

Conflict Without Chaos:

A Look Back at Conflict Intervention Initiatives During the Nation's Civil Rights Era

FOREWORD

As I write this foreword to Bob Greenwald's preeminent book on conflict resolution, I feel some bit of embarrassment. Over the past twenty-five years or so, I have done a lot of talking about alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and have written sporadically to encourage its use. Because I happened to be among the first Texans to speak openly about ADR, I picked up the title of "father" (or more recently, "grandfather") of the Texas ADR movement.

My embarrassment on this occasion arises out of the fact that Bob Greenwald was the first individual I had met who was actually engaged professionally in mediation practice. As I recall, it was in the late 1970's when we first crossed paths as a result of our concurrent involvement with our respective cities—Houston and Dallas, where we were each working toward the establishment of a community mediation center. He was by then already amply experienced in "doing his thing" as a third party neutral, in Texas and beyond. Bringing disputants to the negotiation table to settle their differences was already part and parcel of his *modus operandi* as regional mediator for the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service.

So it occurs to me now that if Bob was not the father of ADR in Texas, he had a substantial impact on its early development and should, at the very least, bear the moniker of "*godfather* of Texas ADR!"

Before 1980, Texas ADR was mostly talk. In those days few lawyers or judges were familiar with the concept of mediation, except perhaps in the context of labor-management dispute settlement. Often the term was confused with the very distinguishable practice of arbitration. In 1979, then Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Joe Greenhill returned home from a judicial seminar carrying with him the notion that mediation might be a way to reduce overcrowded court dockets. In a casual discussion

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with me and a colleague, Charles R. Dunn, he sought to encourage the Houston Bar Association to look into the possibility of establishing what by then was generically referred to as a "*neighborhood justice center* to serve as a peoples' mediation forum."

The rest of the story, as the saying goes, is history. In 1980, Houston opened its doors to people who needed a relatively quick and inexpensive way to get their disputes resolved. The parallel Dallas project was set in motion shortly thereafter. Since then, the neutral intervention process in dealing with intergroup and interpersonal conflict has taken root. From our initially tentative beginnings in Texas (having joined with the few earlier pioneers already in operation elsewhere in the country), has emerged a remarkable new framework in the nation's conflict settlement system. Community-based mechanisms today, providing neutral intervention services, often as an alternative to litigation, can be found not only in most metropolitan centers, but in many smaller towns all across the land.

The use of mediation as a tool to overcome diversity has found its rightful place in the contemporary environment. A whole new career field has developed, preparing young aspirants to serve a cause that has much to contribute to a more stable society and to improved human relations.

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