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LINDA – Fieldnotes – Saturday, January 26, 2008

Subject: Training for giving testimony on the Wednesday ULURP meeting on 125th street rezoning

Location: Adam Clayton Powell state office building, eighth floor

Time: 1:38-3:15pm

I heard about this meeting last night on the radio, when Haja had his segment on the show. I asked Cindy if she thought I could go, and she said yes. We arranged to do her interview first and then for me to go with Haja to the meeting. Cindy and I spoke for almost 2 hours, so I was late to the meeting. Haja had already gone. I left their house around 1:30.

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As I approached the state office building, I paused to allow two elderly women to go in front of me through the revolving doors. They were warmly dressed in fur (or fake fur?) coats, scarves, and hats. As they went through security, I looked at a side table that held tax forms and instruction booklets. They chatted with the second guard at the metal detector about a spy for the Russians who had received a heavy jail sentence. One of the ladies exclaimed that he should be executed.

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I got onto the same elevator as them, and they also were going to the 8th floor. I asked if they were going to the training. I can't remember her response but it prompted me to explain. No, they were not.

On the eighth floor the women headed to the left. I followed them and came across a woman who looked like a maintenance staff worker and asked her. She pointed me the same way. I poked my head into three different rooms, all full of black women sitting at desks with pamphlets in front of them. A woman sitting at the front of one of the rooms, facing the others, told me, "I think you have the wrong room," without me opening my mouth. "I think I do too," I told her.

I passed by several rooms that were locked. I went to the other side of the building, where I found the restrooms. Inside I ran into the maintenance worker, who asked me if I found the room. I said no, but I would try the other side.

Finally I found the room, much larger than the others. A man in a blue sweater stood at the front of the room in front of a screen with a powerpoint-type presentation showing. That slide instructed people to give their name and where they lived, and to have written testimony. Fifteen people were sitting facing him. I walked in, although I hadn't spotted Haja, and whispered to a woman sitting near the door asking if this was the training for the 125th—and before I could finish, she nodded. I thanked her and took a seat in the very back. I finally spotted Haja, who was looking down at the time.

The majority of people were women, and middle-aged and older. Most people were sitting on the right side of the room, near the door. On the left there was a thin Asian woman about my age with a young mixed-race child (Asian and white, about four years

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old), a woman about my age in a brown cable-knit sweater, a man named Julius, and Haja. On the right there was a middle-aged white man in a gray sweater in the front row, a white man with a videocamera, and at last one other person I didn't see clearly. Later, when the cameraman moved to the back of the room [my row], I saw that he wore a dark blue fleece zipped all the way up its mock turtleneck under a black blazer, dark blue pants, and brown leather boat shoes. In the second row sat a woman named something like Ms. Brock, a middle-aged man in a blue cap [whose name I later learn is Roland], and the woman I spoke to, a sleekly dressed middle-aged woman with close-cropped hair. Roland wore a light gray hooded sweatshirt under a dark gray hooded quilted shirt/jacket with a white wooly liner in the hood. He had a medium dark complexion. [He is the only recognizably "working class" man in the room, a little rough around the edges.] In the third row there were two women, one that I don't have any notes on and the other, a medium-skinned husky woman who wore dreads, a denim vest over a black long-sleeved thermal top, and blue jeans belted with a black studded belt and a chain. She also wears glasses with dark chunky plastic frames. In the fourth row there was a middle-aged white man in a maroon shirt, and a woman at least in her forties or fifties. Maroon shirt had floppy brown hair. [Later I would hear references to him being a business owner, possibly in East Harlem. This also suggests that people introduced themselves in the beginning of the meeting.] I sat in the last row near a woman in a beige sweater, whose name I would later hear is Beatrice. Later I would also see that she wore an Obama button. Later at least six more people came in.

There was a white rectangular table in the front of the room, where the man speaking, Charles Calloway, had set up some materials. Out of the windows on the left, you could see the Theresa Hotel. The back wall of the room was a fabric sliding wall. The door was on the right side. Next to the door there was another white rectangular table, set up with magazines and a flyer. Later, people would put extra materials on that table.

When I arrived, Julius was arguing with Ms. Brock. Julius is middle-aged, mocha-skinned, tall, and lean with long graceful fingers. He was wearing a knit black skullcap, glasses with dark chunky plastic frames, a black turtleneck under a black jacket, jeans, and gray sneakers. He has an intense way of speaking. Ms. Brock is an elderly, dark-skinned, and heavysset. She wore a brightly printed dashiki in oranges, yellows, reds, blue, and green, with a matching hat. As far as I could tell, Julius argued for the "need to attack" inaccuracies in the report on the rezoning. Ms. Brock said she didn't see anything in the report about something, I think the environmental impact, and Julius argued that there was. A woman's voice, I think Beatrice, said, "Julius, you've had a lot of air time," trying to get him to shut up. He did not.

Charles told people to bring at least 20 copies of their written testimony. The Asian woman told people that if they needed help with photocopies to come by the office.

At 1:45 a man came in. He was tall, not quite as lean as Julius. I can't remember the shade of his skin. The dreaded woman gave him the Black Power salute as a greeting. He shook hands with Julius, then sat next to Beatrice. I saw that he wore a khaki turtleneck sweater over khaki pants, with light brown heavy shoes. The woman sitting in front of me

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also exchanges greetings with him. Two more black women come in, one wearing a black felt hat.

Next Beatrice gets up to speak. [I believe she is the Beatrice Sibblies that spoke on the radio show last night.] She wore a gold/beige sweater that hung to her hips, with the top button buttoned over a beige shirt, and dark pants. She asks, How many people haven't been to a meeting? Three people raise their hands, including the white man in the maroon shirt and the two women who just came in. She asks the women how they heard about the meeting, did they see the flyer? Word-of-mouth, one answers, looking back at one of the people sitting behind her. [don't know which] That works, a male voice said.

Beatrice says, "where we've heard a lot of upset in the community is the socioeconomic conditions." She gives some statistics on homebuying, including "50% of the buyers are white. The remaining 50% are divided among blacks, Latinos [Hispanics? I miswrote this in my notes as 'whites'], and Asians." She said, "What is being proposed is a demographic and socioeconomic shift."

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Roland asked a question about the homebuyers, and Beatrice answered, "They are not from Harlem." He asked where she got the statistics, and she told him to go online and google some search terms. Julius told people to "google new buyers home buyers Harlem." Camera Man got up and came to the last row, shaking the hand of Khaki Man.

Beatrice continued with a timeline and update of what was happening with the 125th St. rezoning plan and Community Board 10. She mentioned that one of the people on the committee was Karen Phillips, from the Abyssinian Development Corporation. In response to a question she said that two people were appointed by the borough president. "Don't assume they're all hostile," she warned us. "Don't assume they don't all agree with you, at least two do." [I assume this is a reference to aggressive behavior such as the meeting I went to that got shut down.] The woman in dreads nods. Other people jump in, warning that "they'll shut down" the meeting. Camera Guy says, "tell your friends to be respectful." Julius says something I don't remember, and Khaki Guy says "Thank you Julius," continuing, "There's a fine line between passion and being straight up insulting."

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Beatrice emphasizes that we have to communicate to the listeners [city planners?] the personal nature of this. Speaking to the invisible listeners, she says, "This to you is just another rezoning. This to us is the heart of the African American community in Harlem." A woman's voice says, "True that." Ms. Brock, who may have just spoken, says a piece, concluding with, "You're messing with Harlem." She says, "We can get crazy. When you're displacing us."

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Khaki Man leaves, saying, "Ok family." Dreads responds, "Bye baby," or something like that. Meanwhile Julius is ranting about the increase in residential housing as being 900%. Nine Hundred Percent! Beatrice is talking about the rezoning to mixed-use.

Walking Haja back home:

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I ask him if “Pat” was supposed to be on the radio show last night, and he says yes. She’s from Community Board 10.

I ask him about the radio show, and he started by working the board. Then the director asked him to host various shows, and recently has been asking him to host more regularly. He may have a segment this Friday night as well.

The following notes are written up on Wednesday, January 29, 2008.

At some point a young woman enters, dressed in a puffy white jacket. She has straightened hair to her shoulders. She says she’s not from here, but Harlem is what she knows of New York. She worries that “Harlem is not going to look like Harlem.”

Beatrice tells us, “I want to give you buzzwords: bringing life to the street.” [I can’t remember now, but I assume this means that the proposed rezoning claims to do this but will not.] “Let Harlem be Harlem.” [This apparently is the response she is giving us.]

Roland speaks up, saying that “balance” is a middle class word, since “Park Avenue is *dead* at night.” He then says “middle income people use the street.”

The Asian woman says that the Area Median Income in Harlem is \$40,000 with many people between \$14 – 30,000. There is a height bonus for buildings that provide affordable housing. But central Harlem is not like the rest of Manhattan, with an Area Median Income of \$50 to 80,000.

Ms. Brock says in an affronted tone that she knows “people subsidizing on \$4500 a year.”

The following notes/headlines are written up on Friday, February 08, 2008

Beatrice emphasizes that we should use “income-targeted,” not “affordable,” to describe housing.

Asbestos

The white male in the maroon shirt says something about government financing and the 80/20 program, and how “you can’t get what is needed.”

From the website of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/apartment/faqs-for-apt-seekers.shtml#Whatisthe80/20Program>

What is the 80/20 Program?

The 80/20 Program, sponsored by the New York State Housing Finance Agency, the

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New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), uses tax-exempt bonds to create affordable housing for low-income tenants in generally desirable locations throughout the city. The use of tax-exempt bonds to finance the construction of large residential buildings in the city greatly reduces costs. In exchange for the low-cost financing, 20% of the apartment units are reserved for low-income tenants earning no more than 50% of area median income. See Low Income Housing Tax Credit Rent and Income Limits for more details.

The apartments are not necessarily labeled "80/20" in advertisements, but would say "affordable housing."

The cameraman, who is no longer holding his camera upright in the recording position, makes a comment [I seem to remember that he is "against" the plan].

Beatrice explains that this plan is playing the needs of East and Central Harlem against each other, since E. Harlem needs housing. Ms. Brock says, "They shouldn't be so blind."

Camera Man holds forth, saying the other "major thing" is socioeconomic.

Beatrice gives a lesson on the plan using 3 chairs. [As best as I understood, she was saying that people who wanted to build something 3 chairs big would need to set aside space for affordable housing, arts organizations, etc. However, some people will settle for building something 2 chairs big, which means they do not need to provide those 'community benefits.'] Ms. Brock declares that this is "trickenometry." Camera Man asks, "So we get 20% of the third chair?" Ms. Brock insists, "No conditions." Beatrice repeats twice, then three times, "No upzoning without community benefits."

Julius says, "We own some of that. No, we're not accepting that." [Who is the we that Camera Man and Julius allude to? Is Beatrice included, at least provisionally?]

Ms. Brock declares that she's been around long enough to [what? My notes peter out]. Beatrice says they looked at the "little lies," and that "they were shocked that we found this one." [Does everybody but me know who all these "theys" are? I assume the first is the CB10 committee who read the plan closely, and the second are the planners working for the city commissioners.] She makes a metaphor of salt in water to explain how "all of Harlem's going to get expensive." Salt dropped in water doesn't stay in one place, it affects all the water. She emphasizes direct impact vs. indirect impact, with "5400 residents that could be displaced." "So they are saying the lower income people are already gone, so we don't need to look at them."

A woman in a red poncho, whose name I later find out is Patti, makes a comment.

Ms. Brock says something about eminent domain. Beatrice cautions, "Stay with me." [She has not been able to make it through what was supposed to be a relatively short presentation with all the interruptions.] She then emphasizes "adverse," as in adverse

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effects. To Maroon Shirt she says, “Your business is insignificant” [under the plan, presumably because it’s too small]. “Your job is to use the word, *significant*.”

The Asian woman chimes in, “the other words you use are ‘cumulative impact.’” She talks about Columbia’s expansion getting approved in December. She mentions the East River and some “big box and luxury housing” development, “so you can’t consider the rezoning of 125th Street in isolation.”

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Beatrice says, “So can everybody say, cumulative impact?” Many of the others comply. Patti complains, “You saying, ‘everybody do this!’” [I didn’t record earlier when Beatrice rather condescendingly had us repeat after her some phrase she considered key.]

I see that the woman sitting next to me has a letter from CB10 addressing “Dear neighbors.”

Denim Vest starts putting her coat and exchanges goodbyes with Patti. Somebody [my notes don’t say who] says, “A lot of people feel uncomfortable testifying.” The speaker said that people worry they are not “high spoken” or “well-presented,” that they are not “high brow” enough.

My notes say something about a flyer, perhaps the protest for the Record Shack. Denim Vest gives the man wearing a blue sweater a card.

Beatrice invokes the West Village and the Meatpacking district as areas that were able to develop without losing their “historic character.” Ms. Brock says, “That’s because they have a landmarks committee. You don’t have that!” [We turns to you. Is you CB10?]

Beatrice continues, “You have to fight *vision* with *vision!*” She says, “the Village of Harlem.” Ms. Brock says something I didn’t write down. Beatrice has us repeat, “the Village of Harlem.” She says “a lot of these people don’t know Harlem” and “If you wanted to put luxury hi-rises in East Village do you think that would go over well?”

The white man in the gray sweater says, “I live in Chelsea and I work up here. It was not the community board that saved East Village, it was the community.” Ms. Brock says, “it was an ad hoc committee.” In the ensuing hubbub Camera Man suggests, “Let’s just set it up.” Julius retorts, “It’s already set up.” The woman in the brown sweater urges people to “be more specific.” Chelsea Man says, if you’re representing the community board’s position,” and cites how CB11 has a “mixture of desires.” Ms. Brock lists community boards 9, 10, and 11.

Julius insists, “We *use* our open space,” saying, “They forgot about Summer Stage” at the plaza beneath the Powell state building. [The proposed buildings will cast shadows on the plaza.] He mentions “older folks” and says “we hold court.” [He looks to be in his 40s, but he certainly tries to hold court here.] Roland protests that people need “Vitamin D,” and people laugh. [I am not sure that he meant this as a joke; his tone was serious.]

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Beatrice continues, “The one thing they came up with adverse impact is traffic,” and explains the proposed no left turns from 2nd to Amsterdam.

Two more people come in. A woman in an orange hat greets Patti. The other is a man in a black puffy pleather jacket.

Beatrice continues that they want to open a pool hall, club, and something I don’t catch. She emphasizes that we want “nonprofits with a *local selection*.”

Camera Man protests, “You’re not asking us to say all that.” Beatrice responds, “Pick what speaks to your heart.” Julius says, “There was a report,” and gives a website: preserveharlemslegacy@yahoo.com . Charles says “ok, so let’s finish up.” An older man who just came in [not the pleather guy] asks, “Is this the committee to take this resolution to Obama?” Beatrice says no, and Julius says, “Kind of,” and says he already has. The man suggests that they should “take it to Hillary to embarrass someone.” Beatrice shuts him down.

Charles tries to close: “You have enough ideas. If you don’t, you can call me. My card is up here.” Asian woman gets up and hands out cards. Somebody says, I think the Asian woman, “Get your friends and neighbors. Just show up. We can help them write a testimony on the *spot*.”

At 2:47, Maroon shirt asks, “Does it mean the whole thing stops?” Somebody responds with the 197a/c plans [on Columbia’s W. Harlem expansion]. “Make sure you talk to your politicians.” The audience responds with complaints that the politicians are “not accessible.” Beatrice and Patti come back in the room. Julius and Red Poncho both say something, Red Poncho about “social engineering.” Ms. Brock invokes Seneca Village, now Central Park, and puts on her coat. Red Poncho says to the women around her, “Let me get back to my patients.” [doctor? Nurse?]

The location of the hearing is repeated, Aaron David Hall at 135th St and Convent Ave. White jacket asserts that she knows where that is. Red Poncho says, “I’m taking the day off,” to “monitor all day.”

At some point people handed out a flyer with a fill-in-the-blank structure for how to give Personal Testimony of 125 Street Rezoning.” My name is ___ I have been a resident of ___ since ___. I am concerned that 125 Street Rezoning plan will have the following effect on my community. (Please Underline the issue that *most* concerns you)” and so on.

I find Haja and he gives me a hug. I ask him if he’s leaving, and he says he is. He says goodbye to only one person [can’t remember who—Beatrice?] and we walk out.