

CHAPTER XVI

(Tuesday, late evening)

The meeting was called by the Mayor. Panel members included city council members from minority communities, the Manhattan borough president, and a member from the civilian review board. Reverend Nettles mobilized members of the Inter-borough Community Action Network (I CAN), his community organization, to get the word out and rally support and participation. The meeting was held at the Apollo Theater. All of the local news organizations as well as crews from the major networks were set up inside.

The meeting was supposed to be an open forum to give members of the community an opportunity to discuss their concerns about the police department and how they related to, or failed to relate to, the community. The Mayor's office also thought that it would allow folks to vent, release some of the pressure that was building over the shooting of Reginald Carter. As it turned out, people had plenty on their minds, in addition to those issues.

There was standing room only at the Apollo. The I CAN mobilization committee had enlisted church buses and volunteers with cars and vans to bring people in from all five boroughs. In addition, the midday and evening news had carried the story about the meeting, engaging supporters from New Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island, and Upstate New York. A large contingent of young people, many of whom attended colleges and universities throughout the city, was there. The theater was teeming, and the overflow poured onto 125th Street, bulging out into the street at the entrance and flowing along the sidewalk for at least a block in each direction going east and west.

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The city was not prepared for a turnout this large. The police precincts responded by reassigning available manpower and offering overtime. Squads were assigned from precincts downtown so that the city could show presence and contain any disturbance that might result. Two riot control details were put on ready alert, just in case. Extra patrol cars continuously cruised the neighborhood from the Hudson to the East River, and from 110th Street up to 145th. Police helicopters buzzed the area, joined by eye in the sky news crews from the major stations.

Harlem was alive tonight.

The Reverend Nettles was asked to kick the meeting off. In keeping with tradition, he began with a prayer. "...Father give us the presence of mind to discuss these issues that are troubling our community and arrive at productive solutions to the challenges that pit man against man and man against child so that we, your humble servants can peacefully exist with those of us who are charged to serve, protect, and keep the peace that you intended for your children here on earth, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

After the prayer the Reverend introduced the panel members and gave the floor to the Mayor.

"Thank you, Reverend Nettles." The Mayor looked over at the Reverend, waved his right hand and nodded his head. The Reverend waved out a response while he walked down the stairs at the side of the stage and took a front row seat in the audience.

"And thank you all for taking the time to come out and participate in this community discussion tonight. I know that this is not the most desirable circumstance for us to get together like this, but I assure you that we are all here tonight to understand how you feel about the

people who police your communities and what can be done to improve the relationship between them and you.” The Mayor was out of his neighborhood, but in his element. He immediately took control of center stage, confidently filling the room with sincere concern over the issues and wellbeing of the people present.

The Mayor reviewed the agenda, which was printed on a five by seven card and handed out to every person in the auditorium and many on the streets. The back of the handout was a comments form that could be completed and dropped into collection boxes at the exits or mailed in, postage paid, to The Office of the Mayor, P.O. Box.... The meeting was well organized, thanks to Howard Bernstein, the Mayor’s communications director, and his staff.

The plan was for the Manhattan borough president, Mary Tillage, to have ten minutes to discuss the city’s program to improve police relations in the City. The Civilian Review Board representative, Barry Stern, would have ten minutes to discuss grievance filing procedures when there were allegations of offenses by a policeman, and the Mayor would end the presentations with a status report on the investigation into the shooting of Reginald Carter. The panel would finish by fielding questions from the audience, the councilmen from the five boroughs were there to respond to specific issues relating to their districts. That was the plan.

Two minutes into Mary Tillage’s presentation someone in the audience shouted out, “They do that down town, not up here in Harlem, where do you live?”, and echoes of “you know that’s right” and “Amen Brother” and “sho you right” resounded through the theater.

The Reverend Nettles stood up, faced the back of the auditorium and raised both hands to restore order. After another minute of

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presentation there was one more outburst from the crowd, this time Reverend Nettles could not easily restore order.

“Ya’ll think we gonna just sit here and listen to this, I’ll bet a cop is out there right now, roughing up one of our children.” Someone shouted from the back of the theater which responded with an uproar of support.

“I thought this meeting was to find out how we feel,” someone else yelled.

“Those programs are not for us, you have guns and billy clubs for us”, a young person boomed from the far side.

Then everyone started shouting and talking at once. What had began as a well orchestrated meeting had quickly turned into a hullabaloo. The Mayor looked down at the Reverend Nettles with expectation. He seemed to be silently communicating, *do something*. The Reverend took the queue and walked up on stage and stood at the podium, raising his hands to ask for order. The room became silent.

“Good people,” he started, “this is an excellent opportunity for us to talk with some of the city’s most prominent officials. We all have felt the pain of disrespect and intolerance in our community. Let us not stoop to the level of those who offend us, but let us seize this opportunity to dialog with our city representatives and hopefully make progress toward resolving our issues.” The reverend quick-wittedly seized the moment. He then turned half round, still talking into the mike, and said to the people on stage, “Ladies and gentlemen of the panel, we do appreciate your efforts to update us on the programs that the administration has in place to improve police services in the City. But we want you to understand that we feel those programs have not been effective in our neighborhoods and that we have a different set of

issues that we would like to see addressed here tonight.” The audience applauded loudly.

“So with all due respect to the agenda that your people put together for us tonight Mayor, could we use this time to hear from the people and maybe address their concerns?” The Mayor forced a discomfited smile and nodded his head in consent. The Reverend noticed a slight tick in Dan’s left eye and he thought he saw the tips of his ears turn red, he just knew that there would be some discussion later regarding this turn of the event.

The crowd responded with a thunderous round of applause. Supporters could be heard yelling, “You tell em Rev.”, “Amen, Brother Nettles”, “Way to go Reverend”, and the overwhelming support of the crowd affirmed to Martin and “Dan the Man” Ferraro that the community could be moved in support of the right issues and the right individual. Martin Nettles looked over at the Mayor and winked, careful to wink the eye that could not be seen from the audience.

After the meeting, the Mayor and the Reverend convened at the Mayor’s community relations office uptown. Thanks to Martin, the meeting had been a success. The Reverend had taken control and moderated the interaction between the audience and the panel members. The issues of concern went far beyond police brutality. The Mayor was surprised to discover that members of the community were supportive of increased police activity in some of their neighborhoods. However, they wanted the police to focus on the small percentage of wrongdoers who, in addition to stigmatizing the entire community, made the residents feel unsafe in their own homes.

“Well I must say Martin, I don’t think Moses led his people any better than you led yours tonight. Excellent job, Reverend, excellent.”

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The Mayor was smiling like a Cheshire cat. He had finally connected with the minority community in a positive way. The community leaders had congratulated him on taking a major step toward including them in the process and the audience members had seemed to rally in support of the Mayor's promise to address their concerns. Thanks to the Reverend, it now seemed possible that, if he worked hard and delivered on the promises he had made, a significant block of voters would be in his corner for the Governor's election. The Reverend Nettles was gloating too.

"Like I told you when we planned this meeting, it could go a long way toward community support for your bid for the Governor's mansion. When I say I'll deliver the goods, the goods will be delivered."

"Well Fed Ex couldn't have done it any better. What I would like to do now is set up a session for early tomorrow morning to recap tonight's discussion, I want to prioritize the concerns and requests, get on those that we can do something about immediately and come up with a plan for the others. Can you be in my office tomorrow morning at seven, I have an eight thirty appointment that I have to make."

"Seven in your office, no problem Dan, I'll be there."

"Now, would you like to join us for a late dinner, I'm starved, and I'm sure you are too."

"As much as I would like to, I think I'll have to take a rain check this time, Cynthia is expecting me shortly."

"Well say hello to your wife, Martin. See if you can clear her calendar for dinner with Anna Marie and I at Gracie Mansion next week. I'd like us to get together in a less formal setting."

"I'd like that too, Dan. I'll have her to set that up."

After shaking hands with the Mayor and his key people the Reverend left, he could now see a straight path to Washington by way of Albany and he thought, “ *a man without a vision will perish.*”