



Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities Rutgers University-Camden

Volume 3, No. 1 Spring 2008

Cross Ties, Spring 2008/Vol. 3, No. 1, Acts of Civic Engagement

Acts of Civic Engagement: Confronting the History of 1960s Racial Disturbances



July 17, 1967. Soldiers patrol a deserted Springfield Avenue in Newark, New Jersey

Image donated to New Jersey Historical Society by Charles Beaman

We present a double feature in this issue of Cross Ties, focusing on the efforts of The New Jersey Historical Society and the University of Baltimore to engage the public in a thoughtful consideration of the race riots that rocked Newark in 1967 and Baltimore in 1968.

What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties

"What a wonderful time it was." So said a recent visitor to The New Jersey Historical Society's exhibit, *What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties*, which examines the 1967 Newark riot/rebellion. How could this era of civil discord be called "a wonderful time"? The visitor explained that he did not think it was wonderful living through the chaos, anger, and fear catalyzed by the riot, but the exhibit, he said, placed him right back in 1967 – the days, weeks, and months before the riot, when the world was changing, when the status quo was being challenged on all fronts, when we, as a society, began to look at how we lived and loved and demanded more -- more accountability, more understanding, more brotherhood, more care for the socially disenfranchised.

While a pivotal time in Newark's history, the 1967 riot/rebellion has received little scholarly attention and has seldom been examined within the context of the times. It has remained much misunderstood and continues to evoke passion and pain among Newark residents and their neighbors. The creators of *What's Going On?* thus felt that the exhibit and related programs, above all else, had to be of service to the public. We wanted to create a space for civil discourse and open up opportunities for diverse points of view to be expressed and respected. We wanted visitors to interrogate their memories of the riot/rebellion and use those memories to examine the Newark of today and imagine a better Newark for tomorrow. And we wanted to do this in a way that would not be so overpowering or offensive that visitors would stay away.

We approached this goal in several ways. In addition to stating the facts of "what happened" during those five days in 1967, the exhibit places those events in national context and represents different perspectives on them, reflective of the diverse racial and ethnic groups that populated Newark at the time and in the present. This last was accomplished by placing selected quotations from the nearly one hundred oral history interviews conducted in conjunction with *What's Going On?* throughout the exhibit on flat screens, ipods, and listening stations. Equally important, we helped to constitute and then worked with a committee of leaders of Newark's cultural, educational, social service, and political organizations to plan additional events commemorating the riots, thereby opening up multiple venues for reflection and the exchange of ideas.

Have we been successful? By visitor accounts, *What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties* successfully chronicles what happened in July 1967 and why it happened. It is also catalyzing local citizens to both explore the Newark of today and consider what we can do, as individuals, to insure a better Newark of the future. More

continued on page 2

In This Issue

- Acts of Civic Engagement: Confronting the History of 1960s Racial Disturbances 1
- 2008 Fredric M. Miller Memorial Lecture 2
- Projects to Watch 3
- Exploring the Mid@lantic 3
- Featured Resource: Distance Learning at the Bronx Zoo 4
- MARCH Happenings 4
- Regional Roundup 5
- Going to the Well 6
- Famous Last Words: D. Stephen Elliott 7



PROJECTS TO WATCH



Brooklyn Bridge, ca. 1900

Library of Congress

In New Jersey, supporters have announced plans to open a museum commemorating the history of the **John A. Roebling's Sons Company** in 2009. Located on the site of the company's manufacturing complex near Trenton, the museum will occupy the 8,000 square foot Main Gate building and feature models and photographs of Roebling-made bridges as well as examples of the different gauged wires made at the plant. Development has been aided by the Environmental Protection Agency, which rehabilitated the Main Gate building and seven-acre mill yard at a cost of \$6 million. John A. Roebling is known especially for his construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, which celebrates its 125th anniversary May 24, 2008. For further information, visit: <http://www.roeblingmuseum.org/>.



Center for Humans and Nature Logo, depicting 19th century Māhāhā Indian (Washington State) grouse rattle

Center for Humans and Nature

Seeking to build a civic culture that respects and conserves the ecological and cultural heritage of the Hudson River Valley, the **Center for Humans and Nature**

based in New York City has launched a program of regional forums that will culminate in 2009 with an area summit and white paper. Forming a partnership with the New-York Historical Society and the American Museum of Natural History as well as an environmental consortium of some forty colleges and universities, the program has been conceived by **Strachan Donnelley**, the Center's president and former president of the Hastings Center, a bioethics organization in Garrison, New York. Donnelley's intention is "to consider human and natural interactions with the aim of building up the region's biological and cultural diversity." For further details, go to: http://www.humansandnature.org/projects/ongoing_projects/hudson_river_watershed_shared_landscapes_and_civic_responsibilities/

With support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the M.A. Museum Professions Program at **Seton Hall University** in South Orange, New Jersey, is launching the Institute of Museum Ethics, aimed at helping museum professionals create more transparent, accountable, and socially responsible institutions. Under development are a national conference scheduled for November 15, 2008; two new courses on museum ethics in the Museum Professions Program; workshops to help faculty infuse ethics across the museum studies curriculum; and a Web portal with tools that will assist museum professionals incorporate ethics into ongoing operations.

Also with support from IMLS, the **Rochester Institute of Technology's Image Permanence Institute (IPI)** will investigate a Web-based system for environmental risk analysis called WebERA. Using a pilot group of ten museums and five libraries, this project will demonstrate a tool that allows museum and library environments to be evaluated and monitored through Internet connections. Conceived in response to a key finding of the Heritage Health Index, the project is based on the premise that environmental risks can be managed and mitigated if they are identified, quantified, and then communicated to museum leadership and facilities managers. For further information about this and other IPI research programs, go to: <http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/>

The **American Revolution Center (ARC)**, a nonprofit corporation with a large collection of colonial-era artifacts, came one step closer to developing a museum dedicated to the story of the American Revolution when it purchased seventy-five acres in Montgomery County from the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia last September. Located adjacent to Valley Forge National Historical Park, the site, which will also include a conference center and hotel, has aroused opposition from conservation

EXPLORING THE MID@LANTIC

Outstanding websites are available for both the New Jersey Historical Commission's *What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties* exhibition and the University of Baltimore's *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth* project.

<http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/>

This website presents information about the Newark and Detroit riots of 1967, including interpretive essays and maps, a list of victims, video clips of oral history interviews, and bibliographies. Viewers can also record their own memories of events.

www.ubalt.edu/baltimore68

This site includes a timeline of the Baltimore '68 riot, a driving tour of the riot-affected area, transcripts of oral history interviews, reports and documents related to the riot, and a retrospective calendar for 1968 with links to primary documents for the period.

<http://www.nj.com/newark1967/>

Sponsored by New Jersey newspapers, this document-rich site includes interpretive essays, feature articles, personal recollections, primary documents and other materials related to the 1967 Newark riot.

At: http://blog.nj.com/ledgernewark/2007/07/a_qa_with_kevin_mumford.html

is an interview with Kevin Mumford, author of the well received *Newark: A History of Race, Rights and Riots in America* (2007).

Martin Luther King, Jr., his life, work, and death, is the subject of these sites:

www.kinginstitute.info

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute

Located at Stanford University and the home of the King Papers Project, this content-rich website includes primary sources, a bibliography on King and the Civil Rights Movement with links to some secondary sources, a very useful King Encyclopedia, and several lesson plans.

<http://www.museum.tv/exhibitionsection.php?page=92>

The Museum of Broadcast Communications This links to a description of news coverage of King's death and includes video of CBS News's 14 minute Special Report on the night of his death; the site also includes numerous radio and television programs related to the civil rights movement.

continued on page 4

groups concerned about environmental impact. ARC traces its roots to the Valley Forge Historical Society, founded in 1903 by Rev. Dr. W. Herbert Buck, a collector of Washington memorabilia.

