

Sol M. Linowitz

Pioneering The Urban Frontier

As I think about the problems we face in our cities, I wonder if America has too much land to permit the growth of civilized cities. I wonder if we will continue hacking away at nature to make ever more escapes from having to live together, as people in other countries do. Other nations with a better sense of history have managed to preserve the city as a place of national pride; we have permitted ours to become more and more places where only strangers congregate.

We have a short history but a long-lived sense of government. Maybe then we have learned something that others have not learned. Maybe it is given to us to live on the cutting edge of history, to keep alive the hope that where strangers congregate today, communities and neighborhoods will grow tomorrow.

When I look at the inner city today, I see it as our new frontier. I see the people living there as our real pioneers—brave, determined, angry men and women who want in and not out. These are men and women who want to

The writer, a former ambassador to the Organization of American States, is co-chairman of the National Urban Coalition.

make out of the material of their destiny, pathetic as that material may be, a place of self respect, a home, a job, a neighborhood, a community. And there are a number of things we can do to help them get there.

Over a century ago we passed the Homestead Act to help open up new lands in the West by offering 160 acres and more of unoccupied land to those willing to work it. Some viewed it as a way to relieve overcrowding of the eastern cities—so this was, in a sense, urban legislation even then.

The time has come to apply this urban homesteading principle to our inner cities—to offer inner city residents encouragement to rehabilitate dilapidated and abandoned housing in the knowledge that they will become owners. Several cities — Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia and now the District of Columbia—have undertaken modest urban homesteading programs, and others are considering doing so. In Congress, bills have recently been introduced by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Rep. Marjorie S. Holt (R-Md.)

among others proposing limited federal assistance which could aid homesteading. Obviously any urban homestead program will have to be carefully planned in order to be effective. But the goal is unmistakably clear: To show the people in the inner city that they can have a stake in carving communities for themselves out of the urban wilderness.

So I would challenge a city housing authority to come up with a plan for a property management high school, in which young men and women from the inner city can take courses in property management and make a career for themselves out of it. According to a study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, about a quarter of a million men and women will be needed in the years just ahead to manage the public housing units and other government subsidized housing now being built in our big cities.

I would challenge a city school board to come forward with a plan for a teachers' high school that will graduate blue collar teachers each year—not young janitors or file clerks, but apprentice teachers from out of the inner city to start on a new bottom rung of the ladder into a great profession. We know that the teaching profession desperately needs to create room at the bottom for new entrants, if only to create time for more teachers to change the table of their knowledge.

The medical profession is, in some ways, ahead of teaching, but it has come to hug the hospital and the medical building as though it feared it would lose its place if it ventured out into the urban wilderness. Actually, of course, it will lose its place if it doesn't do just that.

So I would challenge a city health department or a great city hospital or a large pharmaceutical firm or all of them together to come forward with a plan for a network of community health services high schools to graduate young men and women into health extension services in our big cities.

I would challenge a city building trades council to come up with a plan for a network of building trades high schools in which the union locals would provide much of the management and teaching.

I would challenge the banks of a big city to get together to fashion banking and accounting high schools to give young men and women a step up the ladder into the financial world.

What I am talking about is the importance of giving people—young people particularly—a real stake in their community and its future.

The people on the urban frontier today may be angry—sometimes even violent; they may be discouraged—even apathetic; they may be handicapped—even crippled; or determined—even obsessed. But they aren't bored, and here lies hope, not just for them, but for the rest of us too. For the energy of those on the urban frontiers today could very well inspire the rest of us, just as the energy of the pioneers a century ago did, to help us become the kind of nation we can yet be.

M. Carl Holman

The Media: A City View

Some observers have long professed to recognize a persistent romance between the press and progressive advocates of such causes as civil rights, the poor, the young and the cities. During the high tide of media coverage experienced by the Southern civil rights movement in the early sixties, it is possible that some of the advocates themselves began to believe in the validity and permanence of that supposed love affair.

Now, of course, the national landscape has changed. So have the realities of media coverage. It has come to seem, especially for those of us in the Urban Coalitions who are concerned about stabilizing and regenerating urban communities, that the media have increasingly joined those in government, industry and the middle class who have found it easier to abandon the cities than to cope with their shortcomings. In Washington, and other cities, major newspapers demonstrate waning interest in and coverage of the problems of the urban poor and minorities as a significant national story. At the same time, many of these papers have come to see themselves as metropolitan or regional media. They consequently devote less attention to the concerns of the local communities from which they operate—most especially, the concerns of the poor and working class residents of the central city.

The Washington Post, as a national newspaper, concentrates on national and international news in its main

The writer, who is president of The National Urban Coalition, was invited to sit in today for our regular media critic, Robert C. Maynard, the Ombudsman of The Washington Post.

news section, and on metropolitan news in its "Metro" section.

At first glance, this arrangement would seem a satisfactory one. For urban advocates, it often is not. The big local news stories—home rule, Metro transit developments, area heating and gasoline cuts—turn up in the main section, as they should. In the "Metro" section, where one would hope to find a fairly comprehensive round-up of lesser local stories, one often finds instead a miscellany of human interest stories, crime stories and various pieces about suburban affairs. Governor Mandel and Congressman Broyhill are likely to appear more frequently than Mayor Washington or Delegate Fauntroy. At times, stories on rent control, the school board race and the Eisenhower Center controversy get their fair share of "Metro" space. But overall, much of the coverage of District news would seem to justify the kinds of complaints we have received from many of our local affiliates across the country—that local press coverage of central city news is "limited", "superficial" or "negative".

The Washington Star-News, less a national paper than the Post, may be somewhat more thorough in its coverage of local urban news—though not much more likely to please urban advocates in its general approach. While its main section contains more urban news, rather heavy play is given to crime. And while a larger percentage of its editorials deal with local area problems, they do not always come to grips with the more fundamental problems of the District. The Metro Life section, in addition to the apparently obligatory dose of crime and human interest, does contain a relatively larger number of serious stories on local developments in education, housing and transportation.

Coalition leaders in Philadelphia, Denver, Wilmington and other cities have expressed similar concerns about media coverage in their localities. And it must be admitted that those carrying the urban battle in some of those 30-odd cities might gladly exchange their local media for ours.

I am aware, too, that the media's readers and viewers may be no more turned on by central cities and their needs than are some reporters, editors and columnists. For all I know, that extraordinary piece of national reporting, the Post series on urban housing, may have aroused less reader reaction than pieces I would consider less significant. I well recall, from the days when I was editing a Black weekly in Atlanta, being rather proud of one issue in which we dealt rather thoroughly with the emerging black nations of Africa. That issue earned us a couple awards. It also bombed on the newsstands. While neither large papers nor small necessarily gear their work to income and reader reaction, it is clear that media reflects, as well as reports changes in the focus and tempo of the society.

Hylan Lewis, the distinguished sociologist who headed up the three-year study of child-rearing patterns in the District, developed the concept of the "Good Poor" and the "Tough Poor". To judge by most media coverage, it

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would appear that the only poor in our cities are the "Tough" poor—those burdened with the most debilitating combinations of social problems.

Polarization in the cities, the suburbs, the nation at large is perhaps as acute a problem as it has ever been. What can we reasonably expect the media to do about it? Not very much more perhaps than report it fairly and interpret the problems which are at the root of that polarization with some sensitivity. The media give relatively little attention to the middle class people who still live in central cities or those who are moving back; the same can be said of those central cities which are 'coming back', and of those which, in the words of one mayor, "have never been away."

The country admittedly cannot boast a surplus of metropolitan areas in which suburbanites are seeking trade-offs and accommodation with central city leadership. Yet some instances do exist where this is occurring because of a realization that suburbs are ultimately in trouble if core cities die. Generally, because they do not fit the mold, these cases are largely ignored.

A group of journalists—most of them young—suggested several months ago that off-the-record sessions be set up between newly-elected black and brown officials and members of the media. The hope expressed was that the novice mayors, councilmen and legislators might have a better understanding of how the press works—and might, therefore, make fewer mistakes in dealing with the press. A week or so later, in the course of a conversation between heads of several national organizations concerned with social problems, it was suggested that perhaps it would be useful to sit down privately with key members of the press to discuss how the media might with greater sensitivity report and interpret post-1960's America. As far as I know, nothing much has come of either suggestion.

If I were to guess why, I would suppose that in addition to the prickly certainty that nobody from 'outside' needs to tell you how to do your job, there may be an instinctive mutual wariness about getting too close to those whose primary motivations, though sometimes parallel, are never quite the same.

In any event, I suspect that, when it comes to the media, most of us engaged in seeking social change are, at best, likely to experience moments of short-lived satisfaction, followed by long spells of frustration. Whatever it means for the society, both we and the media will probably survive.

Meanwhile, I do have two words of advice for those who continue to suspect the existence of a strong and sinister linkage between the press and the do-gooders: *Rest Easy.*