

# VOICES OF PAIN AND HOPE

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*Interviews with leaders, organizers, and participants of the Gang Summit.*

## TEACHING THE VALUES OF GOD

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED WILLIAMS.**

*Fred Williams is the founder and executive director of the Cross Colors/Common Ground Foundation, an advocacy group based in the Watts section of Los Angeles that works with young people involved in gangs. He was co-coordinator of the Gang Summit, and he was interviewed by Jim Wallis shortly after he returned to LA from Kansas City.*

—THE EDITORS

**JIM WALLIS:** How did the Gang Summit come about? Some people think it was precipitated by the Rodney King trial and the Los Angeles rebellion.

**FRED WILLIAMS:** It had absolutely nothing to do with the Rodney King case. It was an idea whose time had just come,



*Fred Williams confers with new NAACP Executive Director Ben Carson.*

and it swelled because the young men were actually tired of killing each other. But even more, they were tired of being victimized by law enforcement and by the same society that claimed to help them. They knew that the only way to change it was to do something for themselves.

**WALLIS:** LA had one of the first gang truce movements, while similar movements were occurring in other cities across the country. How did it all come together?

**WILLIAMS:** It was a natural coming together. LA is the capital of the world and when the young men there went public with the gang truce movement, it gave everybody else a sigh of relief. That made some people say, "Look, let's do the same thing here."

**WALLIS:** What was the significance of the Gang Summit to you?

**WILLIAMS:** This country has never had young African Americans and Hispanics come together on the premise that we are not here to shoot each other in the head. Our destinies are tied together; our future depends on each other. That's why the brothers came together. They decided to create their own economic development because our society has simply forgotten how valuable these young people are.

They cannot be nurtured and cultivated. They cannot work with resources, and the strategies for getting resources have to be clear or these new leaders will go underground.

**WALLIS:** What did you see happening between people at the summit?

**WILLIAMS:** I saw the coming together of a family that had been divided. Although we have experienced the same kinds of degradation across the country, we knew that coming together would give us a better sense of where we need to go. It was powerful, very powerful.

It had nothing to do with all of us who serve in the military. It was a spiritual coming together that was bound to happen.

**WALLIS:** What is the role of the churches in this?

truce movement? What do you hope for from them in terms of relationship or partnership?

**WILLIAMS:** Well, the church might not like all of what I say.

**WALLIS:** That's fine. I want you to tell it like it is.

**WILLIAMS:** We recognize the financial power and the resource strength of the church. The church has to get off its high horse. It's got to be willing to do what no one else is going to do and share its financial and other kinds of resources—immediately. It must be the leader.

Look at what Jesus did.

Jesus wasn't concerned about his wealth. His mentality and approach went far beyond just what God could give him. It went to what he could bring his people. And I think if the church is going to be a force, it needs to be true to what God tells us in the scripture.

**WALLIS:** What are the next steps?

**WILLIAMS:** There needs to be a growing interest in what happens to young people. People should start in their own neighborhoods. Most of us need to start in our own families by just being more sensitive to where young people are.

Because every city is different, we've got to deal with our own problems. Each community has to do that first, then we come together and move forward with a national agenda. And once we do that, oh, the power!

**WALLIS:** The truce is holding in LA?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, it is. But we have to be very clear that the glue has a lot to do with the resources available.

**WALLIS:** There's a lot of cynicism in the media and other places about where the truce movement is going. What do you think are the most difficult questions you'll be asked?

**WILLIAMS:** How do you translate a high-profile summit into a grassroots movement? What about the day in and day out, people talking, people organizing—that's critical. You cannot just go into a city and claim to put together mass gang movements. It's going to turn and bite you.

We can't get lost in the interviews. Some of us are starting to believe our own press releases, and that's going to kill us. The question is, how do we make it a real, and I'm talking about R-E-A-L, not R-E-E-L, movement?

**WALLIS:** You've been doing this street organizing for 10 years. What is your background?

**WILLIAMS:** I was a gang banger. I shot a boy and killed him when I was 14. I did time for that. Crime was my first, middle, and last name. I was one of the Crips that this society trained to die. But they wanted me to believe that once I was one I would always be one. That's not true. That's the message we are taking to our young folk.

**WALLIS:** What turned things around for you?

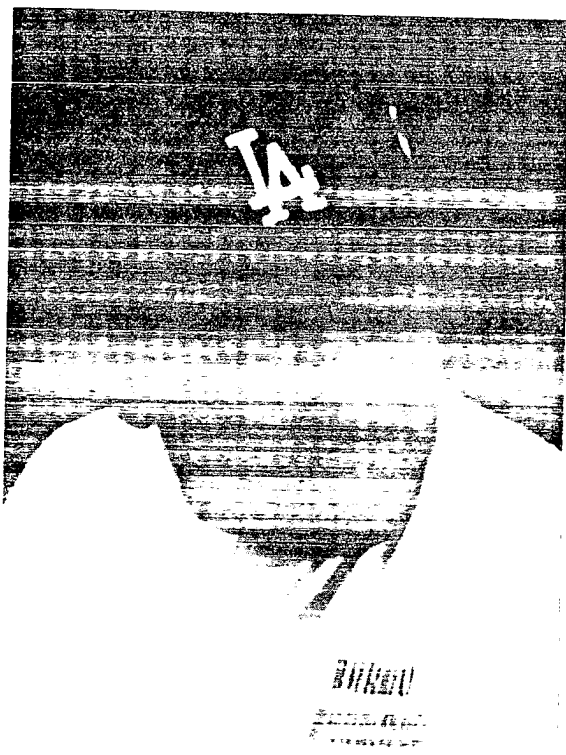
**WILLIAMS:** I can only give glory and honor to God. But it's like I was asleep for the first 15 years of doing this work. Three years ago I realized what God wants me to do.

And that is to help young people see God's value for their life and their own self-worth. They need to see that their commitment to this society is tied to their success. We need to stay about the business of organizing for young people instead of around them. If we step out of the organization of young people and into the capitalization of them, we've already lost the battle.

## HUMBLED TO SPEAK THE TRUTH

### AN INTERVIEW WITH NANE ALEJANDREZ.

*Daniel "Nane" Alejandre is the executive director of the National Coalition to End Barrio Warfare in Santa Cruz, California. Created in 1992, the coalition works on strategies to heal the Latino community and empower youth to become "Barrio Warriors" in the struggle for positive social change. Nane is co-chair of the Gang Summit, and he was interviewed there by Jim Wallis.* —THE EDITOR



*Nane Alejandre, director of the National Coalition to End Barrio Warfare in Santa Cruz.*

**JIM WALLIS:** We just got out of the prayer circle. How are you feeling about the whole summit?

**NANE ALEJANDREZ:** We were up most of the night trying to get everything together. We're feeling tired, but the circle, the prayers, and the facilitators here give you energy—energy that we need to go out and talk to young brothers and sisters about peace.

**WALLIS:** This is really the first major coming together of 100 African Americans and African Americans in a significant way. It's a historic event.

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violence as African Americans, so we have a lot in common. That's what made it come together. Our ghettos are coming, and we need to create change.

We need to develop new leadership because the traditional leadership has not reached us. It's significant to see brothers and sisters reaching out to people they don't even know, but who have the same pain—to see the respect they have for each other.

**WALLIS:** Some people will be saying that the gathering was Spiritual transmutation and political transmutation seemed to go hand in hand.

**ALEJANDREZ:** The spirituality of this gathering had a lot to do with the presence of our great leader César Chávez, who also is respected in the African-American community. That brought us together.

This is a spiritual movement. We need to heal ourselves. We need to embrace each other. We need to humble ourselves to go out and speak the truth.

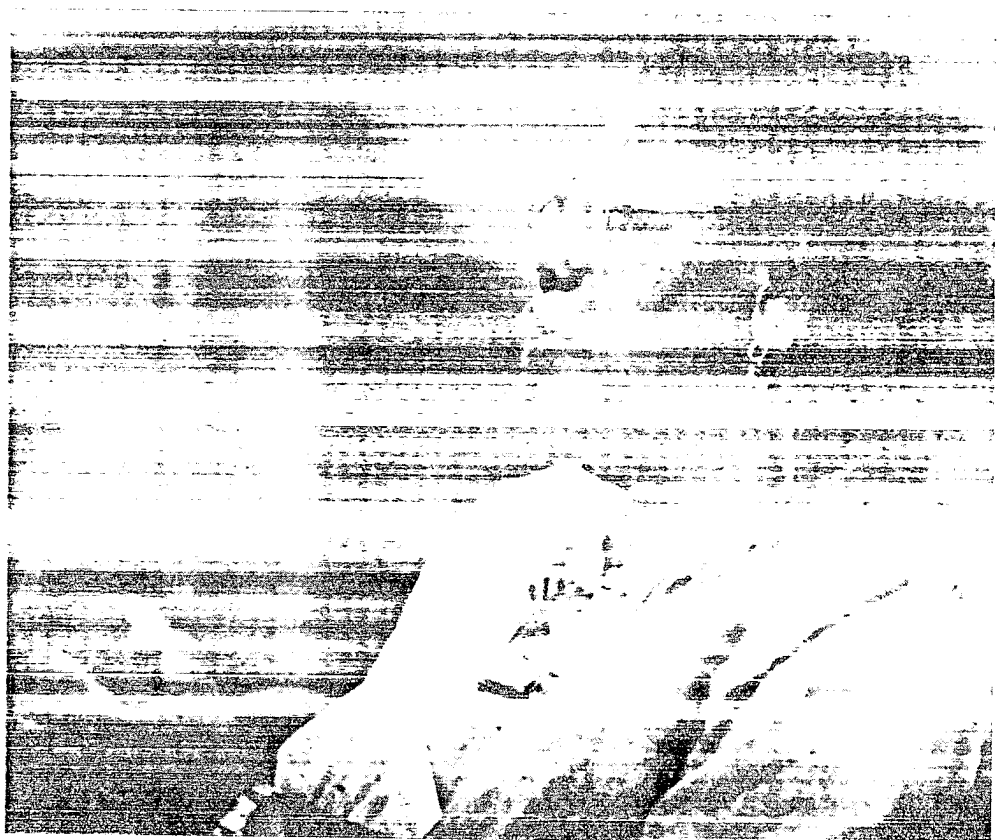
**WALLIS:** You've been a humble facilitator during many critical moments in this whole process. What's on your mind when things are tense? How do you keep yourself together in moments like that? A thousand forces and pressures were against this summit occurring. How did you find the strength to keep going with it?

**ALEJANDREZ:** I have to look real deep...[choking back emotion]... I get by through the spirit of my brothers and my faith. And I learn to shut up and think. I think that's it. Sometimes we get into situations where we have to take a deep breath and look at the situation, because there's a lot of pain out there. Even though we're trying to create peace, when it's not going our way, we sometimes try to be heard.

I have been given this role of speaking for a lot of people, so I have to be very conscious of what I say. I think about what everybody else is trying to come up with. I admire César Chávez's speeches in times of difficulty; he was humble in just saying what he thought.

**WALLIS:** What kind of configuration do you think will emerge from this?

**ALEJANDREZ:** It's a network, and it's individuals and relationships. There are forces out there that will turn it around, pick up the negative, and send out the wrong message. But many people are represented here, and we'll take the real message back.



Marion Stamps

# THERE'S NO THEM WITHOUT US

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARION STAMPS.

Marion Stamps is the chair of the Tranquility-Marksmen Community Organization in Cabrini-Green housing project in Chicago, where she has lived for 24 years. Jim Wallis spoke with her after the Gang Summit.

—THE EDITORS

**JIM WALLIS:** What do you think was the significance of the summit?

**MARION STAMPS:** The summit signified reunification of the black poor and oppressed communities, and it came from the bottom up instead of top down. If we are to unite our communities and stop the violence, it has to take place from the bottom up. Certainly the people at the summit represent the very fabric of the grassroots community.

It was very significant for the brothers to work out for themselves some of the problems they have created for the community. I think they are the only ones who have the solution.

I got a real good feeling from this summit. Having come from the old school, I'm clear that unity only comes out of struggle. When you're able to struggle on issues with brothers and sisters and come out unified, then you have the foundation you need to build a strong and lasting relationship.

**WALLIS:** Can you comment on the role of women in the summit and how that came about?

**STAMPS:** It was very clear from the onset there had not been any participation in leadership from sisters. There were no sisters sitting at the head of the table, there were no statements coming from sisters, there was no introduction of sisters participating in the summit. This is typical in any organization nowadays unless it is a women's organization.

**S**INCE WE'VE BEEN BACK IN CHICAGO, WE'VE MET EVERY THURSDAY AS A COLLECTIVE GROUP OF BLACK WOMEN, PULLING IN SISTERS FROM THE STREETS AND READING ABOUT RUTH AND ESTHER IN THE BIBLE.

I think it is very clear to us as women that we must constantly struggle for our rightful voice when it is a dominantly male situation. The brothers make a serious mistake when they do not include women in the planning and

organizing as it relates to development in our communities. Because first of all, we are the ones who give life; without us, there would be no them. I'm sure they could use the same argument, but the bottom line is women of color hold up three-fourths of the world. We are not to be ignored or patronized.

How we perceive the situation is going to be different than the brothers because it has nothing to do with that macho piece. It has nothing to do with muscle. It has to do with brains and our hearts. A lot of times that's the excuse the brothers use not to do with us—that we're too easily manipulated, that we make decisions based on how we feel instead of what is politically correct.

When the sisters walked out of the meeting, and called a caucus among themselves, and put together a prepared statement, the brothers had to deal with us in relation to leadership. Then I was appointed to the National Advisory Board. I assume to represent the woman's point of view. But that is not my training.

My training is to determine who can get the job done, whether male or female. That's the kind of training that the brothers will have to have. There's a basic education that has to take place in terms of the history of struggle of black and poor people in this country.

A lot of those brothers don't have that history; they come from the street, but they don't come from struggle. The education that we learned in the civil rights movement must be integrated in the development of this peace summit.

The brothers had to do one thing before we even talked to them about peace. They first had to apologize to the African-American community—specifically the sisters and the babies—for all the pain and suffering they have caused us. We demanded they publicly apologize to us. Once they did that, the non-believers changed their perspective. The same kind of thing needs to be done on a national level.

Brothers and sisters have to understand this race isn't about who has the biggest mob. It's about stopping the killing in our community. It's as simple as that.

**WALLIS:** There was powerful bonding between some of the younger and older sisters at the summit. Tell us about that.

**STAMPS:** Oh, that was powerful! One of the younger sisters said in the women's caucus that she did not know what it was

like to be around stronger, positive black women. If she'd had a strong mother, she was almost sure that she would have taken a different role at the summit.

There was so much love in that room. We shared concrete experiences together, and it was obvious that the youngsters in that room needed to understand that we didn't get to where we are as elders without going through some hard times ourselves.

It was very clear that we have not put forth the effort to address the concerns of the young sisters. We made a commitment that would not happen again, and since we've been back in Chicago, we've met every Thursday as a collective group of black women, pulling in sisters from the streets and reading about Ruth and Esther in the Bible.

It's like a political education process we are going through. They can see the love is real and didn't start with us. We are able to love sisters because we know that from the inception of womanhood, sisters have loved us. We are strong because sisters loved us. You can understand if you know how these nations [gangs] function and the way they treat women, that there's going to be some changes, some serious changes.

**WALLIS:** The changes were happening even in Kansas City. How did you feel about the response from the brothers, what you're doing?

**STAMPS:** It was clear that a lot of those brothers weren't as chauvinistic as they appeared to have been. If anybody didn't think that the Lord was sanctioning what was going on, they don't have a relationship with God at all.

When the brothers came up at the altar call, I felt like God just came in and said, "Hey, I'm telling you that what you're doing is important. Just keep on doing what you're doing, and as long as you put me first, it's going to be right. Don't worry about the non-believers. You just carry on my mission." That's the way I felt, and based on that, that's how I'm moving.

It's God that leads me. That's the message I want the brothers and sisters everywhere to understand. If you let God be the leader in your life, I don't care what you have done in the past. If God woke you up this morning, you can correct those mistakes.

## ON THE UPWARD WAY

### AN INTERVIEW WITH JERRY MCAFFEE.

*Jerry McAfee is a Baptist preacher at New Salem Missionary Baptist Church and a member of the Board of Directors of City Inc. and United for Peace in Minneapolis. Jim Wallis interviewed him at the Gang Summit.*

—THE EDITOR

**JIM WALLIS:** A lot of people who don't understand what this is about will be surprised at the role religion played at the summit.

**JERRY MCAFFEE:** Of course! We are a spiritual people, and anytime we operate outside of that spirituality we're nothing. We learn especially from a Christian perspective that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

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