

## Internet resources for what you need to know on NYC Civil Rights

by {ga=ahumm}

Monday, February 23, 2004 02:41 PM - Last Updated Monday, August 18, 2014 02:39 PM

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### The Topic

Civil rights refers to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, and to the laws th

### The Context

New York is the most diverse city on the planet, home to people of every race, nationality, language g

Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia created a Committee on Unity after some race riots in 1943, in order "to make

### The Reporter

Andy Humm is a former member of the City Commission on Human Rights. He is co-host of the wee

### The Archives

[See past monthly updates for Civil Rights.](#)

**Civil Liberties since 9/11. Also: Vacant seats on the human rights commission; the new local about same-sex marriages.**

Monica Terazzi admits that, a year after the terrorist attacks, Arab Americans in New York are no longer subjected to the threats and harassment that many of them underwent in the immediate aftermath. "We have experienced a lot fewer incidents of violent crimes," said Terazzi, the New York director of the [American Arab Discrimination Committee](#) . Indeed, the [C](#)  
[ity Commission on Human Rights](#) has not seen many complaints by Arab Americans of their civil liberties being violated.

But 9/11 still holds a special threat to the civil liberties of Arab-Americans in New York -- as well as to that of the rest of New Yorkers.

"We are still seeing a lot of workplace discrimination and incidents of police harassment. " Terazzi said. She is especially concerned that the government is detaining Arab immigrants and holding them for months on end for such infractions as overstaying their visas. "A Palestinian man with Jordanian citizenship was recently deported for not reporting an address change," she said. "This had never previously been a deportable offense... Everyone knows someone who has been harassed or detained. It is pretty scary, the notion that police can swoop down on your house and disappear with your husband."

Air travel poses special problems for those of Middle Eastern descent. "Many Arab Americans have been pulled out of line at airports," she said, despite assurances from United States Transportation Secretary [Norman Mineta](#) that there would be no such racial profiling. "Arab American passengers have been ejected from flights after going through security. I have spoken to lots of people who have faced so much harassment that they say, 'I'm not traveling again.'"

It is true that most of the incidents that Terazzi talks about are "anecdotal" -- they are not listed in official statistics, such as complaints registered with the City Commission on Human Rights. "People don't want to draw attention to themselves," Terazzi explained. "There is a fear of anything associated with the government." Her group held a town meeting in Bay Ridge with local and federal government agencies represented and the reaction from the crowd was "we don't want to go there; it's the government."

Staff members of the human rights commission are conscious of this reluctance, and have been speaking to small groups of Arab Americans, encouraging them to make reports and reminding them that they do not have to be citizens to do so. But few have come forward, despite an assurance from Commissioner Patricia L. Gatling that "discrimination has no place in this city -- not today, not tomorrow, and not on the anniversary of the attack on our nation at the hands of terrorists." She said that the city human rights law "is one of the most comprehensive in the nation" and that she and Mayor Michael Bloomberg are committed to "the vigorous enforcement of the law that protect these rights. And that protection extends to all New Yorkers, not just some of them."

Indeed, all New Yorkers should be concerned about the threats to their civil rights, says Donna Lieberman, the director of the [New York Civil Liberties Union](#). "In September and October of last year," she said, "I didn't dare contemplate how bad things would get. Some of the measures that the government has adopted have seriously eroded our fundamental civil rights and cry out for reversal." One example is the TIPS program, the Bush plan to recruit millions of volunteers to do domestic surveillance. Another is the "facial recognition technology" which is being employed at the Statue of Liberty, which is "about as accurate as heads or tails" in identifying evil-doers, while creating "a Big Brother-type of encroachment."

"What's heartening," Lieberman said, "is that...the American people have resisted to a certain extent. That's why we have not seen a proliferation of military trials. That's why TIPS has been met with resistance."

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In New York, Lieberman said, the state legislators "enacted tough anti-terrorism legislation without debate or thoughtful consideration in an effort that was designed more to attain political capital than protect security. It increased death penalty application and defined terrorism in a vague and chilling way." Despite the rush to pass the law last year, "we haven't seen any prosecutions." She believes the law would not hold up in court.

The New York City [Department of Education](#) has a whole page of resources for administrators and teachers on how to help students cope with the traumatic effects of September 11, but there is scant acknowledgement in the school system's special materials on the stigmatization to which many students of Middle East origin or descent have been subjected. The resource page does, however, promote a special post 9/11 series on PBS-TV's "In the Mix" called "[The New Normal](#)" that focuses on dealing with ethnic, racial, and other human differences. And the "9/11 as History" program cited from the [Families and Work Institute](#) does include a lesson plan that deals with "compassion and diversity."

New Yorkers concerned about human rights should know about two events timed to the one-year anniversary. [Families for Peaceful Tomorrows](#), an organization of family members of those who perished on 9/11, is sponsoring a march across the Brooklyn Bridge on September 10. And on September 11 at 6 PM, a candlelight vigil will begin at Atlantic and Court Streets in Brooklyn, the heart of the Arab American community in New York, to gather for "remembrance, prayer, reflection, and unity," according to Terazzi.

### **New Human Rights Commissioners to be Named This Month**

Mayor Bloomberg is finally getting around to filling twelve vacancies on what is supposed to be the 15-member [City Commission on Human Rights](#). An announcement is expected in mid-September.

The beleaguered agency, which lost 75 percent of its funding under Mayor Giuliani while ironically gaining Charter status, got a new chairperson, [Patricia L. Gatling](#), back in February. She is the only paid member of the Commission and directs the staff. But only two of the non-salaried commissioners are left-Marta Varela, who chaired the agency under Giuliani, and

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Derek Bryson Park. This minimum of three commissioners is required to make final determinations on cases. When all fifteen commissioners are on board, rotating panels of three review decisions and make recommendations to the full commission.

### Gay Rights Continue to Advance in Wake of 9/11

In June, I wrote an Issue of the Week on " [The Rights of Same-Sex Partners](#) " and how they had advanced after the public saw how domestic partner survivors of the victims of 9/11 received second class treatment. While most of these are state and federal issues, the City Council is doing what it can to bring about spousal equivalency for domestic partners, gay and straight. In August, it passed

#### [Intro 114](#)

by a vote of 34 to 7, with four abstentions. In it, New York City recognizes domestic partnerships or same-sex marriages contracted in other jurisdictions under our domestic partners law. In other words, the couples will not have to register again in the city just as married couples don't have to get married here to have their union acknowledged. Mayor Bloomberg signed the bill on August 27 and it went into effect immediately.

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### Recommended Links:

- [New York City Commission on Human Rights](#) - 40 Rector Street, New York, NY 10006; (212) 306-7500 The Commission enforces the City's Human Rights Law which prohibits discrimination based on race, creed, color, age, national origin, alienage or citizenship status, gender (including sexual harassment), sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic violence, disability (including HIV/AIDS related conditions), lawful occupation, arrest or conviction record, marital status, family status, and retaliation. The Law prohibits discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations, as well as bias-related harassment.
- [New York State Division of Human Rights](#) - One Fordham Plaza, 4th Floor, Bronx, New York 10458; (718) 741-8400 The State Division of Human Rights serves as an alternative to the court system for resolving discrimination claims--in employment, in places of public accommodation, resort or amusement, in educational institutions, in commercial space and in credit transactions and to take other actions against discrimination. The agency is responsible for developing civil rights legislation and policy for the State of New York, and for promoting awareness of civil rights issues and remedies.
- [American Civil Liberties Union](#) - 125 Broad St., New York, NY 10004 "The American

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Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is our nation's guardian of liberty, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States."

- [\*\*Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund\*\*](#) - 99 Hudson Street, 12th floor, New York, NY 10013; (212) 966-5932 is "the first organization on the east coast to defend and promote the legal rights of Asian Americans through litigation, legal advocacy, community education, leadership development and the position of free legal assistance to low-income and immigrant Asian Americans."
- [\*\*Human Rights Watch\*\*](#) - 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor, New York, NY 10118-3299 USA; (212) 290-4700 "Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. We stand with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice."
- [\*\*Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund\*\*](#) - 120 Wall Street, Suite 1500, New York, NY 10005-3904; (212) 809-8585 The nation's oldest and largest legal organization working for the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, and people with HIV/AIDS.
- [\*\*NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund\*\*](#) - 99 Hudson St., New York, NY 10013; (212) 219-1900 "Committed to staying on the cutting edge of the movement for racial justice."
- [\*\*National Organization for Women/NYC\*\*](#) - 150 W. 28th St., #304, New York, NY 10001; (212) 627-9895 NOW/NYC "works towards equality for women with a focus on several key issues: battling racism and violence against women, guaranteeing reproductive rights, advocating lesbian and bisexual rights, fighting for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, and generally working towards economic, educational, and political equity. The chapter provides educational outreach and takes part in political lobbying, zap actions and demonstrations in response to various social situations. The Service Fund of NOW-NYC also offers referrals, support groups, and clinics for women in need."
- [\*\*New York Civil Liberties Union\*\*](#) - 125 Broad St., New York, NY 10004; (212) 344-3005 The NYCLU is "a statewide organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of New Yorkers' civil liberties as enumerated in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of the State of New York."
- [\*\*Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund\*\*](#) - 99 Hudson St., 4th floor, New York, NY 10013; (212) 219-3360 "Through litigation, policy analysis and education, the Puerto Rican Lega IDefense and Education Fund works to secure, promote and protect the civil and human rights of the Puerto Rican and wider Latino community."