

# OPINION

## Spielberg's 'Lincoln' omits Major Fact

Creates a false impression in the fight to end slavery

BY MARC MORIAL

No doubt many of you have seen the new movie "Lincoln," Steven Spielberg's much acclaimed dramatization of Abraham Lincoln's determined and ultimately successful 1865 fight for the passage of the 13th Amendment which abolished slavery.

I came away from the movie impressed with its gripping depiction of the legislative maneuvering and horse-trading that Lin-



coln employed to win passage of the Amendment. But, I am concerned that the movie leaves the false impression that the fight to end slavery was waged solely by white men in Washington and white (as well as a few black) soldiers on the battlefield.

What about the brave abolitionists of that time? Where are Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and William Lloyd Garrison? And most puzzling of all, where is the great African American anti-slavery champion, Frederick Douglass?

In a recent New York Times letter, Pulitzer Prize winning historian, Eric Foner, noted this omission in the film by making the point that "Emancipation — like all far-reaching political change — resulted from events at all levels

of society, including the efforts...of slaves themselves to acquire freedom."

But aside from the presence of some black Civil War soldiers, the few African Americans in Spielberg's film were cast as admiring and grateful maids and butlers.

In criticizing the fact that the movie overlooked the important role that free and enslaved blacks played in the abolitionist movement, Civil War historian, Kate Masur wrote, "Mr. Spielberg's 'Lincoln' gives us only faithful servants, patiently waiting for the day of Jubilee." That is not only factually incorrect; it does a disservice to the historic efforts of numerous black and white abolitionists of that time, none more courageous and effective than Frederick Douglass.

Born in Talbot County, Maryland in 1818, Frederick Douglass spent the first 21 years of his life as a slave, working variously as a household servant and unskilled laborer. In 1838, he escaped bondage and quickly became one of the most eloquent and forceful abolitionist voices of his day.

Self-taught, in 1845 he published his autobiography, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave," and in 1847 he launched his anti-slavery newspaper, "The North Star," in Rochester, New York.

At great risk to himself, Douglass recruited black soldiers for the Union Army during the Civil War, influenced Lincoln's thinking, and even challenged the President's slow, legalistic walk towards emancipation.

Douglass saw the end of slavery

as only the beginning of the fight for full economic and political equality, beginning with extending the right to vote to freed slaves. He argued, "What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice."

Frederick Douglass' efforts subsequently led to the passage of the 15th Amendment in 1869, guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote.

Stephen Spielberg's "Lincoln" affirms the fact that President Abraham Lincoln played a pivotal role in ending slavery in America, but it egregiously omits the fact that Frederick Douglass and a courageous group of grassroots abolitionists led Lincoln and the nation to this victory.

Marc Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

## Peace of Mind for Millions of Americans

The promise of Medicare and Medicaid

BY DAVID ELLIOT

Peace of mind. That's what Medicare and Medicaid mean for nearly



one in every three Americans.

Almost 50 million Americans have paid into, and are beneficiaries of Medicare, our national health insurance program for seniors and people with disabilities. And almost 50 million Americans — the elderly, low-income adults and their children, and people with certain disabilities — have access to Medicaid.

Six million Americans depend on both.

But now these programs are under siege. Some want to replace guaranteed Medicare benefits with a voucher. The prob-

lem with this approach is twofold.

First, it would require seniors to pay significantly more for basic health care — and this would drive large numbers of our most vulnerable citizens into bankruptcy. Second, these are earned benefits that hard-working people paid for most or all of their adult lives. They are not giveaways.

Others would "block grant" Medicaid to the states, as Rep. Paul Ryan has famously proposed. Under Ryan's plan, the federal government would give states a fixed amount of money — in lump sums known as block grants. This amount of money would not go up as more people get Medicaid services.

The results would be either big cuts in health care services or big tax increases for states or both.

Instead, we should keep Medicare as a system that provides federal funding for seniors and

people with disabilities — and for all the families that rely on Medicaid for their health care.

The debate over Medicare's and Medicaid's future is likely to continue throughout this year and for years to come.

Sometimes even the most important government functions can come off as abstractions — decimal points on a budget ledger deciding who is eligible and who isn't, who gets cut, and who doesn't.

So at USAction, we asked our members what Medicare and Medicaid mean to them and their families.

Their responses revealed how deeply and keenly Americans cherish and rely on the promise our nation made when we established these lifelines in 1965. We've kept this promise so far and Americans demand we keep it in the future.

After sorting through hundreds of stories, certain themes emerged.

Many people told us they are alive only because of Medicare or Medicaid. Many others discussed how these services have enhanced the quality of their lives. Others still talked about how it brings them retirement security and peace of mind.

We heard from young people who do not directly receive benefits, but say they are able to save money they would otherwise spend on aging parents. Debra Pekin in Wheeling, Ill., wrote that without Medicare, she would have to quit her job to care for her 92-year-old mom — Social Security pays for her assisted community living, but Medicare covers her health care costs.

Many wrote that without Medicare, they would face financial ruin. A woman noted that the entirety of her monthly Social Security check would have to go to her health care costs — nothing left for anything else.

A number of people wrote that

Medicare and Medicaid mean neighbor helping neighbor — we're all in this together.

Finally, a large number of respondents expressed extreme outrage — outrage so extreme that some comments had to be edited — that a system they paid into all of their adult lives could be cut. These people clearly felt robbed and violated. "I paid into Medicare for 40 years," writes Jim Brady in Rochester, Mich. "This is my money I am getting back. It is not charity. No one has the right to steal my money."

These are the Medicare and Medicaid stories of ordinary Americans. They are on the front lines of the Medicare and Medicaid debates. Whatever policies are adopted, they are the canaries in the coal mine — they will feel the impact first.

We made them a promise. Will we keep it?

David Elliot is communications director of USAction.

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