
Global Peace Services USA

¼ an idea whose time has come

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A MODEL FOR PEACE SERVICE IN CINCINNATI

By John Halpin

The shooting death of an unarmed African American teenager by a police officer in April 2001 sparked Cincinnati's worst civil unrest in over thirty years. Timothy Thomas, the 19 year-old killed, was the 15th person (all African American men) killed by police since 1995. While the riots, or rebellion, as many refer to it, ostensibly were in response to Thomas' death, it was really years of poor relations among police and the black community, as well as severe economic deprivation among communities of color, that led people to take to the streets. Fifteen months later, tensions remain strained as the Cincinnati Police Division suffers a continuing succession of controversies. A boycott of the city, prompting cancellations of conventions such as that of the National Urban League and of performers such as Bill Cosby, continues to gain momentum, attracting the ire of business and political leadership.

A Step in a Different Direction

Amidst the turmoil of the past year, an agreement was born, which many see as Cincinnati's best hope to move forward out of conflict and into cooperation. In early 2001, the Cincinnati Black United Front (CBUF) and the American Civil Liberties Union brought a lawsuit against the city of Cincinnati, alleging 30 years of racial profiling by Cincinnati Police. As an alternative to resolving the issue in the courtroom, a *collaborative process* was developed, resulting in an agreement to improve community-police relations that may well serve as a model for courts, law enforcement, and municipal governments throughout the country. The agreement and the process behind it also give an intriguing picture of the

role a professional peace service could play in resolving tough conflicts in unique ways.

In early July, I had the chance to interview Dr. Jay Rothman, the mediator based in Yellow Springs, Ohio, who developed the *collaborative process*. Rothman sees the resulting agreement as Cincinnati's best hope of moving forward. The lawsuit could have easily taken the usual course of being fought out on the courtroom floor, Rothman says, were it not for U.S. District Court Judge Susan Dlott. He describes her as "a visionary." A former family relations attorney, Judge Dlott recognized that the courtroom wasn't always the best place to resolve such deep-rooted issues in which healing is necessary. She suggested to attorney Ken Lawson that he find another way to resolve the issue. Lawson's co-counsel Alphonse Gerhardstein, in turn, contacted the Andrus Family Foundation, based in New York, and asked if they would help fund an alternative method of resolving the lawsuit. They eagerly agreed and suggested Jay Rothman as the man to do it.

Rothman's specialty is in resolving "identity based conflicts." His approach was developed during the seven years he spent working with the Jerusalem Peace Initiative, an effort to bring Jews and Arabs together to envision new ways for solving the problem of Jerusalem. Rather than starting out by asking, "What are the interests you can accommodate to satisfy the other?" Rothman begins by having parties to a conflict look at the deeper existential issues – questions about why they feel the way they do and the values that lie beneath those feelings.

Problems are goals threatened and frustrated; goals are problems that have been converted into opportunities.

Converting Problems to Opportunities

The riots of 2001 broke out in the initial weeks of Rothman's work in Cincinnati, and he admits that they were instrumental in laying bare exactly what the problems in Cincinnati were and how deep they ran. The riots also focused more attention on issues of race and racism than at any time in recent memory. Suddenly, even the most disinterested of citizens faced the issue in a direct way. The time was ripe for change to be made, a time when most Cincinnatians agreed something needed to be done to improve police-community relations.



Photograph by Jimmy Heath

With the problems largely framed by the riots, Rothman proposed they undertake a visioning process. "If you look at a conflict and turn the coin over, goals are the other side. Problems are goals threatened and frustrated; goals are problems that have been converted into opportunities. Only by converting the problems into opportunities would Cincinnati heal."

Thus began one of the most remarkable aspects of the process – one that has never been done elsewhere, according to Rothman. He and his colleagues turned Cincinnati into several identity groups: African Americans, whites, youth, leaders of religious organizations and social service agencies, business and foundation leaders, educators, police and their families, city employees, and other minority groups. They asked each group to give them their vision of a future in which community-police relations were healed.

Through a web-based questionnaire, paper and pencil questionnaires, interviews and intensive outreach on the streets with youth, over 3,500 Cincinnatians responded to three questions: 1) What are your goals for future police-community relations in Cincinnati? 2) Why are these goals important to you? (What experiences, values, beliefs and feelings influence your goals?) 3) How do you think your goals could best be achieved? "We want them to be visionaries," Rothman said. The "what" and "how" questions provided that opportunity – to articulate a vision about what is important to them. The "why" question allowed them to touch their past experiences – perhaps of anger and despair – but in the context of looking forward for solutions.

Representatives of the identity groups gathered after the surveys were completed and used the responses to set five core goals for their group to guide the negotiations that began in January. The goals dealt with improving relationships and partnerships between the public and the police, ensuring fair treatment for all, and improving police education and accountability. "They truly created a context and a touchstone for negotiators to be faithful to," Rothman says.

Rothman took the five goals and research on best police practices from across the nation and drafted a single text that was to be used as a basis for collaborative negotiations. The text included recommendations from the negotiators and from the identity groups – their goals and the value statements they had drafted.

After several revisions by the parties, they came together in late January to begin negotiations that were, according to Rothman, "very tough. In some ways I was very crestfallen that all this process hadn't transformed the negotiators into collaborators." He thought that after bringing the city through a collaborative process, the leaders would follow, but they still operated in a win-lose paradigm. At times the negotiators were close to quitting, which would have sent the lawsuit back to the courtroom, but participatory democracy won out, Rothman says. Dozens of times he told them: "We have to live up to the mandate we were given by these 3500 people who asked us for some different future." This is what ultimately kept them working and reminded all the parties to be bigger than themselves, Rothman says. An agreement was reached and Judge Dlott, whose encouragement throughout the negotiations Rothman credits as instrumental, approved it on August 5, beginning a five-year implementation process.

A Treacherous Time

Yet with implementation beginning, the parties to the lawsuit seem no closer to being collaborators than they were 15 months ago. In fact, tensions seem only to be rising. Will collaboration succeed or will continuing antagonisms throw the lawsuit back into court? Jay Rothman is optimistic of success, but admits Cincinnati still faces challenges.

We're at a very treacherous time, he says, a neutral zone between what was and what will be, a time when it's easy to return to antagonism because it is more familiar. To make the collaborative succeed, to make the bickering end, he says, we need success that is big enough to matter and small enough to work. The leaders of the community need to step up and be bigger than themselves, which he says they've done throughout the year, just not consistently. The implementation process needs to be as healing as the product, Rothman says. Each time one side isn't fulfilling its part of the agreement, they can't go running to the judge. They must work on a human-to-human level and resolve problems together.

I asked him if there was something else they could have done to make the parties work better together. "Absolutely," says Rothman. "We made thousands of mistakes. We were inventing as we went; this has never been done before, anywhere. Parts of it have but never has there been federal oversight, a riot and 3500 people." Despite the difficulties and the mistakes he leaves Cincinnati feeling hopeful. Those in the collaborative process

were doing the right things with the right people at the right time.

On Peace Service

I asked Dr. Rothman, someone who exemplifies what a peace servant is and what he can do for his community, what kind of training he feels necessary for those attempting to do such work. He began his answer with a quotation from Shakespeare. "To thy own self be true and it must follow as night the day that thou canst not then be false to any other."

When activists go out to change the world without changing themselves, he explains, they do damage. Peacemakers, like anyone, have anger, fury and self-righteous indignation. "When they go out to change the world without having reconciled their own despair, they cause trouble." Rothman believes that peacemakers must find hope and convert their despair through their own spiritual beliefs. "We have to believe in things, we have to model them, we have to witness them."

As for professional training, Rothman thinks the peacemakers' movement must work within the system and transform it from within. "We have to be trained in traditional ways. There are programs in peace studies and conflict resolution and those are great, students should go to them, and yet we also need to have legitimized skills as lawyers, doctors, educators.... Students have to be legitimized and work within the system." He admits there is a role for those who want to work outside the system, but he thinks the peacemakers' movement has to be one that works to transform the system from within. "Get a foothold from the inside, learn a skill, trade, profession that gives you leverage, a power people cannot deny – not a power over but a power with them – to compel them to follow the vision you lead them to."

For more information on the Collaborative Process, visit the ARIA Group's website: www.ariagroup.com

GPS Board Elections

GPS is seeking nominations for the Board of Directors. Send names, contact information, and brief statements in support of your nominees to GPS, postmarked by September 30.

GPS Annual Meeting to Feature Pulitzer Prize Winning Author

The annual membership meeting of Global Peace Services will be on October 12 at Church of the Saviour, 2025 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, from 2:00 until 6:00 p.m. The meeting will provide members an opportunity to discuss ideas and recommendations for the development of GPS programs.

This year the keynote address will be given by David Shipler and his daughter, Laura Shipler Chico. Discussion with the two speakers will follow their presentation. David Shipler is author of *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. "Critical yet compassionate, *Arab and Jew* offers a comprehensive guide for anyone wishing to learn about these neighbors and

enemies living uneasily side by side," wrote a reviewer for USA Today. Shipler later served as producer, writer, and narrator of a PBS documentary, *Arab and Jew*, which won a DuPont-Columbia Award for excellence in broadcasting journalism. Mr. Shipler worked for the New York Times from 1966-1988, serving as Jerusalem Bureau Chief from 1979 to 1984. Later he was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Laura Shipler Chico served as National Coordinator of the Help Increase the Peace Program (HIPP) for the American Friends Service Committee for three years. Last year she was a peacebuilding consultant for the Womens League of Burma, which works with Burmese refugees and exiled women in Thailand.

<i>Global Peace Services USA</i>	
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