

OPINION

Housing for the Poor Under Attack

Hope VI not perfect, but it has its benefits

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The U.S. government has played some part in housing the poor since the 19th century. It was during World War II, however, that the program grew, when hundreds of public housing units were built around the country to house both returning veterans and their families and the poor.

Public housing then was usually filled with mostly working-class and middle-class whites,



not the stereotypical 'welfare mother' the program's opponents like to conjure. Decades later, most public housing units became overrun with gang and drug violence. Generations of

families lived there, exposed to few, if any, positive role models.

These complexes were viewed as 'project cities', complete with a school and grocery store within the complex. There was little reason for residents to venture outside the confines of public housing, and so they didn't. As a result, families that lived there rarely improved their situation, and the cycle of poverty continued.

In 1992, then President Bill

Clinton, a Democrat, signed into law the Hope VI project, a program that sought to demolish public housing and replace it with mixed income communities.

The thinking was that poor residents would be able to mix, and possibly be inspired by, their working and middle class neighbors, an opportunity they didn't always have under the old model.

As the program got underway, notorious housing complexes in major cities like Chicago and New York were torn down and replaced with new townhouses and apartment buildings. Though Hope VI had its own critics, research shows that the program did work to decrease crime and helped in-

still a sense of pride in low-income residents.

It would be interesting to see what further benefits this project would bring, but we may not have that opportunity. Congress, led by a Republican faction determined to cut so-called entitlement programs in an effort to balance the federal budget, have eliminated Hope VI funding from the 2012 budget proposal.

Indeed, balancing the federal budget is important...but at what cost? We must consider what will happen to low-income families, families that are certainly not doing any better financially, given the current recession, if the program is not funded.

Hope VI is not perfect, but it

has had its benefits. We owe it to the nation's poor, and society as a whole, to end the vicious cycle of urban poverty.

Write your Congress men and women; tell them to continue to fund public housing. Feel free to suggest other ways they can balance the federal budget, perhaps by eliminating excessive tax refunds for multi-billion dollar corporations.

Visit the Internet site usa.gov if you need help locating your elected official's contact information.

Judge Mathis is a longtime advocate for equal justice. His life story of a street youth who rose from jail to judge has provided hope to millions.

A Legacy to Honor; A Dream to Achieve

Dr. King's faith in the next generation

BY ROSLYN M. BROCK

As our nation dedicated the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, we cannot help but reflect on the legacy he left behind, the faith he had in the next generation and the dream that we must still strive to achieve.

Without question, few shaped our culture and our nation in the 20th century more than Dr. King. His legacy of social justice and activism has played an integral role in so much of what we take for granted today.

Without his advocacy for voting rights, people of color might still be unable to cast a ballot unfettered. If not for his work

defending the poor, economic disparity in America would be

far worse than it is today. And without Dr. King's call for non-violence, the civil rights movement might be remembered for the bloodshed and not for its message of justice

and equality.

At the NAACP, Dr. King's legacy is prominent in our constant struggle to advance civil and human rights. With our Financial Freedom Campaign, we are building on Dr. King's message that true freedom is inextricably tied to economic justice. With that in mind, we are providing underserved communities across the country with the tools they need to attain and maintain financial stability.

In our health campaigns, we have embodied Dr. King's remark that, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care

is the most shocking and inhumane." Working under that motto, we are organizing campaigns to bring additional attention and resources to the fight against HIV/AIDS and childhood obesity.

When we fight for equality in education, we remember Dr. King's belief that education functions "to teach one to think intensively and to think critically," something that all students deserve.

With all that Dr. King gave to the world, his most enduring gift may be the faith he had in others. Dr. King had an unwavering faith that future generations would continue his fight to ensure that the arc of the universe bends towards justice. He trusted that if he provided the vehicle and destination, we would be able to forge our own path towards equality.

We must remember Dr. King's faith as we fight 21st

century attempts to roll back rights for people of color.

Dr. King succeeded in securing full voting rights for people of all color, but this election season we see a somewhat coordinated push to implement laws that would disenfranchise poor and minority voters. He strove for equality between all races, but our nation is stuck in a "tough on crime" mentality that imprisons African Americans for drug offenses at 10 times the rate of their white counterparts.

Dr. King brought his attention to poverty, but these days the gap between rich and poor is wider than ever before, and the war on poverty has been narrowed to a series of bromides and unrealized initiatives.

It is up to this generation, and the generations that follow to live up to Dr. King's faith and stand on the frontlines in this new battle for civil rights.

I grew up in this organization

as a member of the NAACP Youth and College Division. Inspired by the work of Dr. King and those who followed him, I joined the association as a freshman at Virginia Union University and later served as a youth board member.

I am proud to say that in its 75th year, our youth and college division is 25,000 members strong, making it one of the largest organized groups of young people of any secular organization in the country.

These youth are the future of the organization, and we must have faith in them as Dr. King had faith in us. After all, there is still so much to do before we achieve Dr. King's dream of full equality.

The future is calling, and with your help, the NAACP will answer.

Roslyn M. Brock is the chairman of the National Board of Directors for the NAACP.

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