

## Locals rally against youth violence in West Harlem projects



Casey Tolan for Spectator

PEACEFUL PROTEST | Locals in "STOP the violence now!" T-shirts watched a performance by students in Impact Repertory Theater, a leadership training program.

BY [CASEY TOLAN](#) / Spectator Senior Staff Writer  
July 17, 10:24pm

An unlikely trio has come together to demand an end to the youth turf war between two West Harlem housing projects.

The feud came to a head in 2011, when high school basketball star Tayshana "Chicken" Murphy was [gunned down in the hallway](#) of her Grant Houses building. Last month, Manhattanville Houses resident Tyshawn Brockington was convicted of second-degree murder. Prosecutors said he was looking to take a life [in retaliation after an earlier street fight](#) with Grant residents.

But the trial did more than bring Murphy's killer to justice: it introduced her father, Taylornn Murphy, to Stacy Collins, the mother of Terique Collins, who prosecutors said provided the murder weapon but was acquitted. Later, Murphy met Tyshawn's mother, Arnita Brockington, through a neighborhood activist.

"We sat down and we had the idea of coming together, putting together some kind of rally," Murphy said.

That vision became a reality Saturday, when about 100 locals gathered on Old Broadway between 125th and 126th to condemn violence between residents of Grant, south of 125th Street, and Manhattanville, north of 129th Street.

At first, Brockington said of the rally, "I never thought it was going to happen." But after talking with Murphy and Collins, she said, the three are committed to working together to stop violence.

"If we can help save the children, we're going to do it," Brockington said.

"We have to unite for peace," Collins said. "If we can do it as adults, it should trickle down to the children."

At the rally, activists and local politicians denounced [the rivalry between youth](#) from the two projects.



CASEY TOLAN FOR SPECTATOR

PEACEFUL PROTEST | City Council member Robert Jackson speaks to attendees.

“The only thing that’s going to stop the violence is to talk together in peace,” said City Council member Robert Jackson, who represents the area. He said he would advocate the same solution for Grant and Manhattanville as he would for Israel and Palestine.

Attendees enjoyed an energetic song, dance, and spoken word performance by members of Impact Repertory Theater, a Harlem youth leadership and theater program. Teenagers sang songs promoting peace and boogied on and off the stage. One performer spoke about how he used to sleep with a gun under his pillow.

“I learned to put it together in the darkness,” he said.

But aside from the performers, most of the attendees were well above the target age group of the anti-violence message. Several teenagers stood at the far end of Old Broadway, in front of a corner deli, some picking up a free “STOP the violence now!” T-shirt. The few who would talk to a reporter said they didn’t know about gang violence.

“They’re here, but they’re afraid to come out,” Ann Morris, the president of the Manhattanville Houses Tenants Association, said. “All we can do is present another option” than violence.

Kofi Boateng, executive director of the West Harlem Development Corporation, the local nonprofit that helped sponsor the rally, said the event was intended to be a “family conversation.”

“We want the kids to get the sense that we’re interested in them,” he said.

Residents of the housing projects said they had seen how the gangs' feud affected their communities.

“When I first moved here, somebody was shot execution-style in the back of my building,” Jessie Jones, who moved into Grant Houses in 1999, said. “It makes no sense, because we’re all in the same predicament.”

No one seems to know exactly how the feud started, but locals say it has been going on for at least 40 years.

“Children are getting killed,” Manhattanville Houses resident Carol Williams said. “They still come and fight. Manhattanville goes to Grant, Grant goes to Manhattanville. A lot of fighting, drugs, shootings, stabbings—for nothing.”

Police officers were out in force at the rally.

“We’re here to show our support,” said Deputy Inspector Luis Despaigne, SIPA ’06, who leads the unit that polices Grant and Manhattanville.

Stopping gang violence is “an uphill battle,” Despaigne said. “We’re committed to helping the community.”

The trio of parents emphasized that the rally was only the first move in a campaign to combat youth violence that will continue with other events, including another gathering on Saturday at Harlem Piers Park, at 125th Street and 12th Avenue, as well as an effort to create more services for local youth.

“Today was a good step toward healing,” Murphy said. “It’s not going to be easy, but if we don’t look to reverse this thing, all we’re going to have is angry people committing acts of genocide against each other.”

“I really don’t want any other parents joining this club I’m in,” he said.

[casey.tolan@columbiaspectator.com](mailto:casey.tolan@columbiaspectator.com) | [@caseytolan](https://twitter.com/caseytolan)

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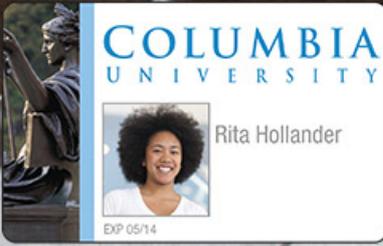
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