The Third Force: A Practical, Community-building Approach to Settling Destructive Conflicts

Note prepared for Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict November 18-19, 2004

(Thursday: 10:00am - 7:30pm & Friday: 10.00am - 5:30pm) Columbia University, Teachers College, Room Horace Mann 433 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10025

> © Jimmy E. Jones Associate Professor of World Religions and African Studies at Manhattanville College Co-coordinator and Co-Facilitator of The Manhattanville College Middle East Forum

I first got involved in the idea of working as a "third force" to resolve destructive conflict during my tenure as Executive Director of the Black Coalition of Greater New Haven (1974-1979). My participation was caused by my strong reaction to yet another community-rending New Haven Public School teacher strike in 1975 (the fourth one since 1968). Given the powerful, negative influences of these educational interruptions on the achievement and psyches of our children, I and other community members felt compelled to get involved in this communal conflict.

We formed the Education Consortium, which included groups such as the Black Coalition, the NAACP's local Center for Advocacy Research and Planning (CARP), the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven and the New Haven Citywide PTA Council. This diverse, grassroots entity fashioned itself into a "third force" which ultimately demanded that the New Haven Board of Education and New Haven Federation of Teachers sit down and bargain in good faith. Members of this ad hoc group were authorized by both sides to sit immediately outside the negotiating room door as observers-stakeholders. The rest, as they say, is history. Due to this effort and subsequent binding arbitration legislation, there have been no teacher strikes in New Haven since. The New Haven Education Consortium then dissolved into history.

A quarter of a century later, it was the start of the second Intifada of the Arab-Israeli conflict that caused me to resurrect this "third force" paradigm. Since November of 2000, I have been working with national American pro-Palestinian Muslim leadership and national American Zionist Jewish leadership in an attempt to forge a "third force" aimed at reducing the carnage in the Middle East. More details about this effort are outlined in my paper entitled, "Middle East Peacebuilding with People of the Book: Problems and Prospects in the U.S. Context" presented at the Islamic Society of North America's Fourth Annual Conflict Resolution Conference on April 18-20, 2003. The paper is available on line here: