

## Hate Crime in the Forgotten Borough



*El Diario/La Prensa*, News Report, Manuel E. Avedaño, Translated by Elena Shore, Posted: Aug 07, 2010

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Demographic changes on Staten Island have contributed to tensions between different communities, leading to intolerance and violence, according to activists and leaders who are seeking a resolution to the recent wave of hate crimes on the island.

"Staten Island is undergoing a process of change," notes sociologist Eugene Prisco, a retired public school teacher who worked in the school system for more than 30 years. "Twenty-five years ago, there were no Mexicans here." He observes that Port Richmond was largely an African-American community, with some whites and Hispanics, but no Mexicans.

Prisco, who is a community organizer for the organization, "African Refuge," dedicated to serving young African immigrants, refugees and other low-income families, says that "now we see Mexican businesses and restaurants all over with a new presence in this community."

The former member of the Staten Island Board of Education doesn't think the recent attacks reflect a generalized sentiment among all African Americans, but rather just a group of young people. "No one is reaching these youth, who don't go to church or to school," he says.

As "newcomers" to the community, Mexicans have become "easy victims" of attackers since they leave work with cash.

Prisco, who has participated in various activities for young people, including sports and theater, believes that "the police are not the solution to the problem," but that it is the job of churches, community leaders and schools.

At a recent community meeting held at St Philips Baptist Church, representatives gathered from various organizations including Communities United for Respect and Trust, the Immigrant Center, Eye Openers: Youth Against Violence, Make the Road NY, and Project Hospitality.

According to data compiled by the leaders themselves, Mexicans started arriving on Staten Island in significant numbers about 10 years ago, attracted by affordable housing and an attractive job market in landscaping, construction and restaurants.

"A lot of people make their lives here without ever leaving the island," said Saúl López who, by contrast, lives in Queens and commutes two hours to work on Staten Island every day.

López, the organizer of Make the Road NY, said Mexicans do manual labor, but they make an effort to learn and better themselves. "We teach English and computers to the men and women who come to class, some with their kids," he says.

However, he notes that in recent months, many students have expressed fears and have stopped coming to class. "At night we close at 9:30 and some of them are afraid, but others say, 'Why should I stay home?' and come," he says.

### Anti-Hate Initiatives

The 443,000 residents of this county have been the targets of the recent wave of hate crimes, according to figures from the 2000 Census. Authorities, community and religious leaders and neighbors in the area have joined together in the group "We Are All Staten Island" to analyze the problem, find solutions and unite the community.

On July 27, the Guardian Angels sent several of their members to patrol the streets of Staten Island to prevent further violent incidents.

Curtis Sliwa, head of the Guardian Angels, which has 150 members in New York and 5,000 worldwide, notes that historically, "Staten

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