

Dear Prof. Lobel,

Thank you for opening up the subject of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville event for discussion. Among other things, it confirmed my belief that the analysis of historical events is best conducted by parties not involved, either actively or passively, so as to better ensure objectivity. From a sociological vantage point, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville event revealed the deep and wide chasm that divided an entire city along racial lines, and which forced people to deal honestly and forthrightly with their attitudes regarding race. This process is always painful but in a way is cleansing insofar as it clears the air of all the excess verbiage and hypocritical grand standing and promotes an honest and forthright exchange of views. When the school board issued those letters to those teachers terminating their employment in the district, those teachers had the right to file grievances pursuant to civil service law. Instead, their bargaining agent, the UFT, chose to defy the authority of the district and engage in a series of strikes to unilaterally impose their will in a manner that violated civil service and state law. This was proof of the teachers' unwillingness to work cooperatively and responsibly to resolve outstanding differences and of their willingness to incite the public in order to gain political support. That the school board lost the struggle is not surprising; they simply did not have the political clout to push through their program. What is surprising is that despite the deeply contentious and highly sensitive nature of the dispute, the city was able to move on and did not break apart, which is proof that the democratic process does work and ultimately succeeds in bringing disparate groups together, even if they want nothing to do with each other.

Phil

PWW 10/2013