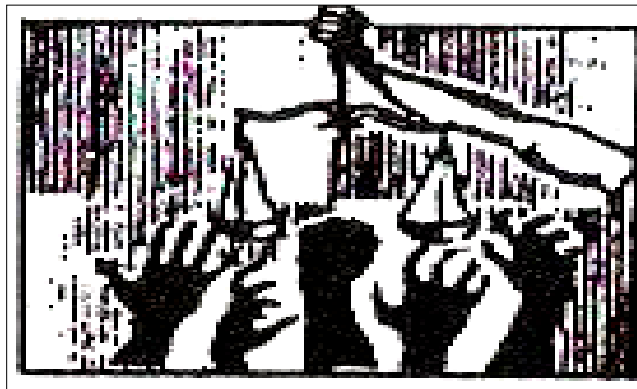




***2010-2011***

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*"Staying on Freedom and Justice"*

ANNUAL  
REPORT

## **CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **ANNUAL REPORT FY2011**

#### **MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The Center for Law and Social Justice is a unit in the School of Professional and Community Development at Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York. Long-term community advocacy for a local civil rights center resulted in the founding of the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) in 1986 by means of a New York State legislative grant. CLSJ's mission is to provide quality, expert legal advocacy, training services on racial justice issues in a personal manner to people of African descent, and persons who are under-served, under-represented and otherwise disenfranchised. CLSJ seeks to accomplish this racial justice mission by conducting research and providing advocacy and litigation on behalf of community organizations and groups that promoting civil and human rights. CLSJ sponsors projects and litigation in diverse areas including voting rights and election protection, public education equity, census awareness and outreach, immigration, community development, cultural rights and child welfare. Because of its unique combination of public policy advocacy, civic education, research, and litigation from a community-based perspective, CLSJ is a focal point for progressive activity.

#### **CLSJ STAFF FY2011**

The staff of CLSJ during fiscal year 2011 was:

Executive Director: Esmeralda Simmons, Esq.  
Deputy Director: Gwen Riddick  
General Counsel: Joan P. Gibbs, Esq.  
Project Associate (retired 4/11): Ruth Lateefah Carter  
Advocacy Academy Program Director (1/11-6/11): Celeste Morris  
Immigration Project Coordinator: Oseye Mchawi  
Immigration Attorney (P/T): Allison Rosenberg, Esq.

Immigration Outreach Specialist (P/T): Meledje Clovis Essis  
Census Demographic Research Project Coordinator (1/11-3/11): Lumumba Bandele  
Census Demographic Research Project Coordinator (3/11-6/11): Zakia Henderson-Brown  
*Consultant Demographic Researchers:* Frank Lewis, Zulema Blair, PhD, and Edwin Dei  
*Volunteers and Interns:* Valentine Celestine, Franklin Hill, and Landry Sen

## **PROJECTS**

The CLSJ Projects during fiscal year 2011 consisted of the following:

**2010 Census Demographic Research Project**  
**ACTS: Technical Assistance Program for FBOS and CBOs**  
**East New York Immigration Program**  
**Voting Rights Project**  
**Racial Justice Litigation**  
**Free Legal Counseling**  
**Sanjurjo Pre-Law Fellowship**

## **New Initiatives**

### **2010 CENSUS DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROJECT**

The 2010 Census Demographic Research Project sought to strengthen Central Brooklyn organizations and activists by equipping them with the necessary knowledge and analytical tools to use the 2010 Census data to advocate on their communities' behalf and to protect their communities' political strength. CLSJ conducted a series of five three-hour trainings that took place over five consecutive weeks that trained community members on:

- understanding the Census in current and historical contexts;
- accessing census data with facility with;
- multiple ways to use the data;
- best use of the data in a community advocacy context;
- social science statistical methods and reports;
- familiarization with the redistricting process; and,
- practical map-drawing skills.

Twenty-seven people, including representatives of thirteen community based organizations and five faith-based institutions attended the trainings. The organizations served included the Bronx chapter of the

NAACP, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, The Metropolitan Housing Council, and Black Urban Gardeners (BUGS.) Beyond the trainings, CLSJ was available to provide support, guidance, and additional analyses to community members seeking to use Census data for community projects.

In addition, on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the project sponsored a community forum at Medgar Evers College, “*Will Black People Count? A Census Forum.*” The forum occurred shortly prior to the release of the results of Census 2010 and, therefore, was highly topical. Forum attendance was “standing room only” and featured a presentation on a study and report on Census 2010 predictions for Central Brooklyn that was commissioned by CLSJ to research consultants, Frank Lewis, Dr. Zulema Blair, and Edwin Dei. It also featured popular WBAI talk radio host, Hugh Hamilton, as the respondent and Esmeralda Simmons, Esq. as the moderator.

**Staff:**

Project Director: Esmeralda Simmons, Esq.

Project Coordinators: Lumumba Bandele (January-March 2011)

Zakia Henderson-Brown (March-June 2011)

Consultant Researchers: Frank Lewis, Zulema Blair, PhD, and Edwin Dei

## **CONTINUING PROJECTS**

### **ACTS: Technical Assistance Program for Faith-based Organizations and Community-based Organizations**

In response to the critical down-sizing, defunding, and closure of many social service providers in Central Brooklyn, in Spring 2010, CLSJ established the Technical Assistance Program for Faith-based Organizations and Community-based Organizations (CBOs). The mission of this project was to build the organizational capacity of faith-based and community based organizations in Central Brooklyn to successfully function as non-profit institutions and administer social service, human development programs, and civic engagement projects. In fiscal year 2011, the Project exceeded its goal of 25 by providing more than 40 technical assistance

services to faith-based institutions and CBOs. In addition, the Project launched the **Advocacy Academy** to train faith-based institutions and CBOs in the methodologies of civic engagement and issue advocacy. Academy trainees also participated in advocacy trips to the state Capitol in Albany and to City Hall. The Advocacy Academy's goal for enrollment was 20 organizational participants. The goal was exceeded: 22 organizational participants enrolled. The target number for participant completion was 12. The goal was exceeded: 13 organizational participants completed all requirements. In addition, two organizations participated in all of the sessions. Participants hailed from several geographic areas. The majority was from Central Brooklyn; however, Canarsie, Brooklyn, and Southeast Queens were also represented.

**Staff:**

Project Director: Gwen Riddick

Advocacy Academy Program Director: Celeste Morris

Legal Counselors: Esmeralda Simmons, Esq. and Joan P. Gibbs, Esq.

**VOTING RIGHTS PROJECT**

CLSJ's Voting Rights Project worked to defend the voting rights of Black New Yorkers and other "racial minority" New York voters. During fiscal year 2011, the Voting Rights Project activities included:

- **New York State Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment:** In December 2010, CLSJ testified before the LATFOR on the upcoming redistricting cycle. CLSJ's testimony emphasized the need for LATFOR, in redrawing new congressional and state legislatures to respect the "one person--one vote" rule, comply with the Voting Rights Act, and preserve "communities of interests" and not divide populations with common needs and interests.
- **Stop Prison-Based Gerrymandering:** CLSJ was a member of the steering committee and very active in this successful statewide advocacy coalition to end the counting *for redistricting purposes* of "people who are incarcerated" in state

prison facilities as residents of upstate rather than their home districts. The Prison Readjustment Act was signed into law in March of 2011.

## **EAST NEW YORK IMMIGRATION LAW PROGRAM**

In fiscal year 2011, CLSJ received a grant of grant of \$61,850 from City Council Member Charles Barron to support the East New York Immigration Law Program. The Program initially opened its doors in January 2007. The mission is to provide free immigration law counseling, representation, and, if necessary, referrals to residents of Brooklyn Community District 5. The Program was sited at the Brownsville Multi-Service Family Health Center Clinic at 360 Snediker Avenue, in the East New York section of Brooklyn. The program goals were to serve 95 people and file 30 petitions or applications. The program surpassed both of these goals by serving 123 people and filing 52 petitions or applications.

### **Staff:**

Project Director: Joan P. Gibbs, Esq.  
Immigration Project Coordinator: Oseye Mchawi  
Immigration Attorney: Allison Rosenberg, Esq.  
Outreach Specialist: Meledje Clovis Essis

## **LEGAL COUNSELING AND LITIGATION**

### **FREE LEGAL COUNSELING AND REFERRALS**

Since its founding, CLSJ has provided free legal counseling and referrals to community groups and residents throughout the City of New York. In fiscal year 2011, over 100 people seeking legal advice who wrote, called, or visited CLSJ received free legal counseling.

## **LITIGATION**

- **LITTLE v. NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND REAPPORTIONMENT**

This case involves a challenge to the recently New York State Law requiring that incarcerated persons be counted at their home address, instead of their place of incarceration, for redistricting purposes. CLSJ, along with the Brennan Center, Dēmos, LatinoJustice/PRLDEF, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the New York Civil Liberties Union, and the Prison Policy Initiative successfully intervened in Little to defend the new law. Previously, state and some local legislative districts with prisons were credited with the population of incarcerated persons. This practice often referred to as “prison-based gerrymandering” gave extra influence to voters who live in the district with the most prisons and diluted the votes of residents without prisons. The new law corrects this bias, requiring that incarcerated persons be counted as residents of their home communities, in accordance with the New York State Constitution’s provision that incarceration does not change one’s residence.

- **PEOPLE UNITED FOR CHILDREN v. City of New York**

This case challenged New York City’s child welfare policies and practices on the grounds that they are discriminatorily enforced against Black persons. The case was settled in 2007. However, three class members objected to the settlement and appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. The appeal was argued in June 2009. In December 2009, the Court of Appeals confirmed, but remanded the case to the district court for the parties to clarify one of the settlement’s provisions. Following the remand to the district court, the settlement was

amended. In fiscal year 2011, after CLSJ's persistent advocacy, the named plaintiffs' received their court ordered incentive awards.

## **OTHER CLSJ ACTIVITIES**

### **SANJURJO PRE-LAW FELLOWSHIP**

Due to a generous major donation from Tom Hamill and his wife, NYS Family Court Judge Hamill, CLSJ undertook a third year of programming for the Sanjurjo Pre-Law Fellowship. In FY2011, three Medgar Evers College students were awarded Fellowships. The Fellowship program aims to prepare pre-law students attending Medgar Evers College for admission into law school. In addition to each receiving a \$1000 scholarship, the students received assistance in covering the cost of LSAT preparation courses, completed a fellowship with one of CLSJ's attorneys, and conducted a legal research project. The Fellowship program included visits to both state and federal courts and to CUNY Law School. CLSJ worked closely with the MEC Public Administration Department and CUNY Law School in carrying out the program. We received administrative support from the Office of External Affairs in working with the donors.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

During FY' 11, CLSJ received a total of **\$245,702k** in government and private funding. While we continue to be successful in receiving grants for specific projects, we again experienced a deficit in general support funds. The funding for specific projects included new grants for the ACTs Project and a census data analysis project and redistricting project. The East New York Immigration Project was also refunded. CLSJ added staff for specific projects, but was unable to raise additional funds to hire staff for administration, research, and legal. In fact, our core staff

was reduced because of a retirement. As a result, the existing staff was overloaded with project work and we were compelled to turn away some of the projects that were brought to us by the community.

#### **AWARDS RECEIVED**

- **“Leader in the Law Award”** (2/25) presented by **Medgar Evers College Pre-Law Society** to Joan P. Gibbs
- **“Women History Month Award” and Assembly Proclamation** (3/29) presented by **Assm. Daryl Towns** to Esmeralda Simmons

## CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### FY2011 Speaking Engagements

CLSJ staff frequently spoke at community forums and events on racial justice issues. For example,

- Council of Black Elected Democrats (2/13): “Redistricting Preview”
- CUNY TV (3/23): “NYC Charter Reform”
- Brighter Choice Elementary School PTA: “Current Events in Public School Policy”
- POISED CUNY-wide Conference (4/9): “Parents as Advocates for their Children in NYC Public Schools”
- Manhattan Cable “Ancestor House” (4/10): Civic Activism
- UPROSE Climate Justice Youth Conference(4/16): “Leadership in Environmental Justice”
- Hot 97!: “Arizona Law Attacks Immigrants?”
- NY Census Funders Initiative (7/6): “Redistricting Preview”
- NYU Dr. Marta Moreno Vega (9/10): “Cultural Rights of Non-Europeans in the USA”
- HEADS UP Natural hair Conference, LIU(2/29): “Historic Legal View on Discrimination Against Natural Hair Wearers”
- CUNY Black Male Initiative Conference, LaGCC (10/1): “Employment Discrimination”
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund Voting Rights Training, Arlie, VA (10/8-9): “Independent Voting Rights Commissions--A View from Inside”
- NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus Public Hearing (10/20) “The Impact of the Governor’s veto of \$190M in Member Items for Community Based Groups.”