

C731.95  
arrivn  
copy 2

Municipal Reference and  
Research Center

RECEIVED

DEC 20 1972

MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
NEW YORK CITY

ARSON, VANDALISM AND OTHER RACIALLY INSPIRED  
VIOLENCE IN NEW YORK CITY

---

A Study of a New Phenomenon  
and  
Recommendations for Action

\* \* \* \*

by

NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN  
RIGHTS

Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Chairman

John V. Lindsay  
Mayor

C 731.95  
avfivn

COMMISSIONERS

NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

---

---

- |                                 |                      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Eleanor Holmes Norton, Chairman | Rabbi Harry Halpern  |
| David H. Litter, Vice Chairman  | Frank P. Mangino     |
| Jerome M. Becker                | Cornelius McDougald  |
| Irving Chin                     | Julia Rodriguez      |
| Gilbert Colgate, Jr.            | Rose Ann Scamardella |
| Eleanor Clark French            | Doris Turner         |
| Dr. Archibald F. Glover         | Celia M. Vice        |
| Murray Gross                    |                      |

Preston David  
Executive Director

Report Issued December 8, 1972

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II.	INCIDENTS . . . . .	5
	A. Rosedale, Queens . . . . .	5
	B. Briarwood, Queens . . . . .	11
	C. Great Kills, Staten Island . . . . .	13
	D. Bedford Park, Bronx . . . . .	16
	E. Forest Hills, Queens . . . . .	19
	F. Ozone Park, Queens . . . . .	20
III.	ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	23

\* \* \* \*

ARSON, VANDALISM AND OTHER RACIALLY INSPIRED  
VIOLENCE IN NEW YORK CITY

---

A Study of a New Phenomenon  
and  
Recommendations for Action

\* \* \* \*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past eighteen months, New York's long history of racial peace has been punctuated by several cases of arson and serious vandalism on the homes of minority families as well as other violent incidents with serious racial overtones. The New York City Commission on Human Rights, mandated by the City Human Rights Law to "initiate its own investigations of racial, religious and ethnic group tensions, prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and disorder occasioned thereby" has closely studied each of these incidents, in an effort to determine their causes and characteristics.

The Commission's concern, however, goes beyond the immediate circumstances of each incident. We are disturbed at the more general implications for a city that has historically maintained a tradition of peaceful pluralism, where a vastly diverse ethnic population has over the years found a way to live together in mutual respect.

Arson and terrorism of the kind that has emerged in the past year and a half have been associated with the most despicable and contemptible aspects of Southern bigotry, not with New York City's more progressive traditions. Their repeated appearance in New York suggests a dangerous pattern that demands investigation, analysis, and action.

We believe that the vast majority of people in this city would without hesitation condemn this disturbing emergence, and that when the facts revealed in this report are widely known wholesale community disapproval will be more widely expressed, thus helping to deter future incidents. Nevertheless, we can no longer maintain the myth that the violence and pathology of Southern racism is totally absent in the North. These occurrences while unconnected, nonetheless suggest an ominous trend that

could mean that continued integration in the North will be resisted as forcefully and violently as in the South. Wholesale public condemnation of this kind is necessary for the survival of New York's best traditions and of the city itself.

The incidents described in this report present dangers beyond that of the immediate acts of violence. For one of the most pernicious effects of such actions is to confirm suspicions among minorities that acceptable means to equal opportunity are closed to them after all. We cannot close our eyes to the danger that violence will be met with violence, starting a tragic cycle that will not be easily broken.

Moreover these attacks were racist in the classic sense: Those who suffered them were victimized simply because they were Black or Hispanic; they were, in most cases, identical to the white neighbors who sought to destroy their homes and chase them from their communities, except for their color or ethnic background. With the growth of consciousness and the willingness to move affirmatively to secure their rights that is the heritage of the civil rights movements of the 60's, minorities cannot be expected to be deterred

in the exercise of their rights even by violence. The clear potential for violence and counter-violence must be faced now and stopped in its tracks.

We need to forestall the development of violence as a means to deter integration before it causes an irrevocable breach. We need to act now to protect innocent citizens from vicious attacks. We need to examine this trend while it is still manageable and can be effectively deterred.

It is the purpose of this report to examine these incidents of arson and vandalism and by identifying their causes and the climate from which they spring, formulate an approach that will prevent further occurrences of the kind. In Part II, the facts of the different incidents are related, as they have been determined by Commission investigators, as well as police and news reports, which form the basis for all the facts reported herein. In Part III, some common aspects and patterns are defined, and specific recommendations for remedial action are made.

## II. THE INCIDENTS

### A. Rosedale, Queens

Rosedale is a virtually all-white community in southeastern Queens, adjacent to the Nassau County line. The Commission has been able to identify there the largest number of incidents of intimidation to discourage home-buying by minority families — at least 6 in this one community — than in any other community in the city.

The area has the advantage of a quiet, suburban community still within city limits, but seemingly isolated from urban problems. Most Rosedale residents have a considerable financial investment in their homes, an investment that often represents sacrifice for people of moderate means. Many view their investment, and the stability and tranquility of the neighborhood as threatened by integration and are constantly vigilant for the first signs of minority occupancy.

The communities that surround Rosedale — Springfield Gardens, Cambria Heights and Laurelton — have undergone considerable racial change in the last five years, change that

has been accompanied and stimulated by intense blockbusting activity. An extraordinarily encouraging stabilization is underway in the nearby middle-income and integrated community of Laurelton spurred by the city's Neighborhood Action Program, the Laurelton Federation of Block Associations and other efforts — all involving black and white coalitions. But this has had little effect on Rosedale where many residents view the arrival of the first minority occupant as an inevitable forerunner of decay and deterioration. It was reported that minority incursion is so feared that residents who dispute with neighbors sometimes use the threat of selling to blacks as an ultimate weapon. And so determined are some Rosedale residents to forestall integration that the first indication that a home might be sold or rented to a minority family triggers a systematic campaign of verbal intimidation and threats, which sometimes escalates to vandalism and arson when less violent means fail.

On June 9, 1971, one such campaign was mounted by unknown perpetrators when it was rumored that a local builder had sold a new development home to a non-white family, variously described as black, racially mixed, and Filipino. (It was later determined that the home had in fact been sold to two Chinese

brothers, one of whom was married to a white woman.)

Neighborhood residents visited the builder to warn him against selling to blacks. When rumors persisted that the house had been sold to a minority family, a wholesale violent attack on the \$53,000 house was organized before it was occupied. As the incident was reconstructed by investigators from the CCHR, the police, and the District Attorney's office, 30 to 50 men and teenaged boys from the block and the surrounding neighborhood, armed with axes and picks, attacked the house. They smashed windows, tore holes in the walls, flooded the basement to a height of six feet, and pulled a wall over from a wall. As the attackers destroyed both apartment units of the house, a crowd of approximately 200 onlookers gathered, either cheering and encouraging the vandals or without voicing opposition. Police did not arrive until after the major damage had been done, and they had great difficulty in dispersing the crowd; at one point a policeman had to brandish a gun in order to turn the people away from continuing to vandalize the house.

Although this incident was the first in Rosedale to attract a wide news coverage and public attention, it was by no means

unprecedented there. Police reports and information offered by residents revealed a number of other incidents over the previous three or four years involving threats and vandalism, such as window breaking and basement flooding in cases where residents were thought to be selling homes to blacks or Puerto Ricans. All of these had been reported to the police, although they had not been reported in the press. The June 9th incident was so boldly violent and involved the open complicity of so many residents that it was widely reported and stimulated investigations by the police, District Attorney's office, and this Commission. In addition, the FBI at the request of the Justice Department launched its own investigation for possible violation of Titles 8 and 9 of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, under the clause which provides for the prevention of intimidation in fair housing. The Commission cooperated fully with the FBI investigators, and was able to offer them useful information.

Despite extensive investigations and effort made by all these law enforcement agencies, however, not one of the alleged 30 to 50 perpetrators was apprehended or indicted. A number of penal codes were clearly broken, including criminal mischief with possible penalties up to 7 years, as well as trespassing,

and disorderly conduct. Resolution of the case would have been facilitated had police made arrests for these infractions at the scene of the crime. One police representative said to CCHR investigators that their failure to do so was because of their unfamiliarity with this kind of situation; caught off guard, they simply did not know what to do. But the police and the office of the Queens District Attorney later made an extensive investigation; two detectives were assigned full time to this and two subsequent incidents. They found their investigation hampered by the reluctance of residents to give information.

The grand jury which investigated the house wrecking also met with considerable reluctance on the part of witnesses to testify, and eventually declined to hand down an indictment.

Although the publicity given the house wrecking incident disturbed Rosedale residents, the campaign to resist minority occupancy continued. A few weeks after the house wrecking, Rosedale homeowners who had agreed to sell their home to a Puerto Rican family received a phone call threatening retaliatory action if the purchase went through. A few days later, a fire broke out in the home while the family was out, destroying a

downstairs room and causing considerable smoke damage. After the fire, the family received another call, in which they were told, "We're not through with you yet." Despite the phone calls, fire officials assessed the fire as non-suspicious in origin, because of defective wiring in a TV set. They offered as evidence the fact that all doors and windows were secure, concluding that this precluded fire-bombing. The neighbor who turned in the fire alarm was also the target of threatening phone calls saying, "You're next."

A number of incidents involving threats to persons considering selling their homes to blacks or Puerto Ricans occurred during the summer. On September 12, 1971, another fire occurred, this time in a home recently occupied by a black family. A number of white youths were seen throwing molotov cocktails at the bedroom windows of the home. Fortunately, the firebombs managed only to break the windows and start a fire in the yard. If they had reached the interior, they would have landed on the beds of the two youngest children. The police investigation that followed this incident resulted in the indictment of four youths and an adult. All four youths pleaded guilty to arson, 4th degree, were determined to be youthful offenders,

and were given five years probation. The adult pleaded guilty to attempted arson, 4th degree and was given three years probation.

B. Briarwood, Queens

Briarwood is a predominantly white, middle class neighborhood of private homes and apartment houses located between predominantly white sections of Kew Gardens and Jamaica in Queens. On November 10, 1971, a house recently purchased by a black construction foreman and his wife was the target of a firebombing attack as the family was in the process of moving in. While an elderly woman relative and two children slept in upstairs bedrooms, unknown perpetrators gained access to the basement by breaking a window pane in an entrance door. They spilled a liquid that was apparently gasoline on the floor, ignited it, and fled. The resultant explosion and fire destroyed the finished basement, but was prevented from spreading to the rest of the house by a fireproof ceiling. The woman and children were fortunately awakened by the smoke in time to escape unharmed.

Police and fire officials determined that the fire was of suspicious origin, but after making an extensive investigation and interviewing many witnesses, they were unable to identify any suspects.

This incident was apparently not preceded by any threats or any indication that the purchase of the home by a black family would trigger violence. Police found the neighbors in the area generally neutral, that is, neither particularly welcoming nor especially hostile to black occupants. While the street where the incident occurred was all white, a number of minority families have lived in the area, apparently without encountering hostile resistance.

Many community residents reacted to the firebombing with shock and outrage. The family was determined to remain in their home, which represented to them a lifetime of savings and effort. They received over 50 letters of sympathy and support. Some neighbors made a special visit to the home, bringing gifts and welcoming the family into the neighborhood.

C. Great Kills, Staten Island

On April 24, 1972, a house in Great Kills, newly purchased by a black family, was damaged by fire the day the family was to move in. The Great Kills area, like most of Staten Island, is predominantly white. In much of Staten Island, minorities seeking to purchase homes have met with difficulties, and fears of minority residency have triggered threats and vandalism aimed at keeping minorities out in the past. In October 1970, in the nearby community of Willowbrook, a house was damaged by fire a few days after it was purchased by a black family. The black owners had been seeking housing in Staten Island for over two years, but had met with evasive tactics by brokers and home owners. They were able to purchase the Willowbrook house only after intervention by the CCHR but were warned by the contractor that they would be unwelcome. Four days after they moved in, a gas fire broke out in three separate parts of the house. Miraculously, no one was hurt.

The incident in Great Kills was similar to the Willowbrook incident. Resistance to minority occupancy began as

soon as it was suspected that blacks might move in. The former owner of the home began to receive threatening phone calls and warnings from community residents before the purchase agreement was even made. Once the house was sold to the black family, gunshots were fired by an unknown perpetrator breaking all the upstairs windows, the drains were clogged, and paint was splashed on the front door. A group of ten white men from the block visited the broker's office threatening to "make trouble" if the deal were closed and offering to buy the house to make sure it would not be sold to blacks. The police department itself had received a series of calls threatening "to burn down all of Milton Avenue," where the house was located. The new owners were to move in the night before the house was damaged, and only by chance were not sleeping in the house as planned. The white family in the adjoining house, however, was at home and, if they had not awakened, could have suffered grave injury when the fire erupted the morning of the 24th.

The Staten Island Borough Commander immediately placed the house under twenty-four surveillance after the fire and that surveillance is still continuing. The city

relocated the dispossessed family, while the broker agreed to rehabilitate the house for occupancy as soon as possible. Staten Island District Attorney, John M. Braisted, Jr., expressed outrage at the incident and called together officials of all agencies involved to coordinate investigation activity, with findings to be turned over to the Grand Jury for possible indictments. Almost 100 witnesses have been called before the Grand Jury and only a few have refused to testify. The Grand Jury has not yet concluded its investigation. The U. S. Attorney for the Eastern District has also announced his intention to start an independent investigation of the incident to determine whether the civil rights of the family had been violated. This investigation will not begin until the Grand Jury investigation is completed.

As in the case of Briarwood, many community residents responded with commendable outrage over the attack, and made a special effort to express sympathy, support and aid to the family. Three days after the fire, CCHR representatives attended a community meeting sponsored by the Catholic Interracial Council of Staten Island involving some 150 residents of the Milton Avenue area of Great Kills. The group decided to actively assist the family

in returning to their home and to approach others in the community encouraging them to join the effort. The students of a nearby girls Catholic high school, which the daughter of the family attended, marched to the home and maintained a vigil outside in a demonstration of sympathy and support.

D. Bedford Park, Bronx

Bedford Park is a predominantly white, mostly lower middle income community in the north Bronx, with only a scattering of black and Hispanic residents. On May 29, 1972, a fire destroyed a three-story building located at 2839 Briggs Avenue, in which the two rental apartments were occupied by Hispanic families. One of the families consisted of a woman and her eight children, the other of a woman, her eleven children, the husband of the eldest daughter and an elderly woman friend. Both families are receiving public assistance, and had been referred to the Briggs Avenue apartments by a broker who had warned them not to reveal their welfare status.

From the start, the families reported, they encountered hostility and were subject to several incidents of harrassment.

For example, they reported, a group of individuals who regularly frequented a nearby bar had urinated in their front entrance, spilled garbage in front of the building, and made obscene gestures at family members when they looked out the window. According to the families, they had yelled such things as, "We want no Puerto Rican Spics in this neighborhood," and the children had experienced a number of unpleasant and threatening confrontations on the playground and on the street.

In the four days preceding the fire that ultimately destroyed these apartments, two other suspicious fires had broken out in the building. About 11 P. M. on Thursday, May 25th, flames broke out in the basement. After the fire was put out, the smoke was so thick that both families had to spend the night in a neighborhood church. The police report of this incident states that the Thursday fire was of a suspicious nature and may have resulted from a fire bomb, but apparently no further investigation was made. Sunday morning, about 3 A. M., both families were awakened by the smell of smoke. This time the fire was assessed by the fire marshall as non-suspicious, and due probably to a short circuit.

The families challenged this, observing that an electrician sent the following day by the landlord to check the wiring found that it was in good condition. According to them, a suspicious incident had occurred the day before the fire when two men tried to gain admittance to the basement and drew a gun on the families when refused admittance. These developments alarmed the families and fearing further attacks they began to move some of the younger children and their belongings to the homes of friends.

During the moving, at 1 A. M. the following morning, a firebomb was thrown through a bedroom window but did not ignite. Minutes after, a car passed the house and one of the children heard a passenger shout, "Watch out tonight." Returning after storing the furniture, the families found the house in flames again. This time the house was completely destroyed.

According to a Commission investigator, until the Commission entered investigation of this case, the reaction of fire and police authorities had been to minimize the seriousness of the initial incidents, and even to focus suspicion on the

families themselves. The case is still open, and police are continuing their investigation. They have suspects, but have not been able to make an arrest. It is the assessment of the police that the incident was the work of certain individuals, not necessarily neighborhood residents, and that the harrasment of the families was not racially motivated. Police report that the community has been especially cooperative in their investigation.

E. Forest Hills, Queens\*

Early in the morning of October 23, 1972, a fire extensively damaged the Local Christian Assembly Church at 94-06 70th Avenue in Forest Hills, Queens. The fire was deemed to be of suspicious origin: Graffiti was scrawled on the church building, including mostly phrases derogatory to blacks such as "Niggers Get Out," but there were also some

---

\*The CCHR did not make an extensive independent investigation of this incident, nor of the school bus attack described below. Police and other city agencies intervned and resolved the cases so quickly that concurrent CCHR investigation would have been superfluous. Accounts of both incidents are based on news reports and city sources.

swastika signs. The church had an interracial congregation of about 200: 2/3 whites and 1/3 black and Hispanic. Both ministers were black.

According to the police, however, the primary motivation was not racial. Prior to being taken over by the current congregation, the church had been abandoned for two years and had, in that time, become a meeting place for teenage drug addicts. They apparently resented the loss of their headquarters, and set the fire in retaliation. In doing so it is indicative of the present climate that they reached for racial and anti-semitic signs to express their hostility.

The police investigation resulted in the arrest of two college students and a 16 year old girl, who were charged with setting fire to the church.

F. Ozone Park, Queens

On October 25, 1972, a school bus carrying black and Puerto Rican students to a Queens junior high school was attacked by several white men, who broke the windows with pipes and poured oil

on the students. One of the students was hospitalized with a possible back injury; others were treated for cuts and for glass particles in the eye, and were released.

The bus that was attacked is one of several that run from the black and Puerto Rican community of South Ozone Park along 101st Street, through the predominantly white, middle-class area of Ozone Park to J. H. S. 210. The school, with approximately 1800 students, is about 1/3 black and Puerto Rican. The vast majority of the students — both white and non-white — are bussed to the school, and bussing of both groups has created problems with the community. Busses carrying white students and others carrying primarily minority students are sometimes packed 90 to a bus, and, without supervision, the children have sometimes been unruly and have harrassed pedestrians by shouting insults or throwing objects from the bus. The attack by adults was said by residents to have been in retaliation for an incident in which one of the alleged attackers had been hit by a pipe thrown from the bus. However others observed that the students had been made well aware of community objections to their attendance at the school and their own actions may have been in turn provoked by the open expression of hostility by community residents.

The school itself had experienced a great number of racial confrontations between students until about a year ago, when a new principal was brought in; since then racial tensions within the school have abated. The community, however, continues to resent the bussing of minority youngsters into the area, and there have been instances of confrontations between minority students and community residents.

Most residents of the area in interviews with journalists, considered the attack inspired by student provocation and somehow justified. Some residents qualified this explanation by expressing regrets that innocent children were involved. But the general feeling seems to have been that the actions of the assailants were understandable and even appropriate. Many residents protested that the attack was not racially motivated; race was considered incidental to the real cause of the conflict. Police have concurred in this assessment.

Police very speedily arrested two men who were arraigned for reckless endangerment and criminal mischief. Two or three other men are still being sought.

### III. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the arson and vandalism on houses described in this report are the work of individuals or small groups, these acts were generated by a widespread atmosphere of racial hostility and tension. This is not meant to implicate the communities or the city as a whole; to do so would be to subscribe to the facile generalization that is the root of all bigotry. Certainly, in each case there were people who reacted to these attacks with shock and anger, and who made a special effort to express their support and sympathy to the victimized minority families. Indeed we believe this to be the sentiment of the great majority of New Yorkers. Still, we should note the significant numbers involved as either participants or active or passive onlookers in the Rose-dale house-wrecking, for example. And we believe that such events would be less common if the community and city atmosphere were one that accepted integration or at the very least roundly and openly condemned the use of violence to protest it.

Clearly, the beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that are the basis of these acts are shared by some others in the communities in which the violent acts took place. These beliefs and attitudes

derive from specific and concrete sociological conditions, fears and changes and their resultant tensions, as well as traditional racial stereotypes and prejudices. Without open leadership and neighborhood condemnation of such acts, the entire community is easily and unjustifiably stereotyped and stigmatized as racist by outsiders and the media.

Each of these communities was a more or less exclusive enclave of lower middle-income and middle-income whites who valued their exclusivity and isolation as protection from growing urban ills. In many cases, they valued this isolation so highly they made considerable financial sacrifice to buy homes in their communities. Integration was most often seen as a threat both to the peace and stability of their neighborhoods and to the financial investment in their homes. This view was often supported by some evidence from surrounding or nearby communities where the densening of minority populations had been accompanied by intense blockbusting activity which did in fact result in some instability and neighborhood disarray. (It should be noted, however, that Rosedale had as an example the adjacent community of Laurelton, which has been cited as a model for

effective resistance to the disruptive influences of blockbusting, and for peaceful, successful integration.)

Contributing to these fears was a generalized identification of all minority group members as the bearers of urban ills. Thus, behind every black or Hispanic lurked the specter of the worst of urban pathology — crime, deteriorating housing, troubled schools, etc. No differentiation was made among different minority individuals. In all but one of the attacks on homes, for example, the targets of the attacks were hard-working, well educated people (some highly educated professionals) who could not be reasonably expected to bring catastrophe in their wake.

These automatic assumptions are simply stereotypes and bigotry, generated by ignorance and the isolation their proponents seek so hard to preserve, and themselves generating the fears and tensions that truly disruptive forces like blockbusting feed upon. The resultant climate is one in which the merest hint or rumor of minority occupancy can precipitate an atmosphere of hysteria and irrationality and stimulate the most desperate and dangerous violence.

Expression of this racial animosity has not been limited to attacks on homes, as the church arson and school-bus attack described above illustrate. While both of these incidents have been assessed by police as not racially inspired, the Commission believes it inaccurate and dangerous to ignore their racial implications. In the church arson, young drug involved people sought revenge for the loss of a meeting place but in expressing their anger they reached for racial slogans; they expressed their hostility in racial terms. This again was a manifestation of a more generalized racial atmosphere, although we must stress here that the interracial congregation of the church had been welcomed by the surrounding community, which was grateful for the conversion of the abandoned building.

In the school bus attack, racial motivation was similarly denied; explanations focused on provocation by students. Still, there has been a history of hostility and resistance of Ozone Park residents to the bussing of minority students. When bussing to J. S. H. 210 began        years ago, community residents expressed their hostility, an expression the bussed children may have remembered, especially in the context of continuing neighborhood tension concerning their presence in the schools. In any

event, one cannot excuse a serious attack by adults as the provocation of children, as many in this community sought to do. And we need to note that the victims were indeed black and Hispanic. While residents readily agreed that white children who were bussed in the area were also rowdy and provocative — some said equally so — it was the minority children who were singled out for retaliatory action. Responsible adults might have sought other solutions to disorder on the busses. The readiness to move violently reflects the temper of the times, one which, in the Commission's opinion, has more than subtle racial overtones.

Clearly any remedial and preventive approach to these phenomena requires an understanding of the dynamics of integration and of the fears and tensions it produces, and an effort to strike at the roots of those fears. Such an approach is one that the Commission is committed to take in its central role of promoting intergroup harmony in the city. This requires extensive study, planning and coordination that is already underway.

The city has been able to develop an effective approach to immediate crises through the Mayor's Urban Action Task

Force chairman and staff and the Office of Special Community Problems, the city's crises prevention apparatus. But to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents stern deterrent action must be taken that will stop those who experience these fears and hatred and the impulse to violence, from expressing them in unacceptable ways that endanger lives and further exacerbate existing racial tensions.

It is the Commission's assessment that the only effective deterrent in such cases is immediate response by police and stern prosecution by law enforcement agencies. Not until the FBI began to investigate and move against racist violence in the South was there an abatement of such violence. A similar problem in the North demands a similar approach. Inaction or indifferent handling by police both reinforces minority mistrust and contributes to the mood which sanctions violent acts.

Police response has been uneven — exemplary in some cases, lacking in others. In only one of the cases of arson or vandalism on homes — the Rosedale arson — have the perpetrators been apprehended and prosecuted. In the case of the house-wrecking incident in Rosedale, identification of perpetrators

was hampered by the failure of police to make arrests at the scene of the crime. This failure, as explained above, was due to police unfamiliarity with the situation and confusion about what action to take. This may have been the case but especially considering the difficulty police have had in apprehending suspects, this experience should produce the immediate development of strategies and techniques to make immediate arrests without increasing tension around a given incident. In the Briarwood incident, police have been unable to identify suspects. The Great Kills and Bedford Park cases are still open. The Bedford Park incident raised questions about police responsiveness to minority families. Because the victims in this case were non-English speaking, large families on welfare, they were apparently the initial focus of suspicion. And a Spanish-speaking Commission investigator believed it was only his intervention that prompted a more thorough police investigation.

In the two most recent incidents — the Forest Hills church arson and the school bus attack — police action was exemplary. Intensive and immediate investigation resulted in the apprehension and arraignment of the alleged perpetrators. Such action indicates that law enforcement officials are becoming increasingly

sensitive to the importance of such incidents. Their response might well serve as a model for future action. Only consistent, determined law enforcement can indicate that we are serious in defining such acts as unacceptable.

Police also have a role in the prevention of racially-inspired violence. Almost all of these was preceded and presaged by a series of less serious incidents — indications that trouble was brewing — phone threats, intimidation of neighbors, confrontations with brokers, minor vandalism, racial confrontations, and the like. These occurrences were often reported to police, but received insufficient or ineffective attention, if any. A more effective approach would involve the establishment of a policy where police take seriously the first, most minor sign of trouble, attempt to identify perpetrators, and give special protection to families or homes as needed. Such a policy might well prevent the escalation to more serious incidents, or the carrying out of threatened action.

In addition to these suggestions, we believe that the following should command the attention of law enforcement and public officials, community and civic organizations, and city-wide

leadership. In all cases the Commission offers to work with the responsible parties :

Law enforcement agencies should establish a defined, consistent policy uniform throughout the city, for the handling of cases of arson or vandalism which appear to be racially inspired. This policy should provide for immediate, intensive investigation by police and fire authorities of any such incident in order to identify suspects and for swift, stern prosecution of perpetrators by law enforcement officials.

The Police Department should develop and establish a similar policy and procedure for prevention of racist arson and vandalism. This should include encouraging reports to police of any indication or threat of trouble, including threatening phone calls, personal confrontations, minor vandalism, and the like. Police should investigate any such incident in order to intervene before escalation to serious vandalism and arson. In addition, police should develop liaisons with residents and brokers, urging them to inform police of the sale or rental of a home to minority people when it is believed such sale might precipitate violence.

District Attorneys for the 5 counties should consult with the relevant United States Attorneys, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other federal officials to work out strategies to combat racist arson and vandalism while this phenomenon is still containable. Federal officials have valuable knowledge based on extensive experience in the South that is indispensable for the development of a law enforcement methodology in a city such as this to which this phenomenon is new.

Because the majority of these incidents occurred in Queens, public officials from that borough should recognize a special situation of resistance to integration and potential for more violence, and should develop strategies for coping with them. There is no question that the overwhelming majority of Queens' residents abhor such violence and that these were actions of a very few, but their cluster in a single borough indicates a special problem that demands intensive coordinated efforts for solution.

Public officials and community organizations in Staten Island should develop a plan for effective and planned integration, particularly because that borough, alone among the five, has an

opportunity to avoid the ad hoc and blockbusting type-integration that is only transitional, leading to the fleeing of whites and even to ghettoization. At the present time, for various reasons, Staten Island has only a small minority population, a situation which provides an opportunity to apply careful planning by providing for the distribution of minorities throughout the borough and preventing the formation of large ghetto areas. In an ethnic dialogue held by the Commission in Staten Island last summer, borough residents of many different ethnic groups evidenced a rising consciousness of the need for such planning, and the willingness to work cooperatively to this end.

In conjunction with the relevant city offices and agencies, this Commission should establish a long-range early warning system to supplement the excellent, short-range crisis intervention work of the Office of Special Community Problems and the Mayor's Urban Action Task Force. Such a system should identify areas where the possibility or existence of integration or other tension threatens to create or has created problems. It should seek to identify problems many months in advance and develop early rather than crisis or ad hoc approaches to them. This program should involve the civic, community and ethnic

organizations that will be working as an ethnic and community coalition in a coordinated effort with this Commission.

This Commission should undertake a study or hearing of the dynamics of integration under new conditions presented by urban deterioration in New York and every other large city, in order to develop new strategies for integration that do not encourage white flight, to separate myth from reality, to identify potential sources of conflict and to alleviate unbased fears and suggest approaches to real ones.

The vast majority of community organizations and individuals opposed to violence and supporting the need for peaceful integration need to take affirmative measures to identify violent trends and work for solutions in their own communities. In the current racial climate, citizens of good will cannot fulfill their responsibility simply by dissociating themselves from criminal actions. A forceful, positive approach should be developed taking into account neighborhood peculiarities to create an atmosphere which will make such actions clearly unacceptable.

\* \* \* \* \*