

OUR SCHOOLS IN TURMOIL

CUNY task-force chief accused of 'ethnic cleansing'

By ROBERT HARDT Jr.

A Queens councilwoman sparked an uproar in City Hall yesterday — accusing the head of the mayor's City University task force of "ethnic cleansing" for recommending fewer remedial programs at CUNY.

As former Yale University President Benno Schmidt testified before the City Council's Committee on Higher Education, panel chairwoman Helen Marshall told him: "In reading this report, I get a feeling of ethnic cleansing, all right?"

Clearly angry, Schmidt shot back: "You're wrong Mrs. Marshall. Hey, look, I'm not accusing you or the people who disagree with me of these provocative and outrageous things. Do me a favor, will you? Give me a break."

Schmidt's report, issued earlier this month, called for CUNY to scale back remedial programs at its four-year colleges as well as "reinventing open admissions."

The report said remediation should be concentrated in CUNY's two-year schools as well as using private companies outside the system.

Marshall, a Democrat, was not alone in throwing the book at Schmidt and Herman Badillo, another CUNY task force member who testified.

"There are too many things in this report that are too offensive for me to ignore," said Councilman Bill Perkins (D-Manhat-

tan).

"Perhaps most outrageous are the racist stereotypes and innuendoes that are implied in this report."

Reading from an appendix to the report, Perkins objected to a sentence that noted that Asian and white students in city public schools tended to perform better than black and Hispanic students.

"The way I read this is that you are blaming blacks and Hispanics," Perkins said.

"That's completely absurd," countered Schmidt.

Overall, Perkins said he found "some very serious racial overtones embedded in this here report."

"You're wrong about that," Schmidt snapped.

Perkins also said he was outraged that CUNY's decision to start open admissions in 1970 was described in the appendix as "policy by riot."

Opening up CUNY to anyone with a high-school diploma was "part of the civil-rights movement," Perkins maintained.

Asked by reporters later about the "policy by riot" line, Schmidt said: "It's not my phrase. I wouldn't have used it but I think that anybody who looks at the history of CUNY in the late '60s and early '70s would probably say that's pretty much what happened."

Badillo, an adviser to Mayor Giuliani who recently was appointed chairman of the CUNY board of trustees, said it was laughable to label the report as racist.

"This cannot be a racist report because there is no chance that anybody is proposing importing whites from anywhere else," Badillo said.



FUROR: Councilwoman Helen Marshall's accusation sparked an uproar.
N.Y. Post: Michael Norcia



TAKEN TO TASK: Task-force members Benno Schmidt (left) and Herman Badillo confer at a hearing where they were ripped by council members.
N.Y. Post: Don Halasy

Reprehensible rhetoric / Editorial: Page 34