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# Fighting Segregation, Teaching Multiculturalism: The Beginning of the Education/Instruccion Narrative of the 1970s Hartford Civil Rights Movement

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# FIGHTING SEGREGATION, TEACHING MULTICULTURALISM:

The Beginning of the Education/Instrucción Narrative  
of the 1970s Hartford Civil Rights Movement

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## **WEB OF POWER: MAPPING INSTITUTIONAL RACISM**

The year was 1970. Three eager individuals gathered in a small recently bought storefront office space at 1170 Albany Avenue<sup>1</sup> in the North End of Hartford. They were focused. They were determined to deeply investigate, unearth, and eliminate institutional racism in the city of Hartford. The first step was this map of where it was at – locating power. They cut pieces of paper with lists of the Boards of Directors of all the major corporations in Hartford – the insurance companies, the banks, the real estate agencies. Gluing names on the wall they realized that names were repeated on Boards across companies. Pasting cut up string they connected the names; they had created a web of power. They had linked together names that were on multiple Boards. Power was in the hands of a few white men.<sup>2</sup>

This was the beginning of Education/Instrucción.

It was right here in this room where their conversations had led to the mapping of power. There were three of them: Julia Ramos, Ben Dixon, and Boyd Hinds. Each person came to the room with very different frames of reference. Later to be described as pop culture's 1970s Mod Squad (a group of 3 hip multi-cultural crime fighters) "because, you know, when [people] saw us coming, they always expected some kind of problem or issue to arise,"<sup>3</sup> the co-directors of E/I were from stark different backgrounds but held a common moral compass. Ramos was a Puerto Rican woman who grew up traveling with her father who was in the military. She spoke Spanish, English, German, and French, and was a recent graduate from University of Hartford. Dixon was a Black man who had grown up in the North End of Hartford, seen his mother fight for his opportunity to be prepared for college, and received a music education degree at Howard University, returning to Hartford to teach shortly after. Boyd Hines was the white man of the group, who had grown up in a middle class background in Hartford and was involved in the 60s students movement, which gave him some experience with the Civil Rights Movement of Hartford. It was Hinds who brought both Dixon and Ramos to teach at the Westledge School, an experimental private school in

West Simsbury, which sought to give a wider range of opportunities to young Black and Puerto Rican boys and as Ramos describes, was run by men with white guilt. They left the school, dissatisfied with the “band aid” approach to a larger systemic issue. They left to address institutionalized racism, the root cause of poverty, housing disparities, lack of quality educational opportunities, underemployment, and lack of governmental voice. As we will see it was E/I’s very unique and consciousness-shifting strategies that have pushed us to create a new category of activism, beyond that which is solely militant or radical and that which is solely negotiate or reformist. We call Education/Instrucción radical reformists so as to use the language people use but in putting these words together complicating the previous misconception of these labels being so distant from each other.

The story of Education/Instrucción is one that begins to explore what it means to be multi-cultural and try to teach multi-culturalism, what it means to think in a changing spatial environment which manifests itself in growing suburban power, what it means to use education as the tool for both the organizations’ own mental and group growth and for state/business-level consciousness, and what a new form of militancy looks like when the state-business power structure refuses to be consulted. The narrative of Education/Instrucción emerges from a dynamic shift in the Civil Rights movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century while remembering the striking radical roots of its recent past. This story is about a group of three individuals from very different walks of life who come together at a poignant political and community mobilizing moment in Hartford, CT. Much like other cities, the Hartford of the 1970s is in a whirlwind of both federal money and unmet local community challenges.

In search of and in recovery of Education/Instrucción, I delved into the times and pondered over the activist strategy of this remarkable group whose story has not been told. What does E/I do in the 1970s (as this decade marks the primary time for which the co-founders are working in this organization) that mirrors or changes the way in which activism has been carried out in the past? This paper examines how and

why E/I came up with their civil rights strategy, how it compared to strategies of previous groups in Hartford and how it changed over time.

Education/Instrucción was an educational research action organization that set out to tackle institutional racism with a model to potentially appeal to these corporations. They set out to be consultants, strategically pinpointing the power brokers of the city and beyond the city limits and raising their consciousnesses to be able to deal with the growing multi-cultural world. But alas the power brokers, obstinate in their ways, were unreceptive, and although the well-educated, well-researched model was upheld, tactics slightly evolved from the radical roots of Hartford's civil rights movement had to be implemented. Militancy came into a new form. The racism of Hartford-based banks, insurance companies, real estate agencies and government bodies was exposed in the media as leverage to threaten their funding and legitimacy: pressure for their change. E/I was a model for a new form of resistance. Was this new model a compromise of the radicalism that had been its roots, or was it the fulfillment of early Civil Rights dreams? Is this a story of naivete and disillusionment, or of hard-nosed pragmatic activism that refuses to compromise its core beliefs? We will find the answers in the history of Hartford's struggles for equality, and in the biographies and interactions among the core activists who comprised Education/Instrucción.

## **RECOVERING THE ROOTS: AN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OVERVIEW OF BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN ACTIVISM IN HARTFORD**

In order to frame the activist work of Education/Instrucción it is important for us to delve back into the context and strategies of Black and Puerto Rican activists of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What were these activists confronting and how did they respond to the injustices? How did people of color in Hartford negotiate with the state and when did they have to embrace more militant forms of activism? It is important that we situate E/I in a place and time which has strong activist roots.

Black and Puerto Rican identified peoples in Hartford are critical agents of inquiring and disrupting the racist, sexist, classist conditions in which they find themselves. Their stories are a part of a sturdy lineage of negotiation and militant politics that interweave through various periods where the state and civil society is at unrest and needs are unmet. In order to map the kind of activist strategies of E/I we map out a basic outline of conditions and activist strategies from the Great Migration/New Negro Movement through the emerging 1970s identity politics. New Negroes claimed physical and intellectual spaces as resistance to the regimented confined living spaces to which they were relegated. Black men of the 1940s created government councils of their own outside of the government due to the lack of representation and access to government. With heightened distress and mistreatment around the workplace, schools, housing, and government agencies, Black women and men and incoming Puerto Ricans of the 1950s and 1960s were fed up and resorted to more militant strategies. Verbal negotiations and spaces were not enough. People marched, participated in boycotts and strikes, as well as rioted due to the inadequate responses to their demands. Here is a story of when negotiations are made between active people of color and the holder of resources. It is a story of how these negotiations are not enough. It is vital to note that weaved within the fabric of all of the employed activist strategies there has been collective story-telling and learning process that has given life to the movements. Education/Instrucción explicitly discusses their need for continual communication, bouncing off of ideas and sharing of stories in order to have the energy and be intentional about their approach to the overarching goal of eliminating institutional racism. Depending on the landscape and how it alters, we find how Black and Puerto Rican peoples in Hartford have navigated the city to push for needs being met.

In order to understand the ways in which strategies of Black and Puerto Rican-led activism formed and changed over time, we have to understand the landscapes for which it emerged. As we will see throughout the history of the activism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is particularly in the prosperous times of the city for which people of color are more and more aware of their isolation from this wealth and resources.

The history books will tell us that the city was booming but the communities of color that we are interested in here are battered even within these seemingly great moments.

By the turn of the century, Hartford had already become the insurance capitol of the nation. Six major banking and insurance companies reigned in Hartford – Aetna, Connecticut, Hartford, National, Orient, and Pheonix; these companies contributed to the accumulated wealth in the city.<sup>4</sup> By the declaration of World War I in 1917, Hartford's Colt was already hyper producing firearms for the war effort. Employment at just this company went from 800 to 8,000 during the war.<sup>5</sup> Hartford as a more visible whole was the home of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe in the earlier century. The city housed one of the top high schools in the state. Everyone wanted their children to attend the esteemed Hartford Public High School. The economy was quite healthy at the time and educated people were cultivating the city. But who got to reap the benefits and who was isolated further by these gains?

Black peoples' activism in Hartford is about claiming space at a moment of greater constraint in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Contrary to the passive characters described in the Charles S. Johnson report,<sup>6</sup> Black people are active in moving (The Great Migration), connecting, cultivating the educated Black elite, and forging spaces in both more confined Black areas as well as some negotiated spaces in other parts of the city. Black people in the earliest part of the century were dealing with the risk of leaving their homes to try and find new lives in northern cities as well as finding ways to re-define and cultivate spaces within the constraints. The confines of the living spaces, the lack of quality jobs, access to quality education and access to governing bodies were all issues that Blacks and later Puerto Ricans would be making negotiations, being resourceful, and making demands about.

Black people lived in close quarters in distinct areas in the North End of Hartford from early on. In Johnson's assessment of the "political division of the city" he finds that not only are there "10 wards" that the city is divided into but that there are "limitations to the mobility of the Negroes living there, and they are to be found packed closely together in communities," and "in those sections previously occupied by

whites who have moved to more desirable areas.”<sup>7</sup> As a report that Schlichting describes, “An analysis of the concentration of African Americans *within* the confines of Ward 3...shows that...35.7% of the total black population resided in just one ward...concentrated on just a few streets...Capen and Martin streets...make up a distinct African American area.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore,

...the homes of Negroes must, in point of location, conform to the larger community’s unwritten code. They must be located where Negroes are permitted to live. This same law operated to throw upon Negro communities...the burden of congestion and high rents. Property with little or no value for residence...deteriorated and impossible to keep in repair, usually takes on value when Negroes begin to live with each other for it...They must live here if nowhere and they are willing to pay dearly for the privilege of a dwelling.<sup>9</sup>

Much like the rest of American cities the dilapidated tenement style housing was a distinct living space for the New Negroes. These particular analysts allude to desperation for housing because of lack of possibilities and that Blacks may be paying more than the worth of the dwellings.

Both Black newcomers to Hartford and Blacks living there all their lives constantly dealt with the limited mobility within the workforce. During the war and at the point of Great Migration, southern blacks were being pulled into the tobacco fields outside of the city, residing in the barracks and then in the city itself. “Connecticut growers decided to recruit black agricultural workers from the South,” but when there was so much of a boom in the factories that really help war thrive like Colt Fire Arms, blacks wanted to take part in this money-making as well, but, “they were nevertheless relegated, for the most part, to unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.” And more than that,

Black workers with trades such as carpentry or bricklaying were excluded from labor unions and often were unable to find steady work in their professions. Black women faced even more severe workplace discrimination...According to the Encyclopedia of American Social History: African Americans were confined to so-called Negro jobs...where the work was heavy, hot, dangerous, and dirty...lower salaries...White women refused to work beside black women and demanded separate eating and sanitary facilities; white customers objected to black saleswomen, receptionists, and secretaries...the proportion of black women in domestic service grew from 44 percent in 1900 to 54 percent by 1930; it was one of the few areas of work open to them.<sup>10</sup>

But Black people actively chose to leave their homes, resisted the limitations in various ways, created new spaces and were entrepreneurs.

We often think of the Great Migration in very passive ways: southern Blacks were pulled up North by recruiters. But here we see that the Great Migration is one of the first massive acts of resistance from Southern violence and disenfranchisement. Although it is clear that the conditions of the North are quite



confining, the movement had agency in it. As we know from letters of southern Black migrants and assessments of prominent New Negroes, there was a conscious leaving of the South for the prospect of a better life, away from the white racial violence of the South, which makes more complex the notion of mere economic pull factors.<sup>11</sup> More black bodies moving into northern cities were seen as an asset to various factories and farms, but were also seen as a threat. Where would these bodies go? It is clear that most Blacks were again regulated to certain neighborhoods in the North End of Hartford. For Blacks who had lived there all their lives, some of them more educated, felt they had a moral obligation to integrate newcomer Blacks into the city. The women of the Colored Women's League were particularly involved in creating space to educate newcomers to the city so as to build a larger force of more critically minded, artistic, bright individuals and give them a sense of home in such a foreign place. The CWL along with others of similar foundation claimed both physical spaces (purchasing a center for their work) and utilizing this space for the educational and social growth of northern and newcomer southern Blacks, and even poor white children.<sup>12</sup> The Colored Women's League was a group involved in the overarching New Negro movement.

The New Negroes in Hartford, much like New Negroes around the country were re-defining what it meant to be Black in America. The re-defining took a variety of forms. The Black intelligentsia were mobilizing, negotiating with the political system and were beginning to burgeon their own community organizations such as the establishment of the church, Black fraternities and Black women founded clubhouses.<sup>13</sup> Some of the strongest institutions in the black community were churches such as the A.M.E. Zion Church. There were clearly various levels of organized resistance. As reported by a Trinity alum in her thesis on the creation of the North End of Hartford,

There are records of public statements by individual ministers or protests led by groups of ministers against: (1) the showing of the D.W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation*; (2) housing conditions for black residents; and (3) discrimination in employment. In addition a chapter of the NAACP was in the early stages of organization around 1917. One significant activity ... was a union organization effort among southern migrant women working in the tobacco industry.<sup>14</sup>

By 1930, op-ed pieces frequented *The Hartford Courant* signed by “THE NEW NEGRO” protesting white racial violence, showing solidarity with Southern blacks who had been wrongly accused of various crimes and beaten and burned, lynched by whites afraid of black self-determination.<sup>15</sup> Blacks were not just named the New Negroes; they claimed this identity, taking up both intellectual and physical space to do so.

Education/Instrucción would also find intellectual and physical space to claim their identity, but unlike the majority of the activists and activist organizations that we survey here, Education/Instrucción was much more inherently multi-cultural.

As more Blacks arrived in Hartford and the violence of the south began to further be on the minds of both whites and blacks alike, new negotiations were to be made. War and prosperity was soon met by the depression and war again, both abroad and at home. How was it that with a great a prosperous city could there be such maintenance of violence, lack of mobility, and lack of resources for Blacks? “...the boom of World War II failed to change the nature of employment, health, education, crime, and social welfare for African Americans.”<sup>16</sup> By the end of WWII, Blacks were still very much confined to dilapidated housing in pockets in primarily the North End of Hartford. In fact by 1940, one third of Connecticut’s black population lived in Hartford, 80% of which was quarantined to a 40 sq. block in the North End.<sup>17</sup> In 1943 race riots had spread across major cities such as Detroit, New York, and Beaumont.<sup>18</sup> There were no riots in Hartford but whites feared that this kind of violence could ensue. Blacks in Hartford felt deeply connected to the violence that flooded the streets of cities in the nation. Outraged over the brutal beating of a Hartford pastor, Rev. John Jackson of Union Baptist, in Alabama right around this time, Blacks were all the more ready to demand a dignified place in society.<sup>19</sup> There was a clear connection between southern and northern racism. In response to this threat and pressure by outraged Blacks as well as concern for recent immigrant populations, CT’s Governor Baldwin set up an inter-racial council supported by the National Urban League in 1943.<sup>20</sup> Governor Baldwin’s Commission’s (herein called “The Commission”) members seemed to be concerned with the possibility of racial violence getting much worse in the state of CT their

main concern was to ensure equal opportunity to jobs.<sup>21</sup> But Black representation on The Commission was disappointing and funds were meager. There was only one staff person and 10 members in The Commission.<sup>22</sup>

According to the men of the Colored Republican Club, assigning only 3 black officers to The Commission was not enough. With so little voices being heard a Commission that could advocate for a better allocation of jobs, improvement of housing, health care, and education ended in a much more “band-aid” approach to the situation. The issue of adequate employment was high on the minds of all parties, but the holistic approach to rehabilitation of the community was lacking. The 1944 National Urban League created a report of the times, similar to that of Johnson’s 1921 report, only that it made greater suggestions about the actual dollar value that Black Hartfordites should receive due to the tax base. Still, companies got away with employing blacks by putting them in lowly positions such as “building custodian, elevator operator...seamstress...” where they had no power in the decision-making or were rarely in skilled labor spheres of the companies.<sup>23</sup> Although The Commission said it would seek out “private real estate agents on making sure there are ‘decent and unrestricted housing opportunities for Negro families,’<sup>24</sup> housing patterns remained the same. And more black migrants were arriving, squeezed into dilapidated public housing in the North End of Hartford. The Commission itself was not completely ineffective. Although there were limited numbers on the Commission, The Commission-appointed staff member, Frank Simpson, a prominent Black businessman, was able to influence the programming enough to open up Hartford companies, construction unions, and department stores to black participation.<sup>25</sup> The Black community formed the Hartford Negro Citizens’ Council in order to put pressure on the government bodies and claim agency in city politics, but made it a point not to use violent tactics.<sup>26</sup> This illegitimate council as seen by the state-initiated commission and the one more active Black man of The Commission was not enough to make any real changes, just small negotiated job-related victories. As we will see in the Education/Instrucción story, E/I felt when its own tactics of trying to appeal to the institutions that they wanted to change were not enough, they built an

outside force (researched evidence of discrimination) that could gain much greater leverage to threaten the status quo of those institutions.

The “quiet negotiations” of the 1940s were so dissatisfying that the Black community had to resort to more militant methods in order to ensure their visibility and that their demands were seen as urgent.<sup>27</sup> The 50s and 60s brought more than just verbal negotiations. Marches, boycotts, strikes, and later rioting were manifestations of a community that felt negotiations were no longer satisfying their demands. Well into the 1950s, after the Fair Employment Practices Act of 1947,<sup>28</sup> Frank Simpson of the Commission would continually have to deal with companies that refused to abide by the law that forbid discriminatory practices. Many unions would deny Black membership. It was in the 1950s that the marches protesting inadequate housing and employment practices began to surface. It is also no coincidence that money going into urban renewal, that which was subsidized by federal and state funding for de-ghettoization, actually displaced people. Poor Black communities from the central downtown district were further pushed into the crowding areas of the North End, with an influx of Puerto Ricans, and a stronger flight of white ethnics to the suburbs or new city enclaves. In their place was the Constitution Plaza: a reconstruction for fancy business district buildings and parking lots.<sup>29</sup> Highway construction was also underway, further cutting off the growing Black North End from the rest of the city. Black citizens protested and boycotted discrimination in the workplace, in schools, and in companies and government agencies. Urgency grew rapidly. Just as membership in the NAACP, SCLC, and CORE increased in the South, they also did in Hartford, particularly in the 1960s. The increase in membership in black-run and more militant activist organizations was a result of both the cultivation of more militant ideologies by influencing forces such as Malcolm X but also the growing more apparent racist-inspired oppression and lack of mobility for which the Black community was facing in Hartford as the population increased.

After the climax of Hartford as a booming city and at the peak of its population in 1950, by 1960, the surrounding suburbs had a 68% increase in population. Urban flight, suburban expansion, and a

resistance to annexation would continue to intensify during this period.<sup>30</sup> It is no coincidence that federal and local subsidies were particularly made post WWII in order to have profitable public-private alliances. Upwardly mobile white families were able to get into affordable single housing in the suburbs. Although it is true that private companies were racial steering families and affordable mortgages were less likely to get in the hands of upwardly mobile blacks, especially outside of city limits, federal and state policy reveals that with encouragement of restrictive zoning, mortgage lending subsidies, among other initiatives show the clear connection between the state and the business sphere, which had great racial implications.<sup>31</sup> There were clear connections between the growing ghettoization of neighborhoods particularly in the North End of Hartford and money being re-distributed to the suburbs and schools were a clear example of this shift. Real estate agencies would use school quality rhetoric as buying incentives for city families moving outside of the city lines.<sup>32</sup> Soon enough industry would be moving outside of the city limits in addition to the people. By the late 1960s, real estate agencies could no longer completely deny Black residents home ownership, especially with the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, and instead almost exclusively sold them homes in Bloomfield,<sup>33</sup> a town that soon enough became the largest enclave of Blacks outside of Hartford's North End. Unlike a story that would show a mere city as if it had no living people who were actively involved in fighting for the re-growth and participation of peoples in making change, the story of the Education/Instrucción action research project, which connects with the growing distrust of the Black militants of the 60s, emerges from this context and puts the activists at the center.

More militant strategies of marching, boycotting, striking, and later rioting were manifestations of a community that felt negotiations were no longer satisfying their demands; people were tired of not getting what they needed. This did not by any means take away from the kinds of conversations and education that was embedded in these tactics. And it also did not mean that along the way, wherever there was a lack of an institution, there were people infusing programming that would fill the void of unmet needs by the private sector or the state. According to Black activists in the 1960s, the Civil Rights laws

passing during these times did not suffice. It is one thing to have legislation and another to implement whole-heartedly. Federally funded and community built organizations would try and do what the state failed to accomplish. The outreach of the Community Renewal Team, funded by the War on Poverty, the breakfast programming and community policing set up by the Black Panthers, Puerto Rican run organizations such as the Spanish Action Coalition and the efforts of women that built organizations such as free health clinics and education for young mothers were all a considerable part of the community built organizations of the heart of the '60s. These self-help organizations considered a sustainable solution to the failure of the state. Black activists and later Puerto Rican activists wanted to see real changes in the housing of their neighborhoods, hold real power in money-making and government bodies, and ensure equal likelihood to receive quality and non-discriminatory education. They would do what it took to receive an answer to their call. This "whatever it takes" approach influenced not only the militancy that was to follow, but also the future radical reformist tactics of Education/Instrucción.

NECAP (North End Community Action Program) was a very distinct Hartford-based group that began to stage kneel-ins and boycotts in businesses that did not hire Blacks in visible positions particularly in restaurants, as early as 1962. Many whites in Hartford did not agree with these more visible tactics. Protesters would receive threatening phone calls. NECAP continued to push, picketing a Main Street building because of substandard living conditions for the poor and receiving a compromise with the owners to improve the building.<sup>34</sup> Negotiations were still in motion during this early to mid 60s period, exemplified by some of CORE's (Congress of Racial Equality) work with hiring practices of local businesses<sup>35</sup> or even Hartford's Urban League who help train and place Black workers in previously all-white positions in local businesses.<sup>36</sup> It was clear that the more the '60s progressed with the shortcomings of legislation, the more non-violent and then more violent protests came into being. By 1965, the NAACP, along with NECAP, the Urban League, and the CRRAC (Connecticut Race and Religion Action Commission) initiated an unrelenting protest of UPS (United Parcel Service) for its discriminatory hiring

practices at Constitution Plaza. The first demonstrations ended in arrests but with the persistence of their presence at Hartford's Chamber of Commerce would leave the UPS spokesperson with no choice but to deal with their grievances.<sup>37</sup> By 1967, the NAACP also demanded immediate changes in terms of the integrating of schools such as Bulkeley High School. The idea that Project Concern, that in 1966 would bring 266 Black students to suburban schools, was not enough – it was a one way street for Black students.<sup>38</sup> All sectors of the community were to be fought over. People needed physical and intellectual spaces that were recognized, integrated, backed by resources.

With the early activism of the 1960s (Hartfordites, too, participated in the Freedom March on Washington and Freedom Summer missions to teach in the South), the work of JFK, and pushes from the state and the national front, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed. Soon after the Watts Riot broke out and violence was exploding in northern cities desperate people still living in terrible conditions, unable to receive proper education or have a strong voice in political matters; people could neither make ends meet nor participate in adequately allocating resources. The activist community sought out control over their own community. Their tactics lead some to destroying what was already unbearable to live with.

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech at Travelers' Insurance in 1966 warning the audience that there was potential for violent outbreak in the city of Hartford. Dr. King warned of the subtle forms of segregation in the North, with Chicago's segregated neighborhoods and schools as the example. In his own words, even if "The Negro in 1966 has more dignity...he is not yet equal."<sup>39</sup> For the next three summers, Hartford's North End and some sections of the South End just below downtown, would feel the fire of Black and Puerto Rican residents. Hartford's three consecutive riots would reflect the urgency in the community for great change and a growing young and militant population. In July of 1967 the arrest of a Black man for the use of vulgar language at a waitress spurred young people of color to firebomb and throw rocks and bottles. Close assesses that the riot showed the beginning of a challenge by young people to the

traditional African American leadership as one of the target homes was the brother of the owner who had gotten the young man arrested. This brother was Rev. Richard Battles who was a member of the NAACP, SCLC, and Ministerial Alliance (also a proponent of non-violent resistance. Most Black leaders said that the riot was not characteristic of the Black community as a whole. From various community meetings this seems to be the case. Most would agree, however, that this violence did not come from a vacuum. Wilbur Smith, Hartford's NAACP President,

argued that the roots of conflict resulted from a refusal to 'treat non-white human beings with dignity' and the city's shortcomings in hiring inner city youth year round...the city needed better housing code regulations, traffic control, street cleaning, and regulation...to stop the isolation of non-white children and parents by constructing houses that already overcrowded areas.<sup>40</sup>

Young Blacks articulated their own issues with North End businesses' failure to hire them; why were 80% of the businesses owned by whites in even the most densely African American neighborhoods of the North End? The youth also talked about police brutality and mistreatment of them.<sup>41</sup> And as Bayard Rustin, chief organizer of the March on Washington said, "...If they are not going to put Negroes to work, educate them, and provide decent housing for them, they've got to expect a negative and violent response...where there is injustice, disorder is inevitable."<sup>42</sup> Here we see that more established Black leaders used young militant acts as leverage for communicating the urgent needs of the community. Education/Instrucción would not use militant acts as leverage but rather use researched evidence of non-compliance to the Civil Rights laws of Fair Housing for example, as leverage.

Black Power was strongly outweighing the softer ideologies. Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers, and the Black Caucus of Hartford were gaining members. Activists in Hartford participated in the shift of Civil Rights movement's tactics that was happening nationwide. Both SNCC and CORE were also becoming more militant in the larger movement. We have to remember that Malcolm X more than a decade earlier came to Hartford to establish Hartford Temple number 14 when a greater militant tactic was being cultivated. The mosque reached out to working class citizens. His speech of 1963 reached many sectors of both the white and black communities. A more militant ideology that was informing the late



1960s Black radical activist mind had started root in the 1950s. The riot of September of 1967 started with an open housing march by Hartford Black Caucus members to confront the mostly white South End. They were stopped before even reaching downtown by police officers fearing the uncontrolled youth who had begun to throw bottles. Twenty marchers were arrested. Over 300 whites were awaiting the marchers, some with bricks, bats, and more. It could have ended in an even bloodier event. But the following night more young people started rioting, hurling rocks and bottles; 54 more people were arrested.<sup>43</sup> Some Black leaders felt that this kind of behavior was a reason for white decision makers to believe that the Black community was non-deserving of the solid communities that they desired. But the majority of more traditional Black leaders such as those of the Ministerial Alliance used the riots as leverage for immediate governmental responses; Leaders called for stronger community policing, youth entrance in the workforce, and a decision on open housing.

Grievances were heard in a community meeting after this riot. A Black Caucus Member said that these white power brokers should stop viewing the city from Constitution Plaza. A white Hall High School teacher came with a statement revealing that in fact there are attitudes on the police force that “the ‘Negro’ must be treated differently because they are savages just out of the jungle.”<sup>44</sup> The teacher said that if these are the attitudes of some police officers, the police force needs to be better trained. The leaders of the Puerto Rican community used the 1969 riots as leverage; they sent a telegram to the governor John Dempsey warning that inaction would lead to more violence.<sup>45</sup> In that same September, Senator Thomas J. Dodd alluded to an impending civil war between Black extremists and whites. Senator Abraham Ribicoff said that the riots were a manifestation of the 100 years of neglect of the Black urban communities. Massive aid needed to be put back into the communities.<sup>46</sup>

We can see that the heightened distress and inadequacy of the government response led to the cultivation of new forming ideologies and execution of more militant activist strategies. The threat of destruction and violence, even if it was executed by a distinct section of the Black and Puerto Rican

population, was vital political leverage for the influx of funding to appease the anger. The question of decision-making, which Education/Instrucción would take up in new ways in the 1970s, kept resurfacing throughout Hartford's struggles in the 20th century both in times of militancy just as in times of negotiation: what kind of real change can happen if people of color are not in legitimized decision making roles (recognized state agencies)? Are their roles always going to be seen as combative to the power structure if they are not to be fully integrated into it? Violence for the next two summers by not only the Black community but the Puerto Rican community as well, revealed the tensions that were not being alleviated. The 1969 riots were

so intense that at the end of the first day and a half of rioting, hundreds of blacks and Puerto Ricans had ravaged a forty-block area of the North End, throwing firebombs and bricks and sniping at police and firemen from rooftops and windows. Sixty-seven stores were looted, one policeman was shot, and 133 individuals were arrested.<sup>47</sup>

“By 1969 25% of Hartford's citizens were on welfare rolls, while 90 % of African Americans and Puerto Ricans lived in the ghetto.”<sup>48</sup> A community out of control of their own community, desperate by the conditions under which they live screams for change when mere soft-spoken words cease to be listened to.

## **A NEW NEGOTIATION PERIOD: 1970S BUSINESS HEGEMONY AND PUERTO RICAN BROKERED REPRESENTATION**

The documented activism of the 1970s in Hartford reverts back to a more negotiation kind of politics. The story that Jose Cruz tells is that particularly of Puerto Rican identity politics and brokered representation (a seat at the table that has been screened by the most prominent business-friendly politician of the decade). Education/Instrucción tries to negotiate with the state/business apparatus itself during this decade, but in fundamentally different ways than what the Puerto Rican community does. Unlike the straight political negotiation of work that Puerto Rican activists, E/I chooses a more business-appealing model to teach the business community how to adapt of the more multi-cultural changing landscape. We find that E/I is rejected from doing this kind of thorough work and then resorts to a more militant but still

professional threatening way of pushing institutions. Out of the late '60s violence leverage, comes a greater influx of federal funding towards both anti-poverty programming and integrating governing bodies.

Hartford activist communities, particularly the Puerto Rican community discussed here, were eager to mobilize but they had to navigate a political structure by that time intricately tied up with business interests. The control of the incoming federal monies (that dressed up urban renewal with community participation language) was greatly influenced by the downtown business sector.

The close relationships between community negotiations, government, and the business sector were a bit complicated. 1969 was the beginning of the regime of deputy mayor Nicholas Carbone, both someone who was seen at the neighborhood level in the 1960s, but sharply connected to business interests throughout the 1970s. The Hartford city government system that although was growing Democratic was also highly aristocratic and corporation friendly. Business dominance was hegemonic in Hartford and only grew to a much fuller stature in the 1970s. The alliance between the city council and the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce were made through much of the urban renewal initiatives and would continue to grow stronger through this period. Carbone's ideology was that in order "to have redistributive impact, public policy had to go with the flow of current corporate preferences and interests." The reality was that those interests lay in "office construction, gentrification, and real estate speculation...rather than neighborhood revitalization, housing construction, or neighborhood retail outlets."<sup>49</sup> Although it was true that Carbone was a negotiator for "public co-ownership of private property, broad political representation, public planning, redistributive policies, and grassroots participation...negotiated jobs, quotas, and contracts, steering them toward Hartford residents," the housing stock would be greatly lessened, grocery stores incredibly minimized.<sup>50</sup> Puerto Ricans involved in politics had to question: was Carbone the Puerto Rican community's advocate or was he just trying to appease the community with rhetoric and mediocre representation?

The Puerto Rican community's negotiating tactics throughout the 1970s under the Carbone regime is the focus of Jose Cruz' book and also reveals the fullest account of what was going on in terms of the active community and political mobilization for the city of Hartford. By the early 1970s, Puerto Ricans were well established with numerous businesses such as bodegas, and had tripled by from their early influx in the 1950s. Much like the Black community, the Puerto Rican community established self-help organizations such as La Casa de Puerto Rico, which started from the Spanish Action Coalition. But like the Black community, Puerto Ricans knew that their interests needed to be heard on a grander scale. There were distinctly Puerto Rican needs that should be met by the government. In terms of political mobilization, the Democratic Party was supported by a solid group of Puerto Ricans. In 1965, the North End Democratic Club was formed on Barbour Street by 14 Puerto Ricans. Inadequate educational options especially in terms of language barriers, inadequate housing, employment, and police brutality were some of the issues that the community was interested in.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the 60s and 70s, brokered representation seemed to be the only outlet for Puerto Ricans in the political sphere. Brokered representation is exemplified by Carbone's control over the choice of candidates from the Puerto Rican community. Education/Instrucción avoided this kind of soft politics because they wanted to have control over their message and their form of change. For this time period, most of the governmental positions were of little political importance.<sup>52</sup> After continual communication by Puerto Rican Democrats with Nicholas Carbone and pushing for representation, Maria Sanchez was the first example of brokered representation in the Board of Education. Maria Sanchez was a community favorite, owning her own bodega where she politicked and an advocate for bilingual education, although with very little formal education herself. At first Carbone hesitated, but it was his final say that allowed for Maria Sanchez to take this first elected position. Even the first official seat of the City Council held by a member of the Puerto Rican community, Mildred Torres elected in 1979, was Carbone's selection and endorsement.<sup>53</sup> Although Sanchez was ultimately seen as one of the most prominent Puerto Rican women

in Civil Rights era Hartford politics and she was able to bring bilingual education to Hartford, her political power, like that of other strong Puerto Rican women in the 70s, was ultimately limited by the mainstream Democratic heavy hitters that allowed her to come into office. Carbone's crucial support for Puerto Rican women's campaigns at this time both enabled their power and limited how far they could go.

As the negotiations progressed and little change to the community as a whole seemed to be occurring, groups of Puerto Ricans seemed to be more militantly gathering outside of government confines, creating socialist and independent groups. The People's Liberation Party had been around since 1969, akin to the politics of self-determination by the Black Panther's Party.<sup>54</sup> The Puerto Rican Socialist Party shared very similar politics to the PLP. These along with the independent groups, although having little voice in the machine politics of Nicholas Carbone's regime, grew stronger as 1970s matured. By 1977, a Puerto Rican was not yet elected on the city council. Edwin Vargas, the candidate-to-be with experience in SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and the labor movement, was critical of Carbone's machine. Surely Carbone was able to gain more federal funds for urban development, but when were these funds really going to get to the people and when would the Puerto Rican people truly have voice in the governmental structure?

Vargas and his comrade La Luz sought out to get Vargas on the ballot and for the first time breach the Democratic regime with an independent candidate.<sup>55</sup> Puerto Ricans were by no means unified under Vargas and in fact he was up against Carbone's candidate, Mildred Torres, and the woman who was always visibly involved in politics, Maria Sanchez.<sup>56</sup> But as many others seemed to feel, "Mr. Carbone is indicating that Mildred Torres is the leading contender to fill that vacancy when the Hispanic community and the citizens of Hartford were not even aware that she was interested in the position."<sup>57</sup> The 1979 Puerto Rican candidacy was preceded by a community forum on the perspectives of the three candidates, of which ended in the voting support of Vargas. Through much negotiation and the ultimate hand-picked choice of Nicholas Carbone, Torres was the brokered representative, winning the first ever Puerto Rican seat at the city

council in 1979.<sup>58</sup> With the work of Vargas in the later part of the 1970s, we see a shift towards a more combative kind of resistance to the brokered representative negotiations of the decade, but the power of Carbone's machine politics would not yield.

By 1977, the Puerto Rican community asserted a bit more control over how their politics might push up against Carbone's regime. The Puerto Rican socialists mobilized outside of his machine politics even if they were not elected. The later part of the 1970s was marked by more rallies and protests by the Puerto Rican community, fed up with housing discrimination, poverty, and the recent racist remarks in a local magazine that pushed many Puerto Ricans over the edge.<sup>59</sup> Overall, according to Jose Cruz, the 1970s was a time of ethnic-based political mobilization, and much like the 60s for Blacks, the 1970s grew to a point of more radical prospects. Education/Instrucción, a combination of people who pushed for a well-supported multi-cultural society are both rooted in the struggles of Blacks and Puerto Ricans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as shifted from a more negotiation kind of politics to a different kind of militant strategy, but we see clear differences for the particular ways in which E/I negotiated as well as when they were more threatening. We will in the following pages unravel this recovered story of negotiation and militancy in the form of radical reformism of the 1970s.

## **THE ROLE OF EDUCATION/INSTRUCCIÓN: “...TO MODEL WHAT WE WERE TEACHING”**

The story of Education/Instrucción is an unwritten one; it has only here been pieced together through oral histories, newspapers, and E/I's reports. Why should we care? We should care because not only is it vital to tell the stories of underexposed people and organizations of our lineage, but Education/Instrucción shows us a new way of looking at Black and Puerto Rican activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. E/I was neither a radical militant organization like the Black Panthers or the People's Liberation Party nor

did it harness the brokered representation of the Puerto Rican Democrats or slow negotiation through the state-initiated Commission such as the work of Frank Simpson. Education/Instrucción was an organization comprised of radical reformist strategies. They were comprised of a diverse group of individuals unlike the other mainly identity-separate organizations. E/I was interested in shifting the consciousness of people within the institutions that perpetuated racism. They cared about fair employment, housing, and schooling. They tried to convince business men that they needed to learn about their institution's racist practices and change them, but were met with resistance so they bought shares and spoke up against the racist policies and practices of the companies at stockholder meetings. Their research crew studied, exposed and brought to court the racial steering and redlining practices of real estate agencies and banks. They trained prison guards, teachers, and organizations to realize the racist power dynamics the institutions they worked in and worked on ways to work through these. They threatened companies who did not meet diversity requirements in their workforce by contacting their federal funders: the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. E/I was a threat to the status quo – a threat to institutionalized racism itself. Why was E/I interested in so many issues? Why did they decide to work in the way that they did? In order for us to understand this we have to understand the people who made up Education/Instrucción.

Like the foremothers and forefathers of Black and Puerto Rican activism, Education/Instrucción sought "...to eliminate racism wherever it existed."<sup>60</sup> However, they had distinct methodology. Rather than trying to merely change laws or ask for further representation, E/I pushed institutions to question and reform policies and practices that perpetuated institutional racism. They understood the changing landscape: a shift of power that was spreading from city's downtown business district to the growing wealthy suburbs. In order for us to understand how Education/Instrucción fits into the greater 20<sup>th</sup> century history of activism for racial equality in Hartford reviewed in the previous section, we have look more closely at this groups leadership, strategy, and shifts. How did they form? What was their mission? How did they carry out their

mission? In what ways did it change in response to community feedback and the responses of the power structure E/I was trying to disrupt?

### **WHO MADE UP E/I: THE 3 CO-DIRECTORS OF THE ORGANIZATION**

Without the concern, passion, commitment, communication and most importantly questioning of the three key activists in Education/Instrucción, the organization would not have formulated and cultivated the ideas and strategies for E/I used to push the racist institutions to change. Education/Instrucción sought to “model what they were trying to teach.” E/I was made up of Julia Ramos (today Julia Ramos Grenier), Benjamin Dixon, and Boyd Hinds. In this section, we’ll see concise biographies of these activists in order to understand how their work together led to the formation of Education/Instrucción. I was able to collect oral histories of two of the three co-directors of E/I through interviews but Boyd Hinds passed away in the 90s with his wife so I was unable to speak with him. I hope to get more of his story through his children in the near future. What I have learned about Hinds is through both Ramos and Dixon and media portrayals of him.

Julia Ramos was a college educated psychologist-to-be in her early 20s. She was a child of a military man. She was raised from Puerto Rico to France to Oklahoma to Hartford. By the time she was a student at the University of Hartford she could speak Spanish, French, English and German. Her linguistic ability came from constant travel and relocation. Still, she was a Puerto Rican woman. Throughout her life she would have to deal with the barriers placed on her identity. As a child going to elementary school in Oklahoma she became voluntarily mute because her teachers placed her in lower level classes because she was just beginning to learn English. She could write, though, and soon spoke again once her protest led her to get into her normal level class. Ramos was a thinker and a questioner from early on. Right after graduating from her undergrad experience at University of Hartford became involved in the Poor Peoples Federation, one of the federally funded programs for the War on Poverty. She also gained experience at Traveler’s as a translator. From her work with PPF she was contacted by Boyd Hinds to be a part of a new school that



sought to give a larger range of private school opportunities to more students of color. It was at this school that Julia Ramos met Boyd Hinds and Ben Dixon.

Ben Dixon had grown up in the North End of Hartford in the 1940s and 50s as a burgeoning Black man. He describes the early changes in the North End's population and environment. He talks of the vibrancy of the neighborhoods. There were Jewish temples alongside Black Baptist churches and Italian delicatessens. The North End was populated by Black, Polish, Italian, Jewish, and early signs of Puerto Ricans with the opening of early bodegas. Ben Dixon went to Hartford Public High School in the mid to late 50s. Dixon says that the first time he saw a fight for equality was through the strength of his mother's voice. At the time he was not being recognized and allowed into the college prep track at Hartford High. His mother stormed to the Board of Education and demanded that he gain entry to the upper level classes. Dixon was not only admitted in the college prep track at Hartford High but enrolled in Howard University where he got his degree in Music and went on to be a Music teacher, a profession that he recognized as a link to the legacy of deeply rooted black Hartford classical musician Augustus Lawson as he was taught by Augustus' son Warren. Dixon was drawn to the schools, back to his home city, to reconsider what it meant to be a teacher within the school system where others with his skin color were not seen in positions such as what he held. Dixon too was drawn to the new school – Westledge – that promised that more kids could potentially get education like the education he sought.

Boyd Hinds' story was told to me through the collective memories of both Ramos and Dixon. Boyd grew up the Hartford area, a child of the Civil Rights – a white man confronting his white privilege and guilt. He came up from a middle class background and married a woman from a wealthy background. It was through his wife's family that all three of the E/I leaders were able support their organization. Boyd was also an active listener and greatly connected man. By all accounts, he was the glue for the group.

It was these three individuals and their stories that gave life to Education/Instrucción. Their continual process-oriented dialogue is what made their shared leadership so distinct.

## **EDUCATIONAL BEGINNINGS AND STRATEGY FORMATION: THE COMING TOGETHER OF E/I AS PROCESS-DIALOGUE SHARED LEADERSHIP**

Like Ramos remembers and Dixon agrees, the time spent in E/I was the “germinating years” for the formulating of ideologies. Ramos’ political ideology

took form and shape when I got together with Ben and Boyd. That’s when we started to talk about our own personal experiences, mine and Ben’s in particular. Boyd was very interested in what we had to go through to get where we were and then of course also Boyd’s experience as a privileged white male and having to deal with those issues and the three of us did a lot of talking. And out of this talking came this idea, this concept that it’s institutional racism that we need to take a look at, yeah individual prejudice and racism does exist but if everyone were to leave every single institution in this country and their policies and procedures remain, those institutions, without the people, would continue to be racist unless you change those institutional policies. And that’s where our thinking started to come into being.<sup>61</sup>

### **THE WESTLEDGE SCHOOL: The First Collectively Critiqued Institution**

Boyd Hinds had been a part of the construction of the Westledge School, a private school in West Simsbury that sought to offer elite educational opportunities to young men of color. It was Boyd that invited both Ben Dixon and Julia Ramos to be teachers at the school. The Westledge School, a school started by “basically a group of white individuals that I think were feeling a deal of white guilt, the fact that they were privileged,” was in its early stages when Julia Ramos got a phone call. She was the Assistant Director of Poor People’s Federation at the time of the phone call. It was at the Poor People’s Federation that she got her feet wet in the workings of one of the many anti-poverty organizations that were being federally funded in the 1960s.<sup>62</sup> Ben Dixon had been a teacher in the North End of Hartford, a man of some of the same streets that his students were from, but had been to Howard and Harvard, a well-educated music teacher.<sup>63</sup> Boyd Hinds, connected to the founding of the school that was trying to privately reconstruct schooling to be available to a range of students of color and white students alike, but soon enough, all three of them agreed that although the school was doing its part, and had some interesting things going on with multicultural education, it was not enough. Ramos says that Hinds in particular

...had a much higher level of need to do something that was meaningful than some of the other people that had founded their school. They were happy and their white guilt was basically assuaged by opening this school. Boyd wasn’t. And his wife Wendy also was very much in agreement with him. They wanted to do something more. And as Boyd and Ben and I started talking together, we started generating ideas about what could be done in terms of eliminating racism.<sup>64</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE TO LEAD TO ACTION

It was through consistent conversation that Education/Instrucción was formed and began to be a visible entity in the community. The group started over food and drink. As Ramos describes, “We would sit and brainstorm, basically, with each other and bounce things off of each other. And test things out with each other...thinking and opinions and philosophies all that.” They were increasingly bound by concern, passion, and a sense of moral obligation. The continual work of dialogue that made up E/I’s strong shared leadership is embedded in the untold part of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. In fact, to prove how important consciousness-raising was in E/I, they sent Ramos to work face to face with Paulo Freire, who had just published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Ramos discussed how this text was one of her Bibles at the time and her experience with Freire truly informed the rest of her work in E/I and as a psychologist in the years to come.<sup>651</sup>

After much process-oriented discussion, they came to understand that “...individual prejudice and racism does exist but if everyone were to leave every single institution in this country and their policies and procedures remain, those institutions, without the people, would continue to be racist unless you change those institutional policies.”<sup>66</sup> In order to grasp what the power structure looked like in order to then figure out how to disrupt it, they decided to map it out.

E/I decided they needed to understand the business hegemony of the time. They started their map with a “visual link up” where they literally took wall space in their newly bought home on Albany Ave. in the North End of Hartford and visually mapped out where corporate power was located. They plastered the

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<sup>1</sup> In the early 70s, most likely a couple years after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in 1970, Ramos was able to work with Freire for a 6 month period. It was here that she was engaged in Freire’s method of *conscientização*, or consciousness raising, and specifically learned the about the literacy program that Freire developed. Freire gave her a challenge, saying that his literacy program and *conscientização* would not work with the Puerto Rican population because their personality development was too dependent on the colonial state; their history was much different from the rest of their Latin American brothers and sisters. Well, Grenier would take on the challenge and proved him wrong when she brought his methods of *conscientización* to the Puerto Rican tobacco farm workers in Hartford. Her literacy program, based off of Freire’s methods, was able to not only make these farm workers literate, but also conscious of their own oppression. Her work ended in a strike that exposed the near-indentured servitude that they were experiencing.

names of the Board of Directors of all the major companies in Hartford on the large wall and added strings linking the names that they found to be on multiple Boards. They found that “these same [white] men ran almost all of the companies. They sat on each other’s Boards, they knew each other, were comfortable with each other and so on. So we realized that there was a very incestuous kind of relationship among all of these institutions that had money behind them.”<sup>67</sup> E/I understood that it was in the institutions that racism was produced and perpetuated but it was here that they saw a clear link between the concept and the people that were involved in following the cycle of institutional racism.

But what could E/I do with this map of power? After more conversation and consideration of their strengths and who they were and represented, they realized that they embodied precisely what they wanted to teach. Ramos, Dixon, and Hinds had various background experiences; they were constantly trying to work through this. But they also understood that in common they had teaching skills. Perhaps if they were seen in the capacity of educational researchers and consultants, they would be seen as professional colleagues rather than outside agitators.

The initial tactic of Education/Instrucción was around the potential to shift consciousness. They felt that in order to be seen as a legitimate entity, to be considered consultants; they needed to use the educational model. Education in the form of consciousness-raising was interwoven into their outset strategy but also into their everyday interactions with each other. The process of learning was inherent in their fight. And the importance of their communal learning would be of great importance throughout their decade of work in the 1970s. E/I decided at first to go to the companies and let them know that the times were changing: the city was becoming a multi-cultural hub of constituents and workers and that companies needed to be aware of their practices and policies so as to change them for the changing times. When confronting the business hegemony, E/I was met with was an old boy’s club even though they were trying to appeal to their business interests. Ramos said that they had legitimately backed concerns that could benefit the companies if they were looking to make money.

...we were looking at the fact that population of the United States...was going to end up heavily Hispanic, for example, with Spanish being a second language in this country. And when we started there were know dual signs anywhere in Spanish and English. And you know we were trying to promote those things. These things are going to happen. You need to get ready for it, is basically our call. You need to get ready for it, basically because the people you are going to draw from for employment are ethnic minority people. You are not going to have that many white people to turn to, necessarily. You need to start making those changes. They weren't ready at that time. But, gradually, over time, they had begun to understand that that's the reality and you want to continue to make money as an organization you need to pay attention to that. Not only for employment, to get employees, but to sell products. But we were too early I think, in a way.<sup>68</sup>

The newspapers called E/I an educational research group and consultant<sup>69</sup> before the newspapers and the companies that backed the newspapers were threatened by E/I's existence.<sup>70</sup> Dixon said it took them a while to fully gain their legitimacy in the public, but to some extent they were never fully embraced, specifically by the companies and organizations that they were pressuring to change.

[The companies] weren't interested. They had no need to do that. We kind of batted our heads against the wall for a while with that. There was no giving. As a matter of fact, I remember being invited to a meeting of the Council of Governments which was again this white group of men who sat on this one board from all of these institutions and basically made all of these rules for what was going on in terms of business. And I remember, the three of us were invited Ben, Boyd, and I to meet with them. And they basically tried to buy us out. They offered us a lot of money. To cease and desist.<sup>71</sup>

It may seem as though The Council of Governments would not be connected to the business sector.

Wouldn't she be talking about the Chamber of Commerce? But recall the business-government dynamics of the 1970s; this was a keen moment for which government relations and business interests were greatly connected.

It was clear from early on that Education/Instrucción was not to be an accepted entity in the business world. Although they were able to convince some groups that they needed to be trained and E/I could be that organization that did this, there were very few in the corporate world that would accept the company's flaws. This did not deter E/I from persisting. They re-grouped, continued with their dialogue and came up with new strategies to deal with the resistant-to-change racist power structure.

### **E/I RESPONDS TO CHALLENGES: THE RADICAL REFORMIST COMES TO LIFE**

Education/Instrucción would come to be what I call radical reformists. E/I was not trying to receive some sort of faulty brokered government representation nor were they picketing at the state capitol or rioting in the streets. They carved out careful plans to both educate various groups within racist

institutions to both grasp and work to change the policies and practices of their respective institutions and to those real estate agencies, banks, and government agencies that were harshly resistant to change, E/I gained research and media leverage to threaten them into compliance. Although E/I did not win every battle they fought, they did push many to think, to question, to become involved, and to change in even slight ways. Here we will see exemplary work Education/Instrucción did in the face of an unresponsive power structure.

Education/Instrucción was not satisfied with brokered representation such as described in Jose Cruz' rendition of the Puerto Rican community and not interested in forming some sort of outside council as described with the Negro Citizen's Council of the 1940s. E/I was interested in pushing for a prepared community for the growing multi-cultural society of Greater Hartford and exposing those who were not complying with the Fair Employment and Fair Housing laws of the 50s and 60s. As Ramos explains,

These leaders had been there, nibbling away at the little crumb that had been thrown at them by the system. And that was the thing that killed the three of us most... We saw our community being happy with being thrown a few crumbs from the pie and thinking, oh, now we have a share. What were saying was well, where is the rest of the pie. We wanted a big slice of the pie and they were happy, these so-called leaders of the Hispanic and Black community, were happy with just the little crumbs that were being thrown to them. They thought that that made them participatory. And we said you're being bought out, essentially.<sup>72</sup>

In a fight to expose the underrepresentation of minority groups in larger state agencies, Education/Instrucción was able to get federal leverage to take away funding for a merger between the Capitol Region Planning Agency and the Council of Governments. In a story followed by *The Hartford Courant*, I was able to piece together this smaller victory of E/I in exposing the underrepresentation in the Greater Hartford governing and urban renewal agencies. There was a proposal in 1971 that would merge the Capitol Region Planning Agency with the Council of Governments. But in late 1972 and throughout 1973, E/I successfully pushed this back from happening, eventually cutting off funding for the council's merge by sending letters to their funder HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) explaining to HUD that CRPA was not compliant to the participation requirements on its own and that the merger would not make any meaningful difference. In order to merge and receive funding from HUD the

agency was supposed to be compliant to the HUD citizen participation guidelines. E/I sent a letter to HUD telling them that “CRPA is using Connecticut law as a reason to do absolutely nothing regarding expanding their own policy board to include elderly, minority, low-income, etc. individuals in relative proportion to their numbers in the region’s population,” and that E/I “would continue to oppose refunding the planning agency until it committed itself to providing concrete ways for special interest groups to participate in the decision-making process of the agency.”<sup>73</sup> The merger between CRPA and The Council of Governments would allow for one vote per town, affectively pushing out thousands of voices, as Hartford, population number alone, would be mismatched with the power of a vote from much smaller towns.<sup>74</sup> Of course, newspapers never knew about the behind-the-scenes deal that the Council of Governments was trying to make with Education/Instrucción as shown above. It shows how threatened the Council was by E/I; E/I were gaining leverage here. Of course E/I refused to take the money and the merger was delayed until a few years later when the merger was better equipped to partially comply with the guidelines.

Education/Instrucción was never fully seen as an “insider” actor by business-government power structure. They threatened the status quo of central leadership being honed by various business institutions (mainly real estate agencies companies and banks) as well as government business-connected agencies. As we have already accessed, although E/I tried to appeal to many companies, their multi-cultural training approach rarely touched the more powerful institutions. But people within these companies started to show interest in what E/I was doing. Ramos says

a number of people started coming out of the woodwork. We would get calls from some of the employees from some of these companies to give us information about what was going on in the company that was racist in nature. And many many people began to feel an affinity for E/I. Openly they may not have said so but they were feeding us and giving us not only information but support as well. A number of other people became very openly affiliated in participating in E/I and came to the meetings.<sup>75</sup>

People gained such an interest that they came to E/I with specific research projects they wanted to be involved in to help substantiate their cause.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps there was a larger variety of people that were ready for change, not just the people who themselves were greatly burdened by years of underrepresentation and

oppression but those that like Boyd Hinds were tired of their white guilt and needed to respond to the long history of dehumanization of the minority populations.

The most prominent research action projects that E/I took on were those that threatened the practices of the banks and the real estate agencies. This project spanned most of the 1970s, and shows how the work of E/I synthesizes the changes of the post-war 20<sup>th</sup> century and documented Civil Rights era into a new arena. Education/Instrucción embodies both the new vision of an integrated society and fought for the real institutional changes that could really make this vision manifest. They were not just looking at housing or schooling, or government or private companies or community organizations, but how all of these entities were interacting to yield such a stark disparity between the City of Hartford and now the growing white suburbs. We already understand this change of demographics spatially from the history section of this paper. It wasn't just about what was happening in the city, but how the power was spreading and gaining its own exclusive turf. As Grenier explains,

we saw the city changing. I mean the North End of Hartford became more and more ghetto as the white families moved further and further out. Hartford, you know, because of the highways and the way it's constructed, can't grow anymore. And so the people who are trapped in it were becoming more minority than anything else. When everybody goes home, Hartford becomes a ghost town and is left to the ethnic minorities. And then til people come back again in the day time. Went into the city and leave it. You know their investment in the city...and we were seeing this happening.<sup>77</sup>

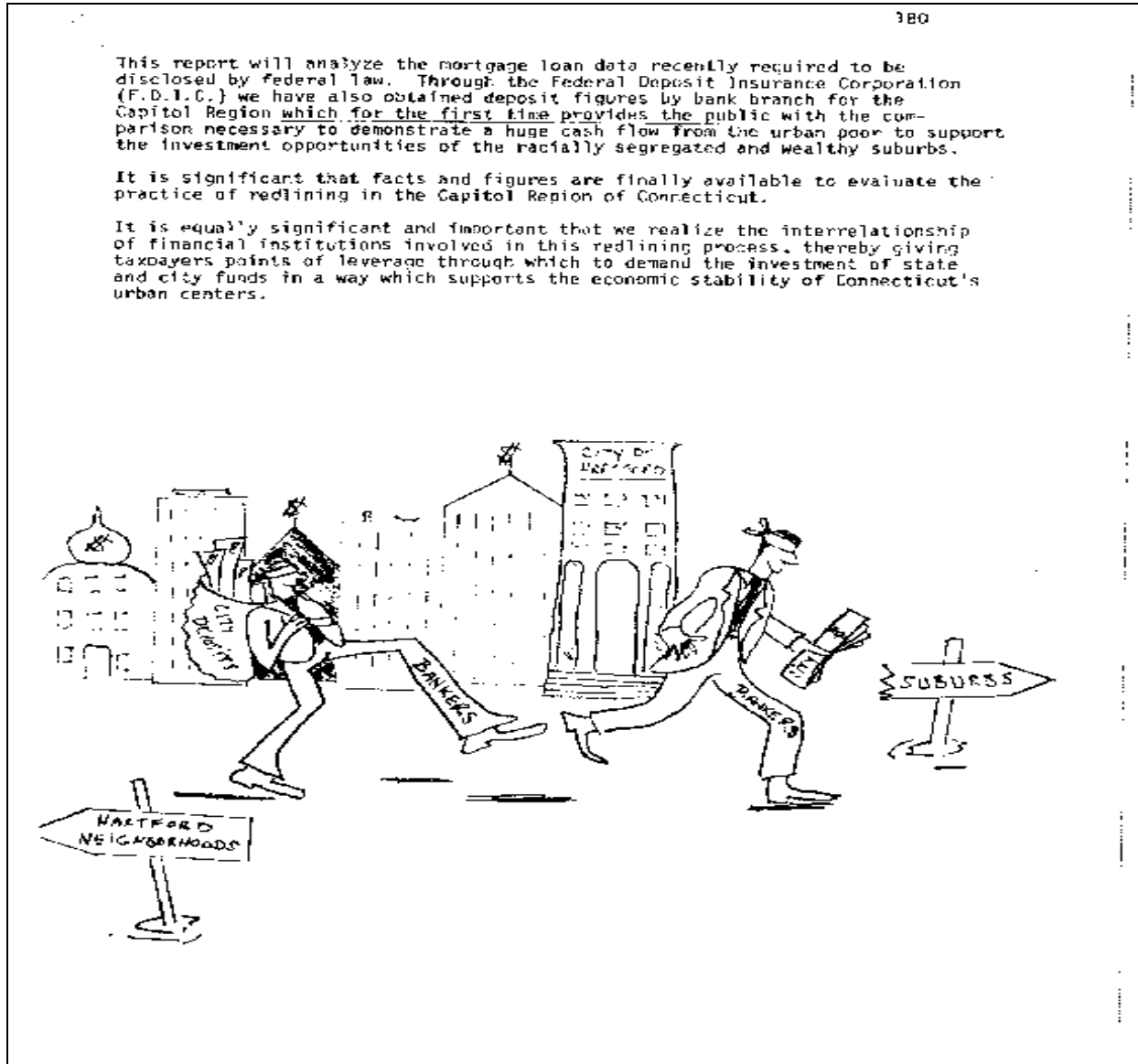
Dixon, who was from the North End of Hartford saw the changes beginning earlier, as he grew up in the North End of Hartford in the 40s and 50s. He describes the area where he grew up as having an Italian delicatessen, a Jewish Temple, a Black church, and the school he went to had Polish, Italian, Jewish, and Black all the same. There were thriving Black and White ethnic institutions side by side. As time passed and the times were changing, these previously existent white businesses and people were moving to the South End or out of the city completely.<sup>78</sup> It was a disinvestment, ultimately, that further created a decaying city for people of color.

E/I was highly critical of the real estate agencies and mortgage lending banks to the point of getting the U.S. Justice system involved in bringing companies to court. It is this substantial researched-backed



exposing act that shows another example of E/I's use of more radically rooted tactics to gain leverage over a situation. The 10 "Fair Housing at Its Worst" reports released by E/I and researched by a team of gung-ho students and community members revealed the apparent redlining of money lenders (banks) and insurance companies and the racial steering of real estate agencies. The Reports were issued from February of 1974 to May of 1977. The majority of the reports came out in 1974, revealing with vast qualitative data that real estate agencies were treating racial and linguistic minorities very differently than their white counterparts. E/I revealed the complete non-compliance of these companies with the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Even if companies were using the "Fair Housing" stamps, they were by no means acting correctly by its policy and practice.<sup>79</sup> E/I's research team did extensive work on the disinvestment of the Hartford neighborhoods by the loan lending banks. They argued that a great proportion of the deposits that were going into the banks in the city were then being transferred and put into suburban expansion. As we can see on a sample page (pg. 180) of Report 9 on "Redlining," the E/I research team collected mortgage loan data through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and compiled it so that "for the first time... the public" can see that "a huge cash flow from the urban poor... support[s] the investment opportunities of the racially segregated and wealthy suburbs."<sup>80</sup> We can also see the lovely image that clearly represents what the data means: the

suburbs are running away with city deposits. Hartford's neighborhoods are being disinvested.



Although the cases with the banks did not go very far, the incredible work of the E/I research team was able to successfully cause the racist practices of 7 real estate agencies in the Greater Hartford area to a) be exposed to the greater public and b) force the agencies to respond. The substantiation of E/I's litigation was extensive. In the U.S. v. Barrows case of 1974, one of the items was a document compiled by the E/I research team of about 200 pages worth of qualitative evidence of racial steering or of real estate agents pushing people into particular neighborhoods and misleading them to information about mortgages and

lending depending on their racial makeup or dominant language. Ramos describes one of the experiences that she had personally as she posed with another Puerto Rican man as a “tester”:

I remember going out with a Hispanic male and we posed as a couple that barely spoke English, you know, our English was supposedly very minimal to a West Hartford real estate company. We walked in and basically made known through gestures and a little bit of English that we wanted to buy a house in West Hartford. And I remember the receptionist there. She was very cordial, very friendly but I remember a guy in the back yells out to her, “If you yell at them they’ll understand you better.” He actually said that. All I could do to hang on to my friend who was with me so he wouldn’t jump over and attack this man. But basically we were steered to the North End of Hartford and the South End of Hartford. Shown houses and given listings in these two locations. All of this we taped. We all carried tape recorders in our bags and we taped all of what they said. We got enough of those. I mean we had almost all of the real estate companies were found to be steering.<sup>81</sup>

Before the real estate agencies could even be found guilty of racially steering, they settled and were supposed to cease and desist their unfair housing practices.<sup>82</sup> But this isn’t quite what happened: as Grenier recalls, “well, you know, haha. It just became a little more quiet and underwater about it, that’s all.”<sup>83</sup>

The reports came at a time that housing market was patterning as an extension of the post war federal policies that sought to provide cheap post-war housing to a white middle class ready to form lifestyles in the suburbs just outside of the cities they worked in as previously mentioned. The Metro Hartford area was not isolated from these policies and practices. By mid-1974, the real estate agencies were lined up at court and they had very little information that would defend themselves against the stark realities of their racist practices. Although Ramos alludes to strength of the companies to be able to say something official (to settle) but in practice still not completely comply, the companies could never go back to the extensive kind of racial steering and misguiding of clients. If anything, more people were aware of these racist practices and if the companies continued to slip up in the manner that they had been, they could easily be exposed again by the newspapers.

Education/Instrucción found that they had to employ various activist strategies for various constituents and at different moments. Education/Instrucción was an entity that was able to shift into various forms to work with different kinds of constituents. They were “meeting with the Panthers,” consulting school teachers and prison guards, entering court rooms where their evidence would support the

racial steering of real estate agencies and the involvement of banks in a redlining scheme for the city of Hartford. They were also contacting HUD whenever their research showed that companies were not complying with the affirmative action component that was attached to the funding they were receiving from the federal government agency.<sup>84</sup> Education/Instrucción were radical reformists, facing the challenges of resistant-to-change companies with the force of well-researched exposure, leverage for public awareness and for companies to respond and better work to change their racist and misrepresentative practices.

### **TEACHING MULTI-CULTURALISM: E/I AS THE MODEL**

Perhaps Education/Instrucción worked so well in shape-shifting to address the diverse organization they worked with and against because of their shared leadership structure. It was about the “we” for them; they embodied it. It was the continued dialogue that Co-Directors of E/I had that kept their organization going for the majority of the 1970s. Dixon explains that this was one of the most difficult things for the newspapers, companies, schools, and government structures to get; it was not that there was one director, but three co-directors.<sup>85</sup> What made E/I so effective beyond the smaller victories and the battles they fought with powerful companies such as the real estate agencies and banks, Dixon explains that they were “modeling what they were teaching.” E/I’s vision was about “pluralism,” and they were able to exemplify a group where no one came on top.<sup>86</sup> As Ramos explains, “multiculturalism” was something that was at the heart of the vision, but something that was really hard for people to get. The newspapers did seem to take a while before they really caught on how to document the group. They started off just mentioning Boyd Hinds name, and every once in a while Ben Dixon, but it wasn’t until an article in May of 1973 that all three Co-Directors of E/I were acknowledged as such.<sup>87</sup> The media did finally get it though, and organizations on the ground who were accepting of the workshops that E/I taught on working through power and preparing for a multicultural society, were able to see E/I as the model for what a pluralist society could be.

Reflecting back on the overall success of the organization in its original mission “to eliminate racism wherever it existed,” Ramos and Dixon both knew that the reality of it was that to a certain extent not everyone was ready to give up a bit of their power. “...that’s why we said if you don’t change the institutional racist practices of the organization, of the institution, then, you can change some things, but the institution...it’s like regressing to the mean, continuously.”<sup>88</sup> When dealing with the educational system specifically, one of their projects was in consulting for the opening of Quirk Middle School. As consultants, they were trying to infuse a multi-cultural curriculum as well as enroll students from the city and the suburbs to make it a balanced racial atmosphere. Although some of the ideas, such as some of the multi-cultural curriculum was infused in the school, the core elements of the school, that would have made it a regional or magnet school (much like what we are seeing today), were seen as somewhat of a threat to not just the city but the suburban families in particular. “We started to...introduce some of these practices,” but

the whole educational system of Hartford...was very turf oriented, would beat us down, would change the rules, would take away funding... We started and trained every single one of the teachers in Hartford to do...this program...And the teachers were gung-ho. But the administration in the central office...it became a turf issue. Who was doing what and why and who was going to control this and where and they destroyed the program.<sup>89</sup>

Although newspapers did not document E/I’s initial involvement with the school, they did document the growing controversies of the school. It was in Clay Arsenal neighborhood, a neighborhood described as dangerous by one mother from the West End of Hartford who used this excuse as the reason she did not want to send her children to the school. Another mother from the Clay Arsenal neighborhood itself said that she should not have to send her kids to the schools if their own neighborhoods were not safe.<sup>90</sup> The busing and open enrollment controversy lasted some time, but with the pushing of groups such as the NAACP,<sup>91</sup> noted in the papers, open enrollment (voluntary schooling) was defeated and some sort of busing system was put in place.<sup>92</sup>

Although E/I was unable to make the leaping effect that they wanted to as consultants of the new Quirk Middle School, their work in training groups all over the city cannot go unacknowledged.

Throughout their work in the 70s, E/I was constantly working with teachers, prison guards, community organizations and other private organizations that were interested in processing their power within the growing multi-cultural landscape. Dixon talks about the importance of having all three co-directors at these training sessions. The very dialogue that they worked through amongst each other about their experiences and dealing with their own privileges and disadvantages is the same kind of dialogue that they would spark with their trainees. Ramos remembers a game called Star Power that they would have workshop participants play in order to better understand power.

We started with that game. It was actually a boxed game that was developed and don't ask me...how many years ago as a way of getting people to understand the issues of power. And what the game was basically was that you put these chips, colored chips in bags and you gave them to people in the group and they were to, given the direction to go out in the group and mingle around and trade the chips with other people. Now, chips that had the highest value were the gold chips so if you ended up with the most gold chips then you would end up having the most money and the most power and we would give them several sessions of training that they would be able to trade the chips to see how many they could get. The one thing that they didn't realize because we didn't tell them was that we had preloaded gold chips in certain people's bags and so those people already started out with more power and then at the end we stopped everything and we asked everyone okay so who how many gold chips? And then they would realize that this particular group had more chips than anybody else and the other two groups they would question how they ended up with so many gold chips. The fascinating thing was how people dealt with this. We had one group. We did it in the prison with the prison guard population. The group with the green chips, I think it was the lowest valued chips, looked at the group that had the most gold chips and they ran, grabbed their bags and ran out of the room. So, it's like, what? People reacted to this very very...and then at then end what we did was we sat down and debriefed and said okay, how did that make you feel? To know that there was these people that were the haves, you know they had all the gold chips and then there's these other two groups of people who had the have nots and how...you know to see in playing this game, how power really became overwhelmingly controlling and that they were not willing to give it up or share it and not in any one of those games did we have the people with gold chips being willing to share their gold chips with the rest of the group. And we talked about that. And we made it not as you know, you did the wrong thing, but so how does that make you feel? That in the game you do that and in real life that's exactly what happens? So Star Power was a very useful game for us. And we did it with teachers, we did it with prison guards, we did it with administrative type people, that worked in companies and basically the same thing happened. They were not willing to share the pot once they got it.<sup>93</sup>

It was in these training sessions that the hard process of learning how to be multi-cultural and work through power and privilege began. This kind of spark for discussion and consciousness-raising was directly taken from E/I's formation and continued persistence in this form of change-making.

Consciousness-raising was, in Ramos and Dixon's eyes, the main way in which Education/Instrucción survived and surpassed the co-founders' active duty with the organization. They didn't split, really; they were always there for directors meetings until Boyd Hinds death in the mid 1990s,

but they were all more interested in particular fields and tried to continue their fight in psychology (Ramos), education (Dixon), and government (Hinds). So as Ramos says,

I think eventually the biggest success of E and I was that other people picked it up and went with it. It didn't stay with us. That we were able to walk away from it and other people were continuing to do things with it even if it wasn't under the umbrella E/I, that enough people's consciousness had been raised to the point that they began to question in the same way that we were and to make suggestions and try to make changes.<sup>94</sup>

## **“...TO ELIMINATE RACISM WHEREVER IT EXISTS...”**

### **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND QUESTIONS**

Education/Instrucción was a multi-cultural, multi-faceted educational activist research group that used group consciousness-raising, community research, multi-cultural educational tools, stock-buying and news media leverage to combat institutional racism. E/I spread itself to reach many areas of concern because they saw all of these institutions as the sources of racism. In many ways, Education/Instrucción was an odd activist group. They were a group of individuals from many different walks of life. Julia Ramos was a well-educated Puerto Rican woman who did not grow up in the city of Hartford. Boyd Hinds was a seemingly well-off but truly concerned white man. Ben Dixon was the only one who really grew up in the bowels of the North End. But it is truly something about the forming of this highly educated, competent, well-organized group of individuals that was quite unique to the Hartford Civil Rights Movement scene. E/I's great concerns mirrored many of the same concerns that both the Black and Puerto Rican communities had but their strategies shifted at various moments with various constituencies. They emerged in a moment that was already trying to begin to create a balance between radicalism and reformism and work through issues of racism that had led to the riots of the late '60s. But E/I didn't wait for the government to elect them; they were not trying to be brokered representatives, nor were they looting the shops and dealing with the police. E/I was trying to shift the consciousness of people in powerful positions so that they could be aware and work through their desire to hone power and perpetuate the racism of their

institutions. Because of E/I's ability to form a shared leadership based on their own form of consciousness-raising, they were able to have their small and somewhat larger successes.

Thinking back, Dixon explained that he thought that perhaps E/I's focus on training of the members of the institution, although great, was not sufficient. Perhaps, in some ways, E/I left a lot of the people they were fighting for behind.<sup>95</sup> This is an important critique but also leads us to the overall importance of learning about E/I and the questions that we may raise about the way in which we learn about the Civil Rights Movement. E/I's story is one that has yet to be told and in a lot of ways, yet to be fully explored. Here we have learned that it is important to look at organizations like E/I more closely because they are organizations that do not fit neatly into the in-system versus against-system analysis of activism that is so common; they are not on either end of the reform-radical or negotiate-militant spectrum. Instead, their work is characterized by relationships and hard-won consciousness battles that are radical here, reformist there, but everywhere concerned with *the conversation*, and the place that the oppressed have within that conversation. There are probably other organizations like this; perhaps historians of the Civil Rights Movement have left out a thorough analysis of the place of dialogue and U.S. *concienciacao* in the work of activist groups. What does this work mean? What did it produce? What of it stays with us today?

Prospects for more questions about the 1970s Civil Rights Movement and its legacies are continued to be worked through. A question around the legacy of multi-cultural thinking and curriculum in Hartford should be further explored. What kinds of schools really did take on a more integrated form, even if this did not last through the 90s? What did it look like? What worked? What didn't work?

The beginning excavations of Education/Instrucción help us to make alive the 1970s activist movement on a local scale and get into the essence of community building and understanding; it starts with a movement in the mind that can only begin through the sharing of stories.



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Education/Instrucción's 10 "Fair Housing at It's Worst" Reports were found at Connecticut Fair Housing Center at 221 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06106. These documents are open to the public and can be looked at by request. You may also be interested in contacting the Educational Studies department at Trinity College because we have digitized all 10 reports for easy access.

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