

FORUM

'A Beacon of Hope Lights the Way for Children and Their Families'

Parents of all races and income recognize the growing threat of crime and violence in their community. An American child dies of gunshot wounds every two hours and every two days 25 children — the equivalent of a classroomful — lose their lives to guns.

Violence was the top worry of parents and children alike in 1993, according to a Newsweek-CDF poll of 10 to 17 year olds and their parents. Nearly three quarters of the parents and half of the children say they fear that a loved one will be a victim of a violent crime.

Despite growing anxiety and fear, New York City residents have put together an inspirational violence prevention program that holds far more promise for reducing crime and violence than the usual knee jerking reaction of demanding more prisons. In 1993, New York City expanded its Beacons Initiative for children, youths and families in poor, drug-infested violent neighborhoods. By the end of the year, a safe school-based Beacon Community Center was operating in every school district in the city.

Beacons are housing in elementary or middle schools and are open seven days a week from early morning until late at night to provide a web of activities and services for children and families. The Beacons work well

because they encourage relationships between teens and caring adults, including parents and other family members, set high expectations and clear standards for behavior, engage young people in learning about their world and developing the skills to shape it and to get young people started in community service activities that strengthen their connection to the community and the work world.

On a typical day at the Beacon in Central Harlem, Beacon staff are at the school early in the morning to help students and parents with problems. After-school youth workers conduct academic, sports, and recreation programs for about 200 children. Late in the afternoon, about 30 parents arrive to join in parent support groups and a "family night" dinner with their children in the school cafeteria. After dinner, between 60 and 80 teenagers get together for youth leadership activities. Another 50 or so parents spend two hours in high school diploma equivalence preparation classes, and as many as 150 parents and children gather in the gym for African dance classes, aerobics, or martial arts.

By working as a team, New York City residents (youths and adults) from Staten Island to the South Bronx, are creating the kind of safe and pos-

itive alternatives that young people must have to keep them off the streets and out of harm's way. The Beacons Initiative is a model for the type of summer, weekend, and after school programs that must be developed in communities throughout the nation to keep all of America's children safe, and connected to caring adults, role models and mentors. With parents and



CHILD WATCH

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

community supported projects like the Beacons Initiative, we can find solutions to the growing problem of crime and violence and help our children to beat the odds, stay in school, and be constructive, law-abiding citizens.

(Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund)

'Birmingham of Today is a Different City With A Black Mayor and Council'

In his new book, A Way Out of No Way, remembering the civil rights movement and his participation in it, Andrew Young recalls the Birmingham



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

ham of old. He remembers how when the South Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) made the decision to concentrate its efforts in that city, all the staff were fearful. He even recalls how Dr. King joked about who was going to give up their life in Birmingham, even delivering satirical eulogies for each of the staff.

But the Birmingham of today is a different city. It is a city with an African American Mayor and a majority black city council. Instead of Bull Connor heading the police force, an African American, Johnnie Johnson is today the police chief of an integrated force. Clearly, change has taken place around the proposed opening of a new toxic waste transfer station in the predominately African-American area of Titusville in Birmingham. Several local community organizations, including the Malcolm X Grassroots Move-

ment and the Titusville Total Awareness Group joined with the Southern Organization Committee Youth Task Force and carried on an opposition campaign even after the City council had approved a bid to build the transfer station.

On Jan. 15, as a way to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, these community groups sponsored a youth march against the waste transfer station's opening in their community. The march which began at the Civil Rights Institute, was to go past City Hall and culminate with an anti-violence rap music concert at a housing project. A few blocks from City Hall, the youths were confronted by police officers and violence erupted. Pictures of Birmingham police wielding nightsticks and spraying mace in the faces of black youths soon appeared in newspapers.

Long-time Birmingham civil rights and religious leaders decried the violence, with several recalling that not since the 1960's had they seen something like this happen in that city. But as bad as those pictures looked, they moved the new Birmingham into action.

Richard Arrington, Birmingham's mayor, met immediately with representatives of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement to discuss the incident and explore constructive ways of dealing with the problems arising from the confrontation. Four days after the incident, the Mayor and community leaders held a press conference to state publicly their commitment to work together and to continue to communicate.

More importantly, the city began to review its decision to allow the waste transfer station to open in Titusville. When the city ruled that the station could not open, its owners filed a \$17 million suit against the city. A settlement has now been reached between the city and the owner of the

station.

This is a new day in Birmingham. The waste transfer station will not open in Titusville. The youth are completing their march on the 4th and joining other marchers in Selma that weekend to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the Selma-Montgomery march.

This story has important implications for cities all across this nation. Seven years ago the Commission for Racial Justice released its landmark report, Toxic Waste and Race, which showed that race is the most important single factor in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. It located hazardous waste sites in both cities and rural areas across the United States. It came out of five previous years of investigation and challenging of the alarming presence of toxic substances in residential areas across the country by the Commission for Racial Justice.

Everyday new waste stations are opened up in communities large and small. Some of them are toxic way-stations, others are not. Too often the community know nothing of their presence until decisions have been made and too often local governments and private companies don't talk with local residents about what they are planning. But citizens so have control of the destiny of their own communities. Birmingham proves that.

Fred Shuttlesworth, who as the local SCLC organizer in the 1960's brought the nation's attention to the plight of black people in Birmingham, said thirty years ago, "As Birmingham goes, so goes the nation." That was true then, and that is true now.

(Bernice Powell Jackson is Executive Director for the United Church of Christ commission for Racial Justice.)

'The Power to Accomplish Our Goals, Ironically Exist in Our Own Hands'

Black America stands at a challenging moment in its history: a time of massive social disruption, class stratification, political uncertainty and cultural ambiguity. The objective for black politics in the age of Jim Crow segregation were simple: full equality, voting rights, and the removal of "white" and "colored" signs from the doors of hotels and schools.

Today's problems are fundamentally different in scope, character and intensity: the flight of capital investment from our central cities, with thousands of lost jobs; the deterioration of the urban tax base, with the decline in city service; black-on-black violence, homicide and crime; the proliferation of single parent households; and the decline in the quality of our public schools. And to this familiar litany of problems, I would add one more: the crisis of the spirit. There is a growing pessimism within our ranks which asserts that there are no solutions to our overwhelming social problems; that government can't help us; that voting and participation within the political process is irrelevant; that no allies outside the African-American community which will help us. And the greatest doubt of all falls on the question of leadership—whether we have the capacity or the will to generate women and men who will rise to the challenge.

We are forced to respond to these dilemmas, and to overcome our adversities. And the power to accomplish our goals, ironically enough, already exists in our own hands.

We must build a new black leadership to tackle today's problems, with an originality of analysis and a new level of programmatic and policy sophistication. First, the new black leadership must develop policy initiatives in concert with the best scholars and researchers, to construct alternative in health care, education, housing, and the environment. At the new Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University, we are developing a center to facilitate the constructive interaction between

black elected officials and their staff members, research scholars, political analysts, and representatives from the unions, churches, public schools, civic associations and other institutions. Sound public policies which actually address the black community's problems must come from a collaborative process, critiquing the weakness of previous policies while identifying those programs which have worked.

The Institute at Columbia will sponsor an annual "African American issue Conference" in New York, beginning in April, 1995. There will be two conference held simultaneously: a research-oriented symposium of scholars and policy analysts, who will examine issues impacting African Americans, and a week-long series of workshops and forums for activists, educators and community-based leaders. Our focus is to bring the best scholarship in the field available to those who are responsible for making public decisions. We want to establish regular seminars for elected officials and NAACP leaders at Columbia, to interact with the best research scholars working on issues affecting black Americans and on urban concerns. And in partnership with Columbia's School for International and Public Affairs, we have already made our first faculty appointment—New York Mayor David Dinkins has agreed to become our first Senior Research Scholar of African-American Studies. Black leadership should be at the forefront of defining alternatives on local, state and national issues. In England, when a political party is defeated at the polls or is out of power, it creates a "Shadow Government," a group of public spokespersons who challenge the policies of those in power and present alternatives. We need a "Shadow Government" in New York City, to monitor the new Republican administration of Rudolph Giuliani, in education, criminal justice, public transportation, economic development, housing and a whole range of public affairs. We should hold a day-long conference at the end of Dec., 1994, to critique what

the Giuliani administration is doing, and present our views on what it ought to be doing. We also need a "Shadow Government" to monitor the Clinton Administration. We need to foster anew SNCC—a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—to nourish the leadership potential of today's youth and student activists. Their idealism, energy and militancy needs to be channeled for constructive political purposes.



ALONG THE COLOR LINE

By DR. MANNING MARABLE

Building a new black leadership means expanding the numbers of African-Americans who are registered to vote, and conducting political education campaigns in churches and community centers. And most importantly, we must realize that leaders aren't "born", they are "made." All people ultimately get the leadership they deserve. We must construct new programs to make the leadership we need to revive movements for democracy in America.

(Manning Marable is Professor of History and Political Science, and director of the African American Studies Institute at Columbia University, New York City.)

'The Budget Edges the Country Toward the Necessary Investments'

You would think that a federal budget of \$1.5 trillion would have room in it for full funding of the program that helps poor people heat their home.

But the budget announced in early Feb., while bitter cold and snowstorms swept the northeast, actually provides for steep cuts in that successful program.

Poor people get hit in other aspects of the proposed budget, too. Spending to modernize public housing is down by 14 percent; public housing aid

back on the poor. But that's a grossly wrong assumption.

In fact, despite the Congressional mandate to cap domestic spending, the Administration has managed to find ways to shift funds into areas that promise to help poor people develop strengths to improve their future.

Education is one such area. The Clinton budget provides for a big jump in Head Start funds, investing in a proven program that helps prepare disadvantaged youngsters for school.

Once they get there, they'll benefit from a 10 percent rise in federal aid to schools in poor neighborhoods—enabling schools to provide special help to the children most at risk.

The budget also includes a huge increase in aid for the homeless, ending a long period of federal neglect in that area, and for empowerment zones to revive impacted neighborhoods.

There's a welcome increase in job training, too, through it's focused on retraining laid-off workers.

But it's as important to target such programs to out-of-school youth and to the unskilled, long-term unemployed.

Both of those groups have been traditionally excluded from efforts to help them into the mainstream, and now is the time to make those efforts.

There's a welcome tilt too, to drug treatment. For the first time, the federal anti-drug program will spend more on education and treatment than on drug law enforcement—recognizing that prevention and cure are more likely routes to cutting drug abuse.

So the Administration has had made hard choices, and while many of

them are the correct choices, intended to find the money to invest in key areas, it is unfortunate that programs for the poor were cut to pay for other programs for the poor.

Given the spending caps and the still-large deficit, the Administration's budget reflects serious thinking about priorities, but I wonder if it made all the hard choices it should have made.

For example, the budget includes almost \$600 million for new prison construction and \$2.3 billion for prison operating funds.

Is that really necessary, when one out of five federal prison cells are occupied by non-violent, first-time offenders serving long terms mandated by unrealistic drug possession laws?

Then there's the Pentagon. The Defense Secretary says "there are no Cold War relics in the budget," but there are. We're still building unneeded aircraft carriers and attack submarines, and maintaining MDA Cold War force levels.

And for all the talk about deficits and tightening belts, middle class entitlements are untouched.

In some important ways, the budget edges the country toward the necessary investments in its future. But until it embraces a Marshall Plan for America that revives the cities and helps poor people into the mainstream, it represents a missed opportunity.

(John E. Jacobs is President of National Urban League)



TO BE EQUAL

By JOHN E. JACOBS

to the elderly is slashed by 87 percent.

Cities take some hits. Grants to subsidize mass transit operations are cut by \$200 million, and other urban-oriented programs continue to be underfunded.

So the easy assumption is that the Clinton Administration is turning its