

ERASE Racism Gala on June 8 Honors Dr. Bill Johnson and Mr. Kevyn D. Orr

STORY BY MARGE ROGATZ • PHOTO COURTESY BY ERASE RACISM

At its 2016 Gala and reception, to be held on June 8th, between 5:30 and 8:30 pm at the Garden City Hotel, ERASE Racism will present its Abraham Krasnoff Courage and Commitment Award to two nationally known pioneers for racial equity: widely-recognized educational leader, Rockville Centre Superintendent of Schools Dr. William H. Johnson, and the city of Detroit's eminently successful temporary emergency manager, Kevyn D. Orr, Esq.

In announcing the awards, ERASE Racism president Elaine Gross said, "We are enormously proud to honor these two remarkable men for their individual accomplishments. Each has displayed rare talent, determination, leadership and collaborative skills in setting and reaching extremely difficult goals while promoting and achieving racial and economic equity, access and opportunity."

Dr. Bill Johnson (as he is known) is being honored as an innovative expert in closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students. During almost three decades under his visionary leadership, Rockville Centre has appeared repeatedly on nearly every list of "best schools" and "best school districts" cited for excellence at the regional, state and national levels.

A long-time advocate for inclusion of students with disabilities, Johnson came to Rockville Centre in 1980 as the director of special education. Named superintendent in 1986, he began a multi-year effort to end tracking throughout the special education, non-Regents, Regents, accelerated and honors tracks in all grades, kindergarten

through 12th. He believed tracking contributed to the achievement gap, which was widest along racial lines in Rockville Centre where 9% of the students were African American and 12% were Latino, but 97% of students in the highest track were white or Asian.

Restricted enrollment

standards were removed, students were encouraged to take the most challenging courses, student transcripts and other data were meticulously analyzed and, in 1993, all entrance barriers to higher-level Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses were removed.

The district's South Side High School became an all-Regents high school seven years ahead of New York State requirements, achieving a Regents graduation rate of 100% for general education students and 89% for special education students. An early leader in offering IB courses since 1981, 100% of South Side High School juniors now are enrolled in IB English and IB History. Johnson says, "I have always been a very, very data-oriented person and I have the data to demonstrate that a course of action that has been taken in this school system works. Greater heterogeneity does not necessarily result in a reduction of rigor and excellence need not come at the expense of equity."

Johnson's influence extends far beyond Long Island. Since 1989, he has chaired the New York State Aid Data Analysis Group, sharing critical information and analysis on the impact of state aid with local and other state school districts and



Kevyn D. Orr, Esq.
Partner in Charge, Jones Day; Racial Equity Pioneer as the Visionary Emergency Manager of Detroit and an Abraham Krasnoff Courage and Commitment Award Honoree



William H. Johnson, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Rockville Centre School District; Racial Equity Pioneer as a Visionary Educator and an Abraham Krasnoff Courage and Commitment Award Honoree

regions. For the past twelve years, he has either chaired or co-chaired the Curriculum Committee for the New York State Council of School Superintendents, helping to define and articulate issues related to implementation of the Common Core and the State's flawed testing system.

Among his many honors, Johnson was named "New York State Superintendent of the Year" by the American Association of School Administrators in 2005 and selected as one of the "2015 Leaders to Learn From" by the national publication, *Education Week*, in 2015.

Mr. Kevyn D. Orr, Partner-in-Charge at Jones Day, an international law firm, is being honored for his groundbreaking work as the emergency manager of Detroit. Appointed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder in March 2013, Orr oversaw the turnaround

of the nation's largest municipal bankruptcy ever and brought the historic, primarily African American city back from the edge of financial disaster.

In 2009, in a different bankruptcy proceeding and restructuring, Orr had represented the Chrysler Corporation and gained national attention when his expertise and vision resulted in the beginning of the resurgence of the American auto industry and the saving of hundreds of thousands of jobs, a large proportion of them belonging to black and Latino workers.

As Detroit's emergency manager, Orr had sweeping powers to remake the city's financial plan, change labor contracts, sell city assets, and overrule elected city officials. The city faced a long-term debt of \$18 billion, a pension crisis, a housing market collapse, and a severe decline in city services. Orr viewed his assignment as well beyond "cleaning up a balance sheet." He placed "a higher priority on fixing Detroit and providing residents with the services they deserved." In confronting these challenges, he was committed to balancing the demands of bankruptcy and restructuring with the civil rights imperatives of justice and equity. For Detroit, that meant prioritizing services to the residents – many poor and black; for Chrysler, it had meant prioritizing workers' protections and benefits.

On December 10, 2014, Governor Snyder announced that Detroit had emerged from bankruptcy, control was returned to the city's elected government, and Orr rejoined Jones Day. Within a short time after he left Detroit, the city's ascendancy was clear: home prices were up almost 30% and progress in addressing blight, lighting, public safety and financial integrity had exceeded the original goals set by Orr and his colleagues.

ERASE Racism president Gross announced that the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra

University will be given an ERASE Racism Leadership Award at the Benefit. She said, "We are honoring the Center for spotlighting the effect of racial disparities on Long Island. With the inspirational vision of Hofstra President Stuart Rabinowitz and the dedicated leadership of Executive Dean Lawrence Levy and Academic Dean Christopher Niedt, the Center has gained a national reputation for its research, education and public outreach regarding the understanding and solution of suburban problems."

Information about the Gala can be obtained by visiting www/eraseracismny.org, calling 516-921-4863, x 17, or emailing Sherley@eraseracismny.org. ■

Marge Rogatz is president of Community Advocates, Co-Chair of ERASE Racism, an emeritus board member of the Long Island Community Foundation, and a director of the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA), New York State Homes & Community Renewal (NYSHCR).



Christopher Niedt, Academic Director and Lawrence Levy, Executive Dean will accept The ERASE Racism Leadership Award to the

National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University for Spotlighting the Effects of Racial Disparities on Long Island

