

## Color TV

*Ben Kim goes to public broadcasting's town meeting on race*

**H**OW DO WE DEAL WITH the institutionalized racism that exists in our corporations, institutions and organizations today?

How do we tear that down so that we can include, so that we can share power?" So asked Gwen Jordan of the Community Renewal Society about halfway through "Combating Racism—Where to Begin," the "town meeting" televised live on Channel 11 last Thursday. Jordan was but one of the show's 120-plus participants (including callers), but one could locate all the hope and despair of the undertaking within her measured queries. Hope in that we're struggling, however awkwardly, to confront and discuss race. Despair in that we encounter power and the unlikely prospect it will be yielded. People of all races and ages talking with each other, facing up to our nation's most intractable problems: As I sat in the studio audience, my thoughts alternated between "What good is this?" and "At least it's a start." Thinking about racism for an hour and a half is exhausting—the hope and, mostly, the despair take their toll. It's a concentrated version of the slow drain from living in racism every day.

Though the show was a start in itself, it also represented the culmination of the two-month-long series, "It's About Race... Chicago Matters," an ambitious multimedia initiative funded by the Chicago Community Trust in collaboration with WBEZ radio, featuring programming on WBEZ, WTTW and WVON. As a regular WBEZ listener, I found its thrice-weekly "Morning Edition" segments absolutely worthwhile and enlightening, from Karl T. Wright's "Black English and Employment" to Jinah Tak's "Asian Political Organizing" (and I'm sure I missed several key segments as well). But perhaps the boldest move was having WBEZ and WVON (the mainstay talk-radio outlet of Chicago's black community) jointly host and simulcast several call-in shows, effectively integrating their respective white liberal and black grass-roots audiences.

According to WVON's Melody Spann, one of the co-hosts, many in both groups were "very surprised" at what the other thought about such issues as "Can Minorities Be Racist?" and "Inter-Racial Relationships."

At the town meeting, as the mikes and cameras swirled around the room, it was clear that, under producer Judith McCray and hosts Stan West and Sue O'Halloran, our reach exceeded our grasp, though even 90 hours wouldn't be enough. Just panning the crowd, the images spoke loudly: faces of color side by side, listening to each other and perhaps really hearing. I can't quantify what we accomplished, but somehow I feel we should be coming back to do this every day. As we left the studio, we learned that President Clinton had withdrawn his nomination of Lani Guinier. It was as if he'd personally stopped by our town meeting to say "Not a damn thing's changed." But, that night, I decided he was too late—he couldn't undo what we'd started in there. ●