. The members of the commission were charged to use mediation, conciliation, and persuasion in solving citizen complaints.<sup>35</sup>

In September 1968, the ordinance was amended to give the commission broader powers, including advising city departments on discrimination laws, investigating complaints, recommending new ordinances, and establishing reconciliation groups. In 1975, the commission reported that job discrimination in Austin was “widespread and well documented”<sup>36</sup> and found that the resolution of complaints brought under federal law to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission required up to two years to resolve. The Human Rights Commission urged the passage of a new local ordinance with stronger enforcement mechanisms.<sup>37</sup>

The NAACP continued to receive numerous complaints from African Americans and Hispanics about the discrimination that they encountered when applying for jobs with the city. In the early summer of 1975, the NAACP requested that several federal agencies

discontinue their funding of city-administered programs in response to the “flagrant” discrimination in its hiring, promotion, and firing decisions.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in July 1975, the city council passed an ordinance giving the commission broader investigative powers and prohibiting employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, and physical handicap. City departments and businesses with more than 15 employees were subject to its provisions, and the commission was authorized to refer discrimination cases to the city's legal division.<sup>39</sup>

### **Representation of Minority Groups on the Austin City Council**

The poll tax, introduced in the latter part of the 19th century, was another instrument for maintaining segregation in the South. It presented a substantial barrier to the full participation of minorities in electoral politics. To be eligible to vote in Texas, one had to be a citizen of the United States, have lived in the state for a year before the election, and have paid (or been exempted from) an annual poll tax of \$1.75. While not one of the heaviest taxes, it disproportionately affected ethnic minorities with smaller incomes. For many citizens of color, \$1.75 was as much as one-half to one full day's wages and thus prevented many minority groups in Austin from voting.<sup>40</sup>

In the early part of the 20th century, African American and Hispanic community leaders in Austin engaged in voter registration drives, attempting to gain a stronger political voice in local government. Together, Blacks and Hispanics made up 25 percent of the population of Austin in the 1920s but accounted for less than 10 percent of the voters. Political power remained in the hands of the White majority. A rather typical sentiment of the day was reflected in an editorial in the *Austin Statesman* in 1917. It strongly opposed suffrage for Blacks, arguing that demands for greater political involvement by African Americans “complicates the so-called ‘race problem’ and...has been the greatest factor in creating and keeping it alive.”<sup>41</sup>

By the late 1920s, African Americans gained a modicum of political influence by voting for candidates *en bloc*. This strategy made the Black vote an important factor that White candidates could not ignore. However, real access to the political system via the ballot box did not come until 1965, when Congress passed the Voting Rights Act. Its provisions applied to both federal and local elections, mandated the abolition of literacy tests and poll taxes, and provided for appointment of federal voting examiners to oversee the election process in states that were suspect. Proposed state legislation dealing with voting procedures or voting districts had to be vetted by the attorney general as to its constitutionality.<sup>42</sup>

In response to the Voting Rights Act, the NAACP led a nationwide voter registration campaign; in Austin the NAACP president, Volma Overton, spearheaded the effort. Volunteers met at the NAACP offices and went door-to-door in East Austin, informing residents that it was no longer necessary to pay the poll tax to vote.<sup>43</sup> By 1974, Austin's NAACP chapter had registered some 25,000 new voters in Travis County.<sup>44</sup>

## The “Gentlemen’s Agreement”

City council members in Austin are traditionally elected through an at-large system whereby citizens vote for all council members and for mayor. Although several African Americans served on the council in the 1880s in the wake of Reconstruction, no Blacks were elected again until the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> A “gentlemen’s agreement,” which has been in effect since 1975, designates Place 5 for a Hispanic and Place 6 for an African American. In recent years, however, minority candidates have been elected in places other than 5 and 6, and Whites have occasionally been elected to these seats.

Ethnic leaders assert that this system skews the voting process by allowing the White establishment to decide through selective endorsement who will run and thus who will fill these places.<sup>46</sup> One Hispanic community leader charged that the at-large system “has dictated who our Mexican American representatives and who our African American representatives are.... The only thing is there’s this constant pendulum swinging. It’s just like the Republican or Democratic Party, but the people at the bottom, we can’t even tell the difference.”<sup>47</sup>

However, not all ethnic groups in the city are opposed to the at-large system. The Black Citizens’ Task Force, for example, argues that the at-large system makes all city council members accountable to ethnic communities.<sup>48</sup>

In the early 1980s, the NAACP filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the at-large system, advocating its replacement with single-member districts. (Such districts had heretofore been rejected by Austin voters in three previous elections.) The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) later joined the NAACP as plaintiffs. In March 1985, a U.S. district judge ruled that the at-large system did not have a discriminatory effect and upheld its constitutionality. The judge further noted that ethnic minority citizens had equal access to local elections and that ethnic groups in Austin had made substantial progress obtaining representation in local politics.<sup>49</sup>

The gentlemen’s agreement, as noted above, seems to be fraying. But as we shall see later, the persistence of at-large elections is a major factor in the mistrust of city government voiced by many minority individuals.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Erwin McGee, "From Slavery to Jim Crow to Freedom," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, vol. 2., no. 1 (January, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. McDonald, *Race Relations in Austin, Texas, c. 1917-1929* (Master's Thesis, University of Southampton, July 1993), p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-78.

<sup>4</sup> McGee, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony M. Orum, *Power, Money, and the People: The Making of Modern Austin* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Velma Roberts, Vice President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas, November 5, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> McDonald, pp. 266-67, 273.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 253.

<sup>9</sup> Orum, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> McDonald, pp. 269-70.

<sup>11</sup> Orum, p. 184.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>13</sup> McDonald, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> Joe R. Feagin, "Delivery of Services to Black East Austin and Other Black Communities: A Socio-Historical Analysis" (Final Report on Hogg Foundation Grant, 1985), p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Austin Human Relations Commission, *Housing Patterns Study of Austin, Texas* (Austin, Tex., May 1979), p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> O. H. Koch and N. N. Fowler, *A City Plan for Austin, Texas* (1928; reprint, Austin, Tex.: Department of Planning, City of Austin, 1957), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Feagin, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Scott S. Greenberger, "City's First Zoning Map Plotted Neighborhood or Minorities, Hazards," *Austin American-Statesman* (July 20, 1997), p. B-1.

<sup>19</sup> Orum, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Feagin, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Austin Human Relations Commission, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Dave Mayes, "Housing Pattern Linked to Deeds," *Austin American-Statesman* (May 12, 1973), p. A-8.

<sup>24</sup> Feagin, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Orum, pp. 264-65.

<sup>27</sup> Austin Human Relations Commission, p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> McGee, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Orum, pp. 254-55.

<sup>30</sup> McGee, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Orum, pp. 258-59.

<sup>32</sup> Carolyn Jones, *Volma, My Journey: One Man's Impact on the Civil Rights Movement in Austin, Texas* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-22.

<sup>36</sup> David C. Humphrey, *Austin: An Illustrated History* (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications Inc., 1985), p. 220.

<sup>37</sup> Mike Cox, "Austin Councilmen Vote Down Equal Employment Ordinance," *Austin American-Statesman* (January 10, 1975), p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Kelley, "City Gets EEO Ordinance." *Austin American-Statesman* (July 11, 1975), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> McDonald, p. 332.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 333-35.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, p. 87.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> McDonald, p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Tucci, "At Large System Defended: Anglo Control of Elections Disputed in Testimony," *Austin American-Statesman* (February 7, 1985), p. A-1.

<sup>47</sup> Interview by Warigia Bowman with Susana Almanza, Executive Director, PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources), Austin, Texas, September 30, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Dorothy Turner, President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas, November 2, 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Tony Tucci, "Judge Okays At-Large Vote for Council," *Austin American-Statesman* (March 13, 1985), p. A-1.

## **Chapter 3. Ethnic Group Relations, Tolerance, and Discrimination**

One of our research aims was to gather some general background on citizens' attitudes toward various aspects of race relations in Austin, Texas. We were curious about how our respondents would describe the overall tenor of relationships among various ethnicities and whether there were certain issues in which responses from one ethnic group varied considerably from another. We explored these relationships not only between Whites and the three largest minority groups but also among minority groups themselves. Again, we were interested to see what patterns could be identified.

A second focus was on various dimensions of racial tolerance, especially what characteristics of neighborhoods (ethnicity, economic status, etc.) the respondents felt most comfortable with. Would they, for example, prefer neighbors of a certain race to the exclusion of others? And were these preferences linked to one's ethnicity?

Finally, we hoped to measure the amount of discrimination that respondents had encountered. How frequently was discrimination reported among various groups, and what kinds of discrimination had they experienced? The discussion below, which uses both survey data and interviews with ethnic community leaders, summarizes our findings.

### **Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Relations in Austin**

Several survey items asked respondents their views of the state of race relations in Austin. The first asked about the quality of relations among ethnic groups. The responses appear in Table 3.1.

As the data suggest, the majority of the respondents, 59 percent, characterized the quality of race relations as poor or fair. This pattern holds for all ethnic groups except Asians, who were more sanguine about the current state of ethnic relations. Blacks were most likely to respond that relations are poor to fair (67%), followed by Whites (61%) and Hispanics (60%). It is striking that the majority of members of all three major ethnic groups agreed with this negative assessment of the state of race relations.

Our interviews indicate that racial tension in Austin is perceived by many, if not most, participants as serious. Some community leaders used the terms "racist" and "hypocritical" to describe majority-minority relations. Others suggested that Austin cannot really become a cosmopolitan, "global" city unless race relations are given more attention. The comments below are illustrative:

An African American minister told us, "[T]here is a serious, serious race problem in Austin. Austin is probably the capital of racism in the country.... It's a lulled-to-sleep dragon that will one day have to be awakened."<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3.1**  
**Responses to Question “How would you rate the quality of the relations among the various ethnic groups in the Austin area?”**

	Poor (%)	Fair (%)	Good (%)	Excellent (%)	Total* (%)
<b>White</b>	9	52	37	3	101
<b>Hispanic</b>	15	46	37	3	101
<b>Black</b>	19	48	31	2	100
<b>Asian</b>	7	40	51	3	101
<b>Average</b>	11	48	38	3	100

Note: (n=574).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.05$ .

A Hispanic leader offered the following interpretation:

I think there's a lot of people that kind of want to hide their head in the ground and say we don't have a problem.... I think there's a denial that goes on that nothing is wrong, "I love you," everybody says, "Oh, I'm not prejudiced." But the reality is they talk the talk but they don't walk the walk as that little saying goes. And then when you really press them and say, "Well, you know, we have to have affordable housing here." [Their response is] "Not in my backyard are you going to have affordable housing, not in my neighborhood are you going to put a center for battered women," or "its not in my backyard that the child care facility is going to go...."

We aren't killing each other in the street; we are killing each other in different ways. And so until we can open up some of the wounds and talk about them, I think there is a lot of healing that has to go on that hasn't.<sup>2</sup>

Another Black pastor observed, "There is a tension beneath the surface and a frustration level beneath the surface, and I think it's going to have to be dealt with.... [W]hites can be deceived by thinking that because they didn't see dogs and fire hoses like in Birmingham or fires in Detroit and Chicago...that things are going all right."<sup>3</sup>

A White pastor noted that racial issues, after a period of quiescence, are resurfacing in Austin.

I think the race issue is back on the table. [It] has been off the table since about 1975.... [T]he pendulum has swung back [and] racism is still here. And that how does it feel to be Black and walk into a department store...how does it feel to be

driving down the highway and get stopped...how does it feel for a Black person trying to hail a taxicab?<sup>4</sup>

A Black community leader argued that the Austin area is becoming increasingly diverse but that this trend is often ignored: “There are some individuals and companies that do not want to touch the ‘race card.’ However, as we move into the new millennium and become a global society, not a local society, then we are going to have to address it because by the year 2015 we are going to be a very diverse community.”<sup>5</sup>

A Native American leader observed, “I think that we still have a lot of racism, even though you hear people say there is no more racism.... [Y]ou still have a lot of institutional racism that is not considered because it is Austin, and you’re not supposed to have it here in Austin.”<sup>6</sup>

An African American educator criticized the tendency to mask racial issues by using economic terms, such as referring to the “disadvantaged” or the “at-risk” population.

There are definitely racial issues [in Austin]...and it actually has been masked in economics. There is a difference between the poor and the nonpoor, but what’s happening now is that we are lumping everyone in this category of economically disadvantaged and not paying attention to race, and race is still there simmering.... The city went from being very race conscious a few years ago to not talking about it, and now we’re at a point of masking it in economics and not really talking about it.<sup>7</sup>

## **Perceptions of Interethnic Tension**

Another issue we explored in some depth was the respondents’ perceptions of which groups had experienced tense relations with other ethnic groups. Table 3.2 shows some striking patterns.

The data suggest that the perception of ethnic tension is most frequent for Whites and Blacks, followed by Whites and Hispanics and then by Blacks and Hispanics. Thus the highest levels of perceived tension are between Whites and the two largest minority groups—Blacks and Hispanics. Interestingly, the tension between Blacks and Hispanics, a finding supported by our field research, ranks third. By contrast, tensions in the relationships among Asians and other groups are seen as relatively low.

Most community leaders generally took tension between Whites on the one hand and Blacks and Hispanics on the other as a given. However, there was some sentiment that income and social class also played a role: tension, they observed, was more palpable among persons in all ethnic groups who are lower in socioeconomic status.

**Table 3.2**  
**Responses to Question “In your view, is there ethnic tension between:”**

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total* (%)
<b>Whites and Blacks?</b>	67	33	100
<b>Whites and Hispanics?</b>	57	43	100
<b>Blacks and Hispanics?</b>	52	48	100
<b>Blacks and Asians?</b>	31	69	100
<b>Whites and Asians?</b>	29	71	100
<b>Hispanics and Asians?</b>	28	72	100

\*Those who had no opinion were omitted.

$p < 0.000$ .

Those interviewed also shed additional light on the relationships among minority groups. One theme was substantial friction between Hispanics and Blacks. This was accentuated by city economic policies, which pitted them against each other—an effort by the White “establishment” to divide and conquer. The following observation by a Hispanic leader is representative of this view:

The White guys have just decided to let the Black guys and the Hispanic guys fight it out. So a lot of the [ethnic] tension is between people of color.... [My] greatest fear is that we are creating haves and have-nots.... [The] tension is fueled by those who want us to continue to be divided because then we don't get anything because we can't agree on what it is that we want.<sup>8</sup>

A Black pastor and community leader added:

[T]here has been what I call a historical strategy to give crumbs to a few selected Blacks and maybe Browns...which has been...used as an appeasement.... You select a few, let them have some things, and hold them up as reflective of what is going on in the whole community, but it's a distortion, because there is only a handful that is benefiting.<sup>9</sup>

A Hispanic educator was even more strident: “What you see is more tension with the Black and Hispanic communities.... [P]eople in Austin have indirectly kind of put us in a battle with each other—*battle*, and I'm not talking about fights. I'm talking about battle for money, battle for positions, and things like that.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Ethnic Tolerance**

The survey also included a set of questions that explored expressed ethnic tolerance. These questions included what kinds of persons are acceptable in one's neighborhood,

what neighborhood ethnic makeup is preferred, and what the attitudes are toward integration and interracial marriage.

**Table 3.3**  
**Responses to Statement “A residential neighborhood should be made up mostly of people from the same race or ethnic group.”**

	<b>Strongly disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (%)</b>	<b>Total* (%)</b>
<b>White</b>	29	61	5	5	-	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	29	43	8	19	1.0	100
<b>Black</b>	16	79	1	3	1.0	100
<b>Asian</b>	21	66	6	6	-	99
<b>Average</b>	26	62	5	7	0.3	100

Note: (n=612).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.000$ .

The data indicate that the overwhelming majority of the sample, fully 88 percent, reject the notion that neighborhoods should be uniform. (One should keep in mind, however, the possibility that some participants may have responded more “positively” than they actually believe. However, they were assured that their answers were anonymous.)

Though a majority of Hispanics rejected ethnic exclusivity, they were three times more likely to agree with this item than the other groups.

Respondents were also asked whether they would object to having a White, Hispanic, Black, or Asian move in near them. The vast majority, more than 92 percent of the sample, indicated that they would *not* object to a member of any of these groups moving into their neighborhood.

There is a strong association between income level and the responses to this question. As personal income rises, the percentage of those agreeing with this question consistently drops—suggesting a relationship between income level and ethnic tolerance. The higher the income level, the more frequently the respondent expressed greater acceptance of other ethnic groups. The same is true for the respondent’s mother’s educational level, itself an accepted surrogate for family income. The greater the mother’s educational attainment, the more likely it was for respondents to disagree with the question.

We were also curious about whether one’s income and educational level would affect one’s potential acceptance in a neighborhood. These data are displayed in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4**  
**Responses to Statement “A residential neighborhood should be made up mostly of people with a similar amount of money and education.”**

	<b>Strongly disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (%)</b>	<b>Total* (%)</b>
<b>White</b>	12	50	18	18	2	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	11	40	11	33	5	100
<b>Black</b>	21	54	7	16	2	100
<b>Asian</b>	6	36	15	42	1	100
<b>Average</b>	13	46	14	24	2	99

Note: (n=614).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.000$ .

These responses indicate a somewhat less open attitude than do those concerning ethnicity per se. Though the majority, 59 percent, disagreed with this item, a little more than a quarter, 26 percent, expressed agreement that neighborhoods should be made up of those with a similar income. There is a variation in response depending on the individual’s ethnicity. Asians were most likely to agree with the statement, followed by Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks, in that order. It thus appears that income and educational level are somewhat more important than ethnicity in determining the desired makeup of a neighborhood, especially for Asians and Hispanics.

Another measure of tolerance or exclusiveness is an expressed opinion about whether neighborhoods should be able to determine or control the race, ethnicity, or creed of their residents. Responses to this measure are shown in Table 3.5.

As the data suggest, a majority of each ethnic group disagrees with this statement. However, many more Hispanics (21%) and Asians (19%) agreed with it than did Blacks or Whites, suggesting that these two groups may be more insular in their views concerning neighborhood composition.

The frequency of marriage outside one’s ethnic group is another measure of ethnic pluralism (see Table 3.6). It often serves as a proxy, in the case of minority groups, for the degree of comfort with or assimilation to the dominant culture.

**Table 3.5**  
**Responses to Statement “People should have the right to keep certain racial, ethnic, or religious groups out of their neighborhoods.”**

	<b>Strongly disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (%)</b>	<b>Total* (%)</b>
<b>White</b>	38	55	3	2	1	99
<b>Hispanic</b>	27	47	6	17	4	101
<b>Black</b>	18	72	3	8	-	101
<b>Asian</b>	26	49	6	19	-	100
<b>Average</b>	31	56	4	9	1	101

Note: (n=613).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.000$ .

**Table 3.6**  
**Responses to Statement “I would be opposed to a member of my family marrying a person who is not from my ethnic group.”**

	<b>Strongly disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (%)</b>	<b>Total* (%)</b>
<b>White</b>	28	53	8	11	-	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	35	50	4	10	1	100
<b>Black</b>	16	74	1	9	-	100
<b>Asian</b>	19	61	11	10	-	101
<b>Average</b>	26	57	7	11	-	101

Note: (n=609).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.001$ .

It is apparent that the substantial majority of members of each group are not opposed to a family member marrying someone from outside their ethnic group. There is little variation in responses by the four groups.

## Patterns of Discrimination

The survey posed several questions about respondents' experiences with racial or ethnic discrimination. Participants were asked about the frequency of discrimination they had encountered and the extent to which they had experienced it in three areas: jobs, housing, and shopping.

### General Trends

Our first task was to explore patterns of discrimination in general. How frequently was it reported and what or who was its source? Table 3.7 displays the sample's experiences with discrimination.

**Table 3.7**  
**Responses to Question, "In the past year, have you experienced discrimination because of your race or ethnicity?"**

	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)
<b>White</b>	88	12	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	65	35	100
<b>Black</b>	54	46	100
<b>Asian</b>	79	21	100
<b>Average</b>	77	23	100

Note: (n=611).

$p < 0.000$ .

The experience of the respondents with discrimination varies markedly by ethnicity. Blacks, at 46 percent, reported the highest frequency, followed by Hispanics, Asians, and Whites, in that order. Blacks, in fact, were almost four times more likely to experience discrimination than Whites.

We were also curious about the sources of discrimination—that is, who discriminated against whom?

Table 3.8 suggests several strong patterns in perceived discrimination. All three ethnic minority groups cited Whites as the chief source of discrimination. Whites reported most of the discrimination they perceived as coming from Blacks and, secondarily, from Hispanics. The three minority groups were much more likely to cite Whites as the source of discrimination.

All groups reported Asians as the group least likely to discriminate, though the relatively small number of Asians living in Austin likely influenced this response. Further, all

groups reported some discrimination on the part of members of their own ethnicity. In brief, minority groups see most discrimination as coming from Whites, whereas Whites see most discrimination as coming from Blacks and Hispanics.

**Table 3.8**  
**Sources of Discrimination among Those Who Reported It**

Those Discriminated Against	Those Who Reportedly Were the Source of Discrimination*			
	White (%)	Hispanic (%)	African American (%)	Asian (%)
White	32	46	54	14
Hispanic	81	32	32	11
African American	89	30	39	24
Asian	86	29	62	24

Note: (n=141).

\*Does not sum to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

*p* <0.000.

### **Job Discrimination**

Ten percent of the survey population overall reported discrimination in the work environment. (The survey did not separate discrimination in hiring from discrimination on the job.) African Americans and Hispanics reported the highest incidences of job discrimination—33 percent of Blacks and 11 percent of Hispanics. Whites (5%) and Asians (1%) reported the lowest incidences. Again, Blacks reported the most frequent discrimination, with six times the frequency of Whites.

### **Housing Discrimination**

The trends in reports of discrimination in housing generally mirror those reported in job discrimination. Blacks, at 22 percent, reported the most frequent instances, followed by Hispanics (13%), Asians (5%), and Whites (2%).

### **Shopping Discrimination**

Of the three types of discrimination we examined, shopping was the most frequently reported. The pattern here was also similar. Fifty-one percent of Blacks reported discrimination while shopping, followed by Hispanics (26%), Asians (15%), and Whites (2%). Of those Blacks reporting shopping discrimination, more than two-thirds reported three or more episodes in the previous year.

## **Summary Comments**

It is fair to conclude that the perceived general state of ethnic and race relations in Austin is not good. The majority of all ethnic groups, save Asians, believe that race relations in Austin cannot be described as any better than poor or fair. Further, there is a lack of trust on the part of many minority community leaders, especially Blacks, toward the White majority. They see the current economic and social structure of Austin as stacked against them. Further, minority leaders expressed a frustration that most Austinites seem to care little about the city's minority groups and ignore the issue of race relations in general.

Minority survey respondents reported that they are often the victims of discrimination, and these patterns of discrimination fall along racial and ethnic fault lines. Slightly more than a third of Hispanics (35%) and nearly half of Black respondents (46%) reported at least one episode of discrimination in the past year, while the frequencies for Asians and Whites were 21 percent and 12 percent, respectively. In certain kinds of discrimination, such as shopping, Blacks and Hispanics reported even higher rates. Whites see most discrimination against them coming from Blacks and Hispanics; Blacks and Hispanics reported the discrimination against them as coming from Whites.

By contrast, survey data indicate that most residents of Austin appear to be quite tolerant. The overwhelming majority of our respondents said that neighborhoods need not be uniform and also rejected the notion that neighborhoods should have the right to exclude persons on the basis of their ethnicity or beliefs. Respondents essentially spurned neighborhood segregation of any kind. And though some respondents would prefer that neighborhoods be composed of persons of their own economic and educational backgrounds, just slightly over a quarter took this position. In most questions pertaining to neighborhood composition and social relations (such as ethnic intermarriage), Hispanics and Asians were more conservative or restrictive in their responses than Blacks or Whites.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Kristoffer Lands, Reverend, Greater Calvary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Interview by Tanya Cruz with Dianne Galaviz, Development and Communication Manager, Capital Metro, Austin, Texas, October 29, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Joseph Parker, Reverend, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 25, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Patrick Flood, Executive Director, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas, December 7, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Interview by Katherine Saunders with Herman Lessard, President and CEO, Urban League, Austin, Texas, October 12, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Interview by Terrelene Gene with Mario Garza, Cuahuitechán Nation, Austin, Texas, November 19, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Interview by Dinah Sbelgio with Glenn Nolly, Area Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Galaviz Interview.

<sup>9</sup> Parker Interview.

<sup>10</sup> Interview by Melissa Lazarin with Robert Mendoza, Associate Principal, Travis High School, Austin, Texas, November 2, 1999.



## Chapter 4. Ethnic Community Views of the City of Austin and Its Services

This chapter examines the attitudes and perceptions of our sample’s view of the City of Austin. The discussion focuses on citizens’ perceptions of and attitudes toward two main areas of interest: the Austin Police Department (APD) and various city services. The material is drawn from both the responses of the survey participants and our field interviews.

### Ethnic Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward the APD

#### General Satisfaction with the APD

Several survey items asked respondents about their views of the APD. The first concerned citizens’ reports of their general satisfaction with the APD. Their responses appear in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**  
**Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the Austin Police Department?”**

	Very Dissatisfied/ Dissatisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied (%)	Total* (%)
<b>White</b>	15	27	59	101
<b>Hispanic</b>	15	27	58	100
<b>African American</b>	26	22	53	101
<b>Asian</b>	6	35	59	100
<b>All Groups</b>	15	27	57	99

Note: (n=604).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.000$ .

As the data suggest, the APD gets relatively high marks. A majority of respondents (57%) reported that, in general, they are satisfied with the APD, and only 15 percent reported that they are dissatisfied. Of the ethnic groups considered, Blacks reported the highest level of dissatisfaction, followed by Whites and Hispanics, tied at 15 percent. Asians had the lowest proportion of respondents who are dissatisfied with the APD, a figure markedly lower than that of the other ethnic groups. This unexpected congruence of White and Hispanic responses is a trend that appears in much of the data considered in

this chapter. Also surprising is the relatively large number of respondents who had no opinion or remained neutral.

It is also important to consider the effect that education has on respondents' opinions of the APD. There is a considerable difference, depending on educational level, in the proportion of African American respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with the APD. Black respondents who were only high school graduates were much more likely to have expressed dissatisfaction with the APD (39%) than Black respondents who were college graduates (14%). A similar pattern is evident in the responses of the other ethnic groups, with the exception of Hispanics.

It comes as little surprise that Blacks gave the APD the lowest ranking of the major ethnic groups. Traditionally, relations between the APD, most of whose officers are White, and Austin's African American population have been perturbed.

Several Black community leaders volunteered that they felt under particular scrutiny from the police, especially when "driving while Black." One African American pastor complained, "I've been stopped at least eight times by a police car. At least six of those were for absolutely nothing—just because I was dark skinned and looked like somebody you might be trying to go after.... Those eight times happened by the time I was twenty-two."<sup>1</sup>

A retired Black APD captain referred to a case in which a man in custody was smothered to death on his waterbed with a police officer sitting on him. "It was ruled accidental.... You know he struggled for breath before he died.... If I did the same thing as a citizen...they would put me away. But it seems like the police department has a license to kill." While acknowledging that the officer responsible was likely a maverick, the captain pointed out that other officers did not come forward with details about the incident. He noted, "That code of silence exists. You're not going to get a police officer to squeal on another one unless it's something that affects him personally."<sup>2</sup>

One Black community leader suggested that officers who request assignment to Charlie sector in East Austin do so to get more "action." He observed, "There's a lot of officers that go to East Austin because they want to crack heads. It's not everybody, but it's a lot of officers; we need to build a system which allows us to determine which people are sadistic and which are not."<sup>3</sup>

Many of the comments from interviewees of other ethnic groups concerning the APD were also negative. A retired Hispanic captain argued, "Police are in a unique position to carry out their hatreds and be the givers and takers of life. And there are some who have no qualms about using their own standards. They will lie, steal, cheat, and even have sexual relations with rape victims." Minority groups, he continued, are especially at risk: "The Hispanics, Blacks, and the poor are really unable to defend themselves."<sup>4</sup>

An Asian community leader, reviewing the APD's reputation, observed:

The police department years ago was a redneck department.... Ten years ago, the police department got a little better, and today the police department has improved significantly compared to what we were looking at ten to twenty years ago. But it is still the most anti-diversity department in the entire city of Austin. It doesn't move; it doesn't make progress as fast as everybody else.<sup>5</sup>

Another Asian American who has been involved in training for APD officers maintains that the culture of “enforcement” that exists is part of the problem. She remarked:

The culture must change. They need to understand that they think that their job is to enforce the law, but they need to know that you are dealing with people. If you come in not even observing other people's culture, not being respectful, why should they give you information to help you do your job? So I think that whole culture, the APD culture is the military culture. They are coming in as the enforcer. That needs to change.<sup>6</sup>

In defense of the APD, several interviewees observed that the number of “bad apples” in the department was quite few. An African American leader commented, “Ten percent of police officers give all police officers a bad name. There's a lot of really good and decent police officers. Ten percent are rotten and the system protects the good ones but also the rotten ones as well.”<sup>7</sup> An African American pastor noted, “You hear more about those who do wrong than those who do right.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Equal Treatment from the APD**

Another issue we explored was whether the police department is perceived as treating all ethnic groups equally. The responses to the question concerning equality of treatment appear in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2**  
**Responses to Question “In your opinion, do all ethnic groups receive the same treatment by police in the Austin Police Department?”**

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total* (%)
<b>White</b>	26	74	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	27	73	100
<b>African American</b>	17	83	100
<b>Asian</b>	47	53	100
<b>Average</b>	29	71	100

Note: (n=462).

\*Respondents with no opinion were omitted.

p <0.000.

A large majority of the respondents believe that the APD does *not* treat all ethnic groups the same. African Americans were the group most likely to answer this question in the negative. The large majority of Hispanics and Whites, whose responses were congruent, also indicate a lack of equality in treatment. A small majority of Asian Americans reported that the various ethnic groups *are* treated similarly.

Several African American community leaders suggested reasons why Blacks feel they receive unfair treatment from the APD. One Black leader commented:

[T]here is a very prejudiced leg [*sic*] of the Austin Police Department that treats minorities much lesser than everybody else—Latino, Blacks, anyone that's not White is going to be treated, you know, with the idea that something must be wrong versus when they come across one that's White it's going to be, "Oh you couldn't possibly have done that."<sup>9</sup>

He also noted the disproportionately high number of officers assigned to East Austin. "You know, it's not accidental; it's not coincidental that the police drive around our neighborhoods a whole lot more than they drive around others."<sup>10</sup>

A retired Hispanic APD captain volunteered that he had experienced discrimination while on the force and had heard frequent racist comments from some officers. "'Let's go out there and stir the niggers up.' I heard that frequently."<sup>11</sup>

Another Hispanic interviewee also commented on the disproportionate presence of officers in East Austin. He said, "The only thing you see a lot of in East Austin is policemen. When I first came here, I moved out to East Riverside.... I mean there were police cars going back and forth, back and forth. You don't see them out at Tarrytown."<sup>12</sup>

A Black leader maintains that police officers feel they can "get away with anything" in East Austin. "Officers know that if they're in East Austin, as long as they don't kill anybody, they can rough them up and nobody will say too much."<sup>13</sup>

The Cedar Avenue incident of 1995 was mentioned frequently. A retired Black captain of the APD commented:

But the West Side of town cannot perceive what goes on out here.... How people are being treated. Now the Cedar Street thing, there's no way in the world that should have happened.... All hell broke loose, when it could have been prevented if they [the responding police officers] had used some common sense. You could've walked away with the town that night because they [the police officers] were all on Cedar Street.... There was no riot to start with; the riot was in them.<sup>14</sup>

An African American leader commented, "Nobody wants drugs; nobody wants violence, prostitution in their neighborhood. But people should be able to expect that they'll be treated fairly [by police officers]...that when police officers do it [treat certain ethnic groups unfairly], their actions won't be ignored and they will get the proper discipline."<sup>15</sup>

## Citizens' Review Board

We were also interested in how Austin citizens feel about the creation of a citizens' review board to monitor the APD. The responses appear in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3**  
**Responses to Question "Do you favor or oppose the creation of a citizens' review board to monitor the Austin Police Department and study citizen complaints?"**

	<b>Favor (%)</b>	<b>Oppose (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
<b>White</b>	83	17	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	92	8	100
<b>African American</b>	90	10	100
<b>Asian</b>	91	9	100
<b>Average</b>	87	13	100

Note: (n=572).

$p < 0.03$ .

As the data suggest, there is overwhelming support for the creation of a citizens' review board across all ethnic groups. Minority groups support the board more heavily than Whites, but the difference is not great.

This comprehensive support for such a board is echoed in the statements of community organizations and leaders. A Black leader views the creation of a board as "absolutely mandatory, in order to get the police officers to act appropriately." He firmly believes that police officers are trained and socialized to oppose any effort for outside investigation. "[Police officers]...will not hold each other to a high standard of performance, a high standard of integrity, a high standard of fairness, internally. They're just not made that way. They're taught from the day they get into the force that if you tell something on an officer, you will not be backed up on certain calls."<sup>16</sup>

Another African American leader views the staunch opposition to the citizens' review board by police officers as a strong indication of the need to have one. "[W]e need to have this police review board because they [APD] see this as a threat, as an antagonist, and I see this as a balancing act."<sup>17</sup>

A retired Black officer indicated the need for a board that would have teeth and broad powers of investigation. "Even the president of the United States has someone watching over him.... You got to have somebody unbiased, somebody not affiliated with the city or the police department out here.... Nobody wants somebody looking into their background

and into their actions, but if you are doing the right thing, what do you have to be afraid of?”<sup>18</sup>

Another interviewee pointed out that powerful individuals and institutions need some check on their power. “Why shouldn’t they [APD] have somebody watching over them? They have the power of life and death in their hand. It’s awesome the [power] the police officer has; he can take your liberty anytime he sees fit.... He’s got the whole city behind him. Who’s gonna look at his record? Nobody, because they’re confidential.”<sup>19</sup>

A retired Hispanic captain commented that some officers overreact and referred to a case in which two officers shot to death a drunk person armed only with a pointed stick. “Yes, we need a review board. It allows for a better watchdog over the police. The chief and the city manager do a fair job of monitoring, but it fails too often.”<sup>20</sup>

## Ethnic Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward City Services

Several survey items asked respondents about their views of the services offered by the City of Austin. The first asked citizens to generally rate their satisfaction with city services. The responses appear in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4**  
**Responses to Question “Overall, how satisfied are you with the various services provided by the City of Austin?”**

	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Very Dissatisfied/ Dissatisfied (%)	Total (%)
<b>White</b>	83	12	5	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	87	7	6	100
<b>African American</b>	78	8	14	100
<b>Asian</b>	79	18	3	100
<b>Average</b>	82	12	6	100

Note: (n=609).  
*p* <0.02.

### Satisfaction with City Services

The large majority of the respondents are satisfied with the various services provided by the City of Austin. On average, only a small proportion, 6 percent, were dissatisfied. This strong support of city services generally holds true along ethnic lines. African Americans, however, expressed a greater level of dissatisfaction than did the other three groups.

There were, on the other hand, some who voiced displeasure, especially with services and resources in East Austin. One observed, “When you look at investments in Austin, public infrastructure, it is not east of I-35. You can look at roads, water, sewer, schools. What kind of investment are you going to have next to a power plant or the tank farms [that are in East Austin]? You’re not gonna.”<sup>21</sup>

An Asian American leader also sounded a negative note: “The people in the community that feel the city is not really helping them are the people who might not have the language ability. This is survival. If you go to pay your water bill, and there is no one there to understand you, that’s frustrating.... People who do not speak the language feel that the city has not really done their job.”<sup>22</sup>

Another commented, “I think the city has done very poorly, so far, as far as the Asian Americans are concerned...it’s only in the talk...but in the action nothing has happened. And I think it’s appropriate for the citizenry to feel comfortable to get services from the city.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Satisfaction with Utility Services and City Parks**

The great majority of survey respondents reported that they were satisfied with utility services. Again, the satisfaction cuts across ethnic lines, though African Americans reported somewhat less satisfaction than did the other ethnic groups. Whites, Hispanics, and Asians reported roughly similar levels of satisfaction (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5**  
**Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the utility services (water, electricity, trash pickup) of the City of Austin?”**

	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Very Dissatisfied/ Dissatisfied (%)	Total (%)
<b>White</b>	75	10	15	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	77	12	11	100
<b>African American</b>	67	11	22	100
<b>Asian</b>	76	17	7	100
<b>Average</b>	74	12	14	100

Note: (n=608).  
p <0.01.

As the data indicate, African Americans and Asians reported slightly lower levels of satisfaction with the parks and recreation services than did Whites and Hispanics. Again, African Americans reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction, and Asians, the highest level of neutrality (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6**  
**Responses to Question “In general, how satisfied are you with the parks and recreation services of the City of Austin?”**

	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Very Dissatisfied/ Dissatisfied (%)	Total (%)
<b>White</b>	84	8	8	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	84	12	4	100
<b>African American</b>	77	9	14	100
<b>Asian</b>	79	18	3	100
<b>Average</b>	82	11	7	100

Note: (n=591).

$p < 0.000$ .

### **Equal Treatment from City**

Respondents were also asked whether they believe that all citizens receive the same quality of services (see Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7**  
**Responses to Question “In your opinion, do all ethnic groups receive the same quality of services from the City of Austin?”**

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
<b>White</b>	52	48	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	58	42	100
<b>African American</b>	38	62	100
<b>Asian</b>	78	22	100
<b>Average</b>	55	45	100

Note: (n=465).

\*Percentage of those expressing an opinion.

$p < 0.000$ .

As the data suggest, the majority of the sample are of the opinion that the city provides the same quality of services to all groups. These responses stand in contrast to the ones to the similar question in Table 4.1 concerning the APD. However, there are marked differences among certain ethnic groups.

African Americans, unlike the other groups, do not believe that groups are treated the same. Their responses were starkly negative. Nearly two-thirds do not believe the city is equitable in its services, indicating a wide gulf between them and the other groups. Asians, by contrast, were much more likely to answer in the affirmative than other groups. Whites and Hispanics share roughly the same views.

An African American interviewee commented, “I’m sure there’s some disparity in the services. Cleaner streets, road services, and things like that...things like trash.... I think that’s the disparity you’ll see—on how well they keep the streets.”<sup>24</sup>

An African American student leader commented, “I am not saying that East Austin is bad; I like it here, but just that this is the dark side of the tracks.... At least clean our streets and give us the same stuff that West Austin has!”<sup>25</sup>

A Hispanic spoke about the division between East and West Austin and expressed anger that the city has not made equality a priority. He noted, “We just saw a twenty-year plan for the city and there wasn’t anything in there about bridging I-35. In fact, the proposed light rail does not include any plans for East Austin in the first place.”<sup>26</sup>

A Japanese American felt that the Asian community has received much less attention from the City of Austin than other ethnic groups. He said:

I think that Austin is going to have to start paying attention to the Asian community. And if it doesn’t, then I think there are going to be some problems.... It’s the idea of taxation without representation. There just doesn’t seem to be things here that are really geared towards the Asian community.... You know, we have things here for the Hispanic community that’s governmentally supported; we have things here for the African American community that’s governmentally supported. I don’t really see those kinds of things available for the Asian community.<sup>27</sup>

### **Political Efficacy**

We were curious about whether Austin citizens perceive the Austin City Council to be representative of their positions on issues. The responses appear in Table 4.8.

On average, about a third of the sample agreed with the statement, a third disagreed, and the remaining third were neutral. Ethnicity again made a difference. Half of the Hispanics agreed that the city council reflects their views, followed by Asians, then by Blacks and Whites—the only question in the survey on which both Blacks and Whites agreed.

Various community leaders discussed the issue of representation with special reference to the “gentlemen’s agreement” discussed in Chapter 2. Several indicated that while the agreement provides some representation, the ability of the city council to represent minority views is quite limited. An African American politician noted, “In politics, there has not been a lot of change. You say we have a democratic system in the city, but when

you have seven-to-one odds [on the city council], yeah, you are represented, but to what degree? Can you get anything done?”<sup>28</sup>

**Table 4.8**  
**Responses to Question “How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement? ‘My views on city issues are reflected in the decisions made by the Austin City Council.’”**

	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly Disagree/Disagree (%)	Total* (%)
<b>White</b>	30	29	41	100
<b>Hispanic</b>	50	20	30	100
<b>African American</b>	30	29	42	101
<b>Asian</b>	44	39	18	101
<b>Average</b>	35	29	36	100

Note: (n=565).

\*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

$p < 0.001$ .

Other African Americans feel that despite their being guaranteed a seat, Black members of the council have not really been representative of the broader African American community. According to one Black reverend, “We got certain Blacks in position in the city council, and they ain’t doing nothing but being Black. They could care less about the community in a real way. They’re not trying to help us.”<sup>29</sup>

A Hispanic leader charged that the city council often ignores East Austin completely, including the views of Hispanics and African Americans who reside there. He noted, “If you empower East Austin, then what? Is the city going to go down the tubes? The fact is, they don’t want to deal with East Austin.”<sup>30</sup>

A member of an East Austin Hispanic organization expressed his belief that the city council does not represent the needs of his community: “The City Council is not meeting our needs. What we have to do then...we have to vote people out of there, and vote [for] people who are going to listen to what we have to say.”<sup>31</sup>

By contrast, a former member of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, himself Hispanic, expressed satisfaction with the representation of Hispanics for the City of Austin. He said of the minority population in Austin, “They are very well represented.... There are African Americans that hold high level jobs at the city.... Jesus [Garza] is Hispanic and he is the CEO of our city. And so I think there is some good representation.”<sup>32</sup>

One Asian American noted that while representation has improved for Hispanics and African Americans, Asians have not seen increased representation of their views in city government. He said, “If you look at the Asians, there are only one or two people.... We are having a hard time trying to get into the circle.... We are just being left out.”<sup>33</sup>

Other Asian interviewees indicated a sense of isolation from the city council and the political process. The president of an Asian organization commented, “There’s always the barrier that is more subtle...lack of outreach and lack of communication...and... asking for feedback on policies that affect the Asian American community.... I think that a lot more could be done.”<sup>34</sup>

## Concluding Observations

These findings indicate several major themes in the perception of the city and its services by its citizens. Overall, the picture is generally positive, with some notable exceptions. One such exception is citizens’ perceptions of the APD. Respondents have a favorable opinion of the APD, with a majority of each group expressing satisfaction with the APD *in general*; on the other hand, most of the community leaders who discussed the APD were quite critical—especially African Americans.

Much of the criticism concerns the impression that various groups of citizens are treated differentially, with Blacks and Hispanics getting the short end of the stick. There is a general sense, confirmed by the survey data, that the APD does *not* treat everyone the same. In fact, more than 70 percent of the survey respondents indicated that the APD’s treatment of various ethnic groups is unequal. A large amount of anecdotal material offered by those we interviewed supports this view, with many of them recounting instances in which the APD discriminated against ethnic minority individuals.

Even stronger is citizen opinion in favor of a citizens’ review board. Fully *87 percent* of the survey members believe such a board should be instituted, and there is little variation among the various ethnic groups as to its necessity. We also found very strong support for the creation of such a board among those we interviewed.

Most respondents thought that the city is doing extremely well in general in the area of service delivery. More than three-quarters of our sample reported they are satisfied in general with city services; again, there is little variation among ethnic groups, though Blacks reported greater dissatisfaction. A similar pattern emerges from respondents’ views of utility services and parks and recreation. A substantial majority of citizens reported satisfaction in both areas—82 percent in the case of parks and 74 percent in the case of utilities.

One cause for concern is the rather small majority of respondents (55% on average) who believe that the city treats all ethnic groups equally. Blacks are again the exception: nearly two-thirds feel that the city is *not* impartial in its dealings with various ethnic communities.

Finally, the sample is split evenly on whether the decisions of the city council reflect respondents' views on issues. Roughly a third of the respondents reported that their views *are* reflected and a third that their views are *not* reflected; the remaining third were neutral. Whites and African Americans were most likely to disagree that the council is reflective of their views.

One trend among ethnic group responses is especially striking. On nearly all items, Blacks reported the least satisfaction and the greatest dissatisfaction. They were the most dissatisfied with the APD and most likely by far to report that all ethnic groups are not treated equally by the police. They were the most dissatisfied with city services in general, the most dissatisfied with utility services and parks (though the level of dissatisfaction was quite low), and, along with Whites, were most likely to report that the city council is not reflective of their views. As we discuss in the conclusion of this report, a good case can be made that Blacks are the most alienated group.

Hispanic respondents by and large tend to have more positive attitudes and perceptions about the city and the services it provides than do other ethnic minority groups. Asian respondents tend to be more unsure or neutral in their responses to questions than do other ethnic groups and least likely to hold negative opinions about the city and its services.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Kristoffer Lands, Reverend, Greater Calvary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Interview by Emily Trevino with Louie White, Retired Captain, APD, Austin, Texas, November 5, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Emily Trevino with Jeffrey Travillion, Former President, Austin NAACP, Austin, Texas, October 8, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Interview by Richard Schott with John Vasquez, Retired Captain, APD, Austin, Texas, July 18, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Interview by Leanne Nhan with Channy Soeur, President, Cambodian Foundation, Austin, Texas, November 11, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Interview by Leanne Nhan with Amy Mok, President, Asian American Alliance, Austin, Texas, October 29, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Travillion interview.

<sup>8</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Joseph Parker, Reverend, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 25, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Lands interview.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Vasquez interview.

<sup>12</sup> Interview by Frank Fernandez with Pedro Garza, Regional Director, Texas Department of Commerce, Austin, Texas, December 16, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Travillion interview.

<sup>14</sup> White interview.

<sup>15</sup> Travillion interview.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> White interview.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Vasquez interview.

<sup>21</sup> Garza interview.

<sup>22</sup> Interview by Leanne Nhan with Amy Mok, President, Asian American Alliance, Austin, Texas, September 22, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Gopal Guthikonda, Trustee, India Community Center, Austin, Texas, November 29, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Volma Overton, Former President, Austin NAACP, Austin, Texas, December 1, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Interview by Katherine Saunders with Brad Jackson, Student Leader, Huston-Tillotson College, Austin, Texas, December 11, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Garza interview.

<sup>27</sup> Interview by Larry Phillips with Cecil Lawson, President, Japan Society of Austin, Austin, Texas, November 2, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Willie Lewis, Member, Austin City Council, Austin, Texas, November 9, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Lands interview.

<sup>30</sup> Garza interview.

<sup>31</sup> Interview by Terrelene Gene with Marcos DeLeon, Member, El Concilio, Austin, Texas, October 5, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Interview by Frank Fernandez with Gary Valdes, Former Head of Austin Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas, November 23, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Guthikonda interview.

<sup>34</sup> Interview by Larry Phillips with Jennifer Kim, President, Asian American Democrats of Texas, Austin, Texas, October 13, 1999.

## **Chapter 5. Current Reconciliation Efforts in Austin**

This chapter discusses current activities designed to improve race relations in Austin via the Austin Human Rights Commission and the Council for Community Reconciliation. It also examines the role of religious groups, provides background on the history of efforts to introduce a citizens' review board to monitor the Austin Police Department (APD), and reviews the work of the Citizens' Police Academy.

### **The Austin Human Rights Commission (AHRC)**

The Austin Human Relations Commission, later renamed the Austin Human Rights Commission (AHRC), was established in October 1967 by City of Austin Ordinance 671005-B.<sup>1</sup> Since then, its mandate has been modified several times. Today, it is concerned with a wide range of discrimination complaints, including race, religion, sex, age, physical handicap, and sexual orientation, especially in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations.<sup>2</sup> Its mandate includes the charge to “act as an advisory body on non-discrimination policies, aid in forming local community groups, investigate complaints of prejudice and discrimination, and conduct educational programs.”<sup>3</sup> The AHRC is composed of eleven members appointed by the city council. The city's Human Resources Department conducts investigations of citizen complaints; the AHRC makes recommendations on their resolution.<sup>4</sup>

The AHRC is charged with enforcing four city ordinances: the Employment Ordinance (940210-B), the Housing Ordinance (770825-F), the Public Accommodations Ordinance (760410-D), and the AIDS Ordinance (861211-V). The AHRC is also empowered to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employers from discriminating based on race, religion, sex, and nationality and to receive complaints under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), and the Equal Pay Act (EPA). Complaints under the ADEA and EPA are forwarded to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for investigation and resolution.<sup>5</sup> An agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides citizens the option of filing a housing discrimination complaint with either the AHRC or HUD.<sup>6</sup>

In most cases in which a complaint is filed with the AHRC, investigators determine whether there is sufficient evidence to prove the existence of discrimination. If the city's director of the Human Resources Department finds cause, the AHRC may issue formal charges of discrimination. If conciliation efforts fail, the AHRC (by majority vote) may forward the case to the city attorney for prosecution.<sup>7</sup>

On average, the Human Resources Department handles about 400-500 cases a year.<sup>8</sup> Table 5.1 indicates the number and disposition of cases for a recent fiscal year.

**Table 5.1**  
**Disposition of Discrimination Cases for Fiscal Year 1998-99**

<b>Case Type</b>	<b>Number Filed</b>	<b>Number Resolved</b>	<b>Pending</b>
<b>Title VII cases</b>	409	317	92
<b>Housing complaints</b>	28	7	21
<b>Ordinance complaints</b>	16	10	6

Source: Austin Human Rights Commission, Austin, Texas, August 1999 (meeting minutes).

More than two-thirds of the Title VII cases filed resulted in “no cause” findings (i.e., no proof of discrimination); 18 percent resulted in settlement agreements; 14 percent resulted in closures due to lack of jurisdiction; and only 5 percent represented cause findings.<sup>9</sup> Charles Gorham, the director of the Compliance Division of the Human Resources Department, indicated that the very small number of cause findings (where discrimination was substantiated) is due to the insufficient evidence available in the majority of cases.<sup>10</sup> Further, the relatively small number of complaints received indicates that very few persons avail themselves of the services of the AHRC. “Is there discrimination in Austin?” Gorham asked rhetorically. “Absolutely! We’re not even scratching the surface here.”<sup>11</sup>

To increase the AHRC’s capacity to resolve complaints, Gorham established a mediation unit in 1999. The complainant and the party alleged to have discriminated have the option of entering mediation, in which third-party neutrals can facilitate communication and possibly resolve the dispute. Mediation occurs before an investigation; and if it fails to produce resolution, the department proceeds with an investigation. Approximately 85 percent of mediations result in a negotiated settlement.<sup>12</sup>

The AHRC has also been active in publicizing issues of interest to the community. In January 1999, it conducted a panel discussion to raise awareness of hate crimes and later held several public forums on the topic. The vice chairman volunteered that in so doing, the AHRC wanted to raise “awareness of people who are victimized, so they will know to go and report it to the proper authorities.”<sup>13</sup> Further, members of the commission have taken active roles in various arenas, including testifying before the legislature on matters related to discrimination.

Several commissioners expressed concern that the AHRC and its role in discrimination matters are little known to the public. One commissioner urged that the AHRC needs to become much more visible in Austin:

[The AHRC] could be a very active and open forum for filing those grievances...but it’s only on a kind of word-of-mouth basis. One issue the commission really needs to work on...in terms of a public relations campaign [is] making it more known to the citizens of Austin that (1) the Human Rights Commission of Austin exists and (2) it’s an open forum and a public meeting

where anyone in the city of Austin can come...to present what they feel is a very important issue, not necessarily related to racial issues, but anything that the Human Rights Commission has governance over, which is discrimination and bias in housing, employment, or basic human constitutional due process. And I think it can become, if we basically advertise that it exists, a very active component in the city in terms of those issues. So that's where I'd like to see it go.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Council for Community Reconciliation (CCR)**

Following the Cedar Avenue incident on Valentine's Day, 1995, the subsequent filing of lawsuits, and the settlement with most of the plaintiffs in the summer of 1998, religious leaders, supported by Austin Mayor Kirk Watson, issued a document called "Commitment to Racial Reconciliation" in December 1998.<sup>15</sup> The document recognized ethnic and racial divides in the city and committed the signatories to confront racism and prejudice and help build bridges among Austin's ethnic groups. The preamble of the document noted, "Austin, Texas, is a community divided within itself today. The concrete and asphalt barrier called IH 35, which geographically splits our city east from west, also generally segregates our minority communities which are often ignored and frequently impoverished. Community reconciliation is needed in Austin."<sup>16</sup>

It continued:

One of the key contributions to racial tension in Austin today is the denial by many that racism exists and the refusal on the part of the many in the White community to listen seriously to those who continue to suffer its effects.... If we are going to attain community reconciliation then White Austinites can no longer deny the reality of racist laws, institutions, customs, and conditioned reflexes. Nor can they deny that this evil continues to plague our present. For if these racist attitudes and practices are not acknowledged, condemned and abandoned they will curse our future.<sup>17</sup>

In support of the reconciliation effort, the mayor charged a group of community leaders to study the issues involved and develop initiatives to improve ethnic relations. At the same time, he appointed a task force to assess the feasibility of a citizens' review board over the APD.<sup>18</sup>

The initial meetings of the reconciliation task force were convened by the mayor's chief of staff and the executive director of Community Action Network (CAN), a nonprofit organization involved in public/private collaborative planning. During the summer of 1999, the task force organized and became the Council for Community Reconciliation (CCR), which meets monthly. The CCR is made up of some 18 Austin community and religious leaders and officials from city and county government. Ultimately, members will serve three-year terms.<sup>19</sup>

The CCR has four main functions: recruitment and conflict resolution; facilitating communication and reconciliation efforts among those who have been through mediation training (“Community Bridge Builders”); responding to racial conflicts (“Conflict Response and Transformation Team”); and recognizing significant reconciliation efforts and sponsoring events that celebrate Austin’s cultural diversity (“Community Reconciliation Recognition”).

Originally, the CCR, which functions as a board of directors, was led by cochairs; in the spring of 2000, it appointed an executive director to oversee daily operations.<sup>20</sup> The Austin Clergy Committed to Racial Reconciliation (ACCRR), a group of interested clergy from various faiths, serves as an advisory group to the CCR.

The CCR intends to be a continuing presence in Austin and is in the process of establishing itself as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its former cochair explained that the CCR will continue to be “active in areas that are or have the potential to divide the city along racial lines...and will work with the various institutions to educate and eradicate racism in their borders and lifespaces.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Austin Clergy Committed to Racial Reconciliation**

The ACCRR is composed of religious leaders whose role is to provide “moral and spiritual guidance on reconciliation.”<sup>22</sup> It had its origins in the Pastors’ Prayer Fellowship of Austin that formed in 1995 when African American Rev. Anthony Mays challenged a White pastor, Rev. Rick Randall, to build relationships between themselves and their congregations. They preached in each other’s churches, ate at each other’s homes, and nurtured personal ties between members of their congregations. One interviewee explained:

Pastor Mays essentially said, “We’ve got this March for Jesus that we do once a year. It gives the appearance that we’re more unified than we are. Let’s do something throughout the year.” So out of that the two of them developed a relationship between their churches, where they exchange pulpits.... So a group of pastors started meeting twice a month, prayer for the first Wednesday and then the third Wednesday the fellowship for breakfast...realizing that the only way the walls will come down is through relationships.<sup>23</sup>

Some 70 pastors signed a “Pastoral Covenant for Racial Reconciliation” in 1996. Since then, other pastors and their congregations have adopted and signed the covenant. Its preamble states, “The continuing racial division and discord in society, in general, and in the Christian community, in particular, clearly and painfully suggest the need for intentional and decisive action to promote reconciliation, peace, and unity.”<sup>24</sup> Signers agreed to “speak out against the sin of racism” and to build relationships with congregations of different racial groups.<sup>25</sup>

In August 1998, in the wake of heightened tensions associated with the Cedar Avenue incident, Mayor Watson invited clergy from various faiths to assume a leadership role in reconciliation efforts. To confirm their commitment, a committee of these clergy drafted

a document, the “Commitment to Racial Reconciliation,” which was signed by the larger group and made public in December 1998. Thereafter, the clergy and the mayor met on several occasions to discuss racial reconciliation issues. In the winter of 2000, these clergy formed the ACCRR, and that body continues to meet monthly on its own initiative.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Community Bridge Builders**

In December 1998, the clergy group and the mayor invited some 45 business, political, and religious leaders, as well as youth involved in the Cedar Avenue incident, to attend a Plowshares Institute workshop to learn conflict transformation (resolution) skills.<sup>27</sup> The institute is highly regarded for its substantial experience in conflict resolution in South Africa, in East and West Timor, and in major U.S. cities, such as Philadelphia and Los Angeles.<sup>28</sup> (As one participant commented, “It’s getting people to want to sit across the table from each other and really talk seriously without getting upset or hurt and walk away.”)<sup>29</sup> The basic Plowshares training focuses on conflict reduction in general, while the advanced training deals with issues specific to Austin.<sup>30</sup>

A major emphasis of the CCR has been bringing new organizations and individuals into the community reconciliation process and having them trained in conflict transformation via the Plowshares program. A main objective has been to build understanding of conflict transformation as a philosophy, to spread its message more broadly, and to expand participation.<sup>31</sup> Those who receive Plowshares training and are connected to the reconciliation effort are considered “Community Bridge Builders” and are expected to share their skills with the broader Austin community.<sup>32</sup>

### **Conflict Response and Transformation**

Another major goal of the CCR is to have a mechanism in place to respond to racial conflicts that may arise. It is developing the means to make available a rapid response to racial and ethnic incidents. It will provide information and resources to help address community conflict issues and recommend responses to incidents in a way that does not polarize the community.<sup>33</sup>

### **Community Reconciliation and Recognition**

A final function under the CCR is community reconciliation recognition. The goals are to “plan, organize, and execute events to bring the community closer together through recognizing and celebrating reconciliation and conflict transformation efforts”<sup>34</sup> and to celebrate the heritage and contributions of Austin’s various races and ethnicities.

### **Citizens’ Review Board**

The concept of a citizens’ board to review actions of the police was first raised in Austin some 20 years ago, but it lay dormant until the Cedar Avenue incident in the spring of 1995.<sup>35</sup> The events on Cedar Avenue brought to the surface underlying tensions between

Austin's ethnic minority groups and the city's police force. Several minority leaders questioned whether the police could investigate the incident fairly and recommended a citizens' review board to consider allegations of police misconduct.<sup>36</sup>

The fallout from this incident provided the catalyst for a series of public meetings addressing relations between the APD and city residents beginning in late 1998 after the settlement of the Cedar Avenue case. And it also led to major reviews of the APD and the viability of a citizens' review board.<sup>37</sup>

The City of Austin first hired Al Dean, a 34-year veteran of law enforcement and an African American, to direct a five-member consulting team to study accountability in the APD. The team interviewed Austin police officers, conducted a survey among APD employees, spoke with residents, and studied past management of citizen complaints. Several open forums were held to allow public comment.<sup>38</sup>

In March 1999, Dean presented his findings and recommendations to the chief of police and the city manager. He reported the existence of a marked feeling of mistrust of the APD among Austin's African American and Hispanic communities—especially of the APD's Internal Affairs Division. Although the report contained serious criticism of the APD and its accountability processes, Dean recommended against the creation of a review board, suggesting it would further polarize the relationships between the APD and Austin's ethnic minorities.<sup>39</sup>

Also in March 1999, the city council began its own study of the issue and in June created a ten-member task force, the Police Oversight Focus Group. The council charged it with deciding how the APD could better be supervised; whether a citizens' review board should be created; and, if created, how much authority it should have.<sup>40</sup>

In March 2000, after many months of intense deliberation, the panel arrived at a consensus recommending the creation of such a board. Among its recommendations was that officer files remain closed to the public.<sup>41</sup> Other provisions included authorizing the city manager to hire a police monitor and staff and holding citywide open nominations for the nine-member panel. The monitor and review board were to hold regular meetings, inform citizens of procedures to submit complaints, and monitor the APD's internal investigation of those complaints. After the APD's own review of a complaint, the review board would be entitled to ask the APD to further investigate the complaint, request reconsideration of the chief of police's decision, make its own recommendations, or ask for an independent investigation.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Citizens' Police Academy**

The Citizens' Police Academy, which introduces Austin citizens to the workings of the APD, began in 1987 under former Chief Jim Everett as a part of the community policing initiative. To date, 39 classes have been held, and roughly 1,300 persons have participated. The academy offers a 12-week program designed to give the public a

working knowledge of the APD. Three academy sessions are offered per year, with each session involving approximately 35 hours of instruction.<sup>43</sup>

Classes are held once a week in the evenings, and a different topic is offered each week. Among the items covered are communications, officer training, patrols, the K-9 corps, S.W.A.T., and recruiting. Participants spend a night on a ten-hour patrol shift, tour police headquarters, and conduct mock building searches during which they carry weapons that fire blanks. Students learn, among other things, how to subdue an assailant, how to deal with a stalker, and what is involved in running a neighborhood substation.<sup>44</sup> Some 1,000 persons a year, many of them senior citizens, participate in the program; the ethnic composition of those attending is not known.<sup>45</sup>

## **The Religious Community**

Religious leaders played a substantial role in the recent reconciliation initiatives, as witness the Pastors' Prayer Fellowship and the "Pastoral Covenant for Racial Reconciliation." Their work provided a base from which the mayor could assemble a task force that later became the Council for Community Reconciliation.

Religious groups have taken additional steps to promote reconciliation, such as the event on Pentecost Sunday in May 1999, when some 3,000 individuals from 24 churches—Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians—gathered in Palmer Auditorium for services. Rev. Rick Randall, one of several who addressed the group, stated, "Dr. King said, '11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.' We intend to show that is not true, at least in Austin."<sup>46</sup>

One of the several interfaith organizations in Austin, the Austin Metropolitan Ministries (AMM) has been active in establishing dialogue among some 150 congregations and ministries across the city, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Sikhs, Hindus, Unitarians, and Mormons. Patrick Flood, the executive director of AMM from 1988 to 1999, described its aims:

One is to have communication open between the various faith bodies of the city. There are denominations of Christianity and the nondenominational Bible churches, but [AMM is] also inclusive of other religious bodies. All are members of Austin Metropolitan Ministries. So we seek to keep a communication network, dialogues, a sharing of tradition and our faith journeys together.... Second is to be able to do things together in a relational way that would be addressing the quality-of-life needs or the common good in the community. And that would be in relationship to the social equity, that all share in the benefits of community. And we would address minority groups, elderly, poor, poverty. And we would have definite programs that would be worked through, that the congregations and volunteers work as a common program.<sup>47</sup>

Flood also described the AMM as having a mission of policy advocacy designed to improve the lives of people and emphasized that reconciliation is a major concern.<sup>48</sup>

An example of one of the service projects sponsored by the AMM is the Hands on Housing program, which assists persons who are elderly or disabled and lower-income homeowners in Austin. Since it started in 1990, Hands on Housing volunteers have rehabilitated more than 450 homes, many, if not most, in East Austin.<sup>49</sup>

A cochair of the CCR emphasized the potential of religious organizations to help reach out to the Austin community at large.

We live in the same community, so let's do what we can to bring peace to the community and instill those activities and relationships that would help bring stability among the various cultures.... So why don't we pool our creative brains, come together instead of pointing fingers and saying, "It's the minorities' fault." Why don't we pool our talents, come together and say, "All right, let's try and solve the problem. What can we do to make neighborhoods safe? What can we do to instill a sense of community?"... But there ought to be a sense that we're in this together. And no part of this city ought to go down with the rest of us saying, "Oh, gee, that's too bad what happened over there in East Austin, Southeast Austin, or Northwest Austin." We ought to say, "Gee, we're not going to let that happen."<sup>50</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> City of Austin, Austin Human Rights Commission (AHRC). Online. Available: <http://www.ci.Austin.tx.us/hrights/hrcomm.htm>. Accessed: February 9, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> AHRC, Austin, Texas, August 1998 (meeting minutes).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Telephone interview by Tiffany Reyes with Charles Gorham, Executive Director, Compliance Division of the Human Resources Department, City of Austin, Austin, Texas, March 27, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> AHRC, October 1997 (meeting minutes).

<sup>10</sup> Gorham interview.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Discussion on Hate Crimes Set for Today," *Austin American-Statesman* (January 28, 1999), p. B-2.

<sup>14</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Dr. Michael Supancic, Commissioner, AHRC, Austin, Texas, February 21, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> "Austin Residents Urged to Acknowledge Racism," *Austin American-Statesman* (December 2, 1998), p. A-1.

<sup>16</sup> "Commitment to Racial Reconciliation," signed November 20, 1998, Austin, Texas.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "A Unified Effort," *Austin American-Statesman* (July 25, 1998), p. A-10.

<sup>19</sup> “Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation Process,” July 23, 1999 (meeting summary), provided by Fred Butler, Executive Director, Community Action Network (CAN), Austin, Texas.

<sup>20</sup> Ashton Cumberbatch, Cochair, Council for Community Reconciliation (CCR), personal communication, Austin, Texas, July 27, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Ashton Cumberbatch, Cochair (CCR), email to Richard L. Schott, March 27, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> “Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation Process.”

<sup>23</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Ashton Cumberbatch, Cochair, CCR, Austin, Texas, November 16, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> “Pastoral Covenant for Racial Reconciliation,” provided by Ashton Cumberbatch, Member, Pastors’ Prayer Fellowship, Austin, Texas, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Cumberbatch communication.

<sup>27</sup> “Conflict Resolution,” *Austin American-Statesman* (December 15, 1998), p. A-15.

<sup>28</sup> “Racial Reconciliation Requires Practice,” *Austin American-Statesman* (July 25, 1998), p. A-11.

<sup>29</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Margaret Gomez, Travis County Commissioner, Precinct 4, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Fred Butler, Executive Director, CAN, and Member, CCR, Austin, Texas, October 27, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation Process.”

<sup>33</sup> Butler interview.

<sup>34</sup> “Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation Process.”

<sup>35</sup> “City Should Consider Citizen Review Board,” *Austin American-Statesman*, (March 14, 1999), p. E-2.

<sup>36</sup> Bob Banta, “Police Critics Challenge Report: Some Minority Leaders Say Call for Austin Civilian Review Board Was Ignored,” *Austin American-Statesman* (March 10, 1999), p. A-1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “City Should Consider Citizen Review Board,” p. E-2.

<sup>40</sup> Bob Banta, “Who Should Watch Police? Public Input Sought on Whether Austin Needs Citizen Board for Complaints,” *Austin American-Statesman* (August 17, 1999), p. B-1.

<sup>41</sup> Jason Spencer, “Police Oversight Group Puts Together Proposal,” *Austin American-Statesman* (March 28, 2000), p. B-5.

<sup>42</sup> “Final Report and Recommendations of the Austin City Council Police Oversight Focus Group,” April 14, 2000. Online. Available: [http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/news/pofg\\_1.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/news/pofg_1.htm). Accessed: July 20, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Kerry Haglund, “Community Policing a Familiar Concept in Austin,” *Austin American-Statesman* (August 30, 1992), p. A-10.

<sup>44</sup> Eunice Moscoso, “Classes Give Austinites a Closer Look at Policing,” *Austin American-Statesman* (November 29, 1997), p. B-1.

<sup>45</sup> Interview by Tonya Cruz with Joe Muñoz, Citizens’ Police Academy Program Coordinator, APD, Austin, Texas, November 18, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> “Worship Service to Celebrate Racial Unity,” *Austin American-Statesman* (May 21, 1999), p. B-11.

<sup>47</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Patrick Flood, Executive Director, Austin Metropolitan Ministries (AMM), Austin, Texas, December 7, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> AMM, “Hands on Housing Action Program.” Online. Available: [http://www.ammaustin.org/pgm\\_hoh.htm](http://www.ammaustin.org/pgm_hoh.htm). Accessed: January 27, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Cumberbatch interview.



## Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### A Context for Ethnic Relations

In addition to the specific issues we studied in this report, there emerged a set of broader themes that seemed to permeate our discussions with community leaders. One of these is the seeming disaffection of minority groups in Austin from the dominant White culture. There was a sense of mistrust, a feeling of isolation, frustration at being ignored, and suspicion of what is perceived as the White-dominated power structure of Austin. Minority participants sometimes used such terms as “calculating,” “uncaring,” “hypocritical,” and “manipulative” in describing the relationships between the dominant culture and minority groups. A few believed that there existed a strategy, even a conspiracy, to keep minority groups “in their place.”

There was also an almost wistful hope that Whites might reengage with the struggle for civil rights and social equity. Some leaders mourned the passing of the spirit of the 1960s, when liberal Whites stood shoulder to shoulder with Blacks in the South. Some felt that the current generation is much more bent on making money and less socially conscious than the previous one. Much of the energy of progressive Whites, in these leaders’ view, has shifted from issues of social equity to those of environmental protection. Whites are now more interested in saving rare birds and salamanders than in addressing the issues of poverty and inequity.

Of the groups we examined, African Americans were far and away the most alienated. They reported more frequent discrimination than any other group and were consistently more negative in their evaluations of city services, especially the Austin Police Department (APD), than Whites, Hispanics, or Asians. Asians were generally at the other end of the spectrum. They seem most supportive in their views of city services but, on many questions, reported they were neutral or not informed. Their seemingly low level of interest may be due to the insularity reported by many leaders of the Asian community, who observed that the reference point for most Asians is their nation of origin rather than the Austin community or city politics.

It is often hard to disentangle issues of race from issues of income. As a group, Asians have the highest per capita income, followed by Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, and Native Americans, in that order. Thus these last three groups tend more frequently to fall in the lower socioeconomic strata. It is apparent that the tremendous economic growth of the past decade has left many persons of color behind. Most studies indicate that income disparity has increased during the current expansion and that lower income groups, many of them of color, have been left behind.<sup>1</sup>

Several participants argue that the current emphasis on income distorts or downplays the importance of ethnicity, as if one can “explain away” race relations problems by couching them in economic terms. As one educator argued, racial issues in Austin have “been masked in economics. There is a difference between the poor and the nonpoor, but

what's happening now is that we are lumping everyone in this category of economically disadvantaged and not paying attention to race, and race is still there simmering."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the leaders we interviewed referred to the fact that East Austin was historically designated for people of color and that today it still remains underserved. Some charged that city policies, especially in economic development, have exacerbated tension among ethnic groups. We often heard the complaint that the city's economic policies favor the wealthy, leaving Blacks and Hispanics to fight over the crumbs. This disparity appears to have increased tension between these two groups. And the tension seems heightened by the relative growth in the number of Hispanics, who now constitute 28 percent of Austin's population, along with the decline in the relative number of African Americans, now at 13 percent. The relative increase in the Hispanic population is expected to continue.

At the same time, there is fear of White encroachment on East Austin neighborhoods. As gentrification proceeds, many residents fear being priced out of their original neighborhoods and forced to look farther out for housing.

## **Major Findings**

Perhaps the broadest conclusion that can be drawn from our study is that race relations remain a serious problem in Austin. That can be said, of course, of most cities in America, but the fact seems to fly in the face of Austin's image as a progressive, enlightened city with few major social problems. Those we interviewed in the minority communities, almost to a person, view this image as flat wrong if not hypocritical. Some, who see the issue in more polarized terms, believe that the White "power structure" likes to keep it this way.

As one Black pastor put it, "There is a tension beneath the surface and a frustration level beneath the surface, and I think it's going to have to be dealt with.... [W]hites can be deceived by thinking that because they didn't see dogs and fire hoses like in Birmingham or fires in Detroit and Chicago...things are going all right."<sup>3</sup> In Austin, as another observer suggested, issues of race are "back on the table."<sup>4</sup>

The survey data confirm this negative view of race relations, but they also indicate that it is not just a minority view. Whites do not appear to minimize the existence of racial tension in Austin. More than 60 percent of Blacks, Hispanics, *and* Whites characterized the state of ethnic relations in Austin as only fair to poor. Two-thirds of all respondents perceive substantial tension between Whites and Blacks, and a majority see tension both between Whites and Hispanics and between Blacks and Hispanics.

Discrimination against minority individuals continues. Forty-six percent of African Americans reported at least one incident of ethnic discrimination during the past year, followed by Hispanics (35%), Asians (21%), and Whites (12%). Blacks were much more likely than other groups to report multiple instances, often three or more. This "hierarchy" of reported discrimination generally held for the three major types we

studied—jobs, housing, and shopping. Whites reported that the most frequent discrimination they experienced came from African Americans and Hispanics, while both African Americans and Hispanics reported that Whites were the primary source of discrimination against them.

By contrast, our survey data indicate that most residents of Austin appear, at least by self-description, to be quite tolerant. The great majority of our respondents (87%) rejected the notion that neighborhoods should have the right to exclude persons on the basis of their ethnicity or beliefs. And they spurned the notion of neighborhood segregation. Though some respondents preferred that neighborhoods be composed of persons of similar economic and educational backgrounds, just slightly over a quarter held this view. Blacks and Whites were more liberal and less exclusive in their views concerning neighborhood uniformity, while Hispanics and Asians were somewhat more conservative or insular in their responses.

Survey respondents gave very high marks to the services provided by the City of Austin, save for the APD. The overwhelming majority (82%) expressed satisfaction with service provision in general, with relatively little difference among various ethnic groups. This satisfaction extended to the provision of utilities and to parks and recreation facilities. In the view of most respondents, the City of Austin generally provides equal treatment to various ethnic groups. Overall, some 55 percent endorsed this view. Black respondents, however, are a notable exception: *62 percent* responded that in their view, all ethnic groups do *not* receive equal treatment from the city—a position echoed by many, if not most, Blacks we interviewed.

Relationships with the APD by citizens in general and various ethnic groups in particular are much more problematic. Although a majority (57%) of respondents rated the APD's performance as satisfactory, comments from community leaders were generally quite critical. One Black leader alleged, "Officers know that if they're in East Austin, as long as they don't kill anybody, they can rough them up and nobody will say too much."<sup>5</sup> And a retired APD captain, referring to a recent incident in which a minority individual died while in police custody, charged: "If I did the same thing as a citizen...they would put me away. But it seems like the police department has a license to kill."<sup>6</sup>

Fully 71 percent, on average, of those who offered an opinion hold the view that the APD is inequitable in its treatment of various ethnic groups. This view was expressed most strongly by African Americans (83%) and the least frequently by Asians (53%). Racial profiling and discrimination on the part of APD officers seemed largely taken for granted by minority community leaders.

Of all the issues we studied, none had such a strong resonance among both survey respondents and community leaders as the creation of a citizens' review board. Fully 87 percent favored the creation of such a board, with more than 90 percent of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians answering in the affirmative. Eighty-three percent of White respondents were also in favor. Not one person we interviewed was opposed.

## Recommendations

1. **The City of Austin should establish a Citizens' Review Board to oversee the Austin Police Department.**

It is obvious from our data and interviews that the creation of a citizens' review board has overwhelming support among Austin residents from all ethnic groups.

2. **The City of Austin should better publicize the existence of its discrimination ordinances, make better known the existence of the Austin Human Rights Commission (AHRC), and inform citizens of its role in handling discrimination complaints.**

The AHRC is a potentially powerful means of redress for those who have experienced discrimination. Two other venues, the Texas Commission on Human Rights and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are also available to complainants. However, as discussed above, there are only 400-500 cases brought to the AHRC each year. Moreover, the number of cases in which the complainant prevails is very small. This suggests that (1) most citizens are simply unaware of the AHRC's existence and the city's antidiscrimination ordinances and (2) citizens lack knowledge of the proper documentation and procedures to follow when making a complaint.

The city should better publicize the AHRC in the workplace and provide information on how to bring a complaint. Further, some mechanism should be provided, perhaps through the Council for Community Reconciliation (CCR), to provide technical assistance for those seeking to file complaints.

3. **The City of Austin should explore ways to involve the private sector and educational institutions more deeply in efforts to improve race relations in Austin.**

A successful effort in improving race relations cannot be accomplished just by the city, religious groups, and nonprofit organizations interested in reconciliation. We are struck by the assertion that Austin, if it is to attain parity with areas such as Portland, Oregon, and the San Francisco Bay area, must confront its ethnic and race relations problems. A comprehensive effort should ideally involve both the private sector and educational institutions. As the CCR is in the process of becoming a nonprofit entity in its own right, it may want to consider expanding its efforts in this direction.

4. **The City of Austin should study the race relations policies and programs of other cities to determine whether there exist successful ethnic conflict-reduction initiatives that might be adopted.**

**5. The City of Austin should expand public awareness of the Citizens' Police Academy and increase participation in its programs.**

The number of persons attending the Citizens' Police Academy should be increased, and records should be kept on the ethnicity of participants. The City of Austin should consider ways to make the academy accessible to more citizens, especially ethnic minority individuals.

**6. The City of Austin should review membership on its various advisory boards and commissions to ensure adequate representation from ethnic minority groups, especially Asians and Native Americans.**

Advisory boards and commissions are important in involving citizens in various aspects of city policy and administration. Representation of minority groups on these boards should be studied to determine whether minority representation is sufficient. Especially among Asians and Native Americans, there is sentiment that they do not have a place at the table.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chris King, Director, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, The University of Texas at Austin, personal communication to Richard Schott, August 8, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Interview by Dinah Sbelgio with Glenn Nolly, Area Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Amy Chang with Joseph Parker, Reverend, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 25, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Interview by Tiffany Reyes with Patrick Flood, Executive Director, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas, December 7, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Interview by Emily Trevino with Jeffrey Travillion, Former President, Austin NAACP, Austin, Texas, October 8, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Interview by Emily Trevino with Louie White, Retired Captain, APD, Austin, Texas, November 5, 1999.

## Appendix

### Policy Research Project Interviewees

**Charles Akins**, Associate Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Susana Almanza**, Executive Director, PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources), Austin, Texas

**Vince Bland**, President, Native American Parents Group, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Rick Bradstreet**, Psychologist, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Fred Butler**, Executive Director, Community Action Network, Austin, Texas

**Dr. George Chang**, Chairperson, Asian American Employee Alliance, Austin, Texas

**Khanh Chau**, President, Vietnam Nationalist Committee, Austin, Texas

**David Chen**, President, Asian American Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Sam Chen**, Former President, Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Ashton Cumberbatch**, Cochair, Council for Community Reconciliation, Austin, Texas

**Debasree Dasgupta**, Chairperson, India Community Center, Austin, Texas

**Marcos DeLeon**, President, East Town Lake Citizens' Association, and Member, El Concilio, Austin, Texas

**Ronnie Earle**, District Attorney, Travis County, Austin, Texas

**Loretta Edelen**, Board Member, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Patrick Flood**, Executive Director, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas

**Dianne Galaviz**, Development and Communication Manager, Capital Metro, Austin, Texas

**Arnold Garcia**, Editorial Editor, *Austin American-Statesman*, Austin, Texas

**Gus Garcia**, Member, Austin City Council, Austin, Texas

**Frank Garrett**, Reverend, KAZI 88.7 FM, Austin, Texas

**Jesus Garza**, City Manager, City of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Mario Garza**, Program Director, Culture Contacts, Austin, Texas

**Pedro Garza**, Regional Director, Texas Department of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Margaret Gomez**, Travis County Commissioner, Precinct 45, Austin, Texas

**Charles Gorham**, Executive Director, Compliance Division of the Human Resources Department, City of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Gopal Gothikonda**, Trustee, India Community Center, Austin, Texas

**Ana Guzman**, Executive Vice President, Administration and Institutional Advancement, Austin Community College, Austin, Texas

**Brad Jackson**, Student Leader, Huston-Tillotson College, Austin, Texas

**Jennifer Kim**, President, Asian American Democrats of Texas, Austin, Texas

**Kristoffer Lands**, Reverend, Greater Cavalry Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

**Cecil Lawson**, President, Japanese Society of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Herman Lessard**, President and CEO, Urban League, Austin, Texas

**Willie Lewis**, Member, Austin City Council, Austin, Texas

**Mark Madrid**, Education Director, Austin Latino Lesbian/Gay Organization, Austin, Texas

**Mike McDonald**, Assistant Police Chief, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Robert Mendoza**, Associate Principal, Travis High School, Austin, Texas

**Mamata Mistra**, President, SAHELI, Austin, Texas

**Amy Mok**, President, Asian American Alliance, Austin, Texas

**Randy Moreno**, Former President, Hispanic Firefighters Association, Austin, Texas

**Joe Muñoz**, Citizens' Police Academy Program Coordinator, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Glen Nolly**, Area Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Volma Overton**, Former President, Austin National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Austin, Texas

**Joseph Parker**, Reverend, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

**Velma Roberts**, Vice President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas

**Channy Soeur**, President, Cambodian Foundation, Austin, Texas

**Catherine Solomon**, Board Member, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas

**William Suh**, President, Korean Association of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Michael Supancic**, Commissioner, Austin Human Rights Commission, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Chat Thiet**, Program Director, Walnut Creek Elementary ESL Program, Austin, Texas

**Lai Tram**, Asian American Liaison, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Jeffrey Travillion**, Former President, Austin National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Austin, Texas

**Dorothy Turner**, President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas

**Gary Valdes**, Chairman, Austin Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**John Vasquez**, Retired Captain, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Elena Vela**, Human Resources Coordinator, Common Bonds Program/Department of Human Resources, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**John Waukechon**, Former Director, Austin Independent School District Title IX Program, Austin, Texas

**Samuel Wheeler**, Project Coordinator, Upward Bound of Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas

**Louie White**, Retired Captain, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Patrick Worlds**, Police Officer, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas





