

# Point of View

## To Be Equal

### AGED POOR DESERVE SAFETY NET

By John E. Jacob

Congress is considering reauthorization of the Older Americans Act of 1965, which includes programs that provide desperately needed social services for the elderly poor.

It thus has an opportunity to restore the savage holes blasted in the safety net programs serving impoverished older people.

The elderly black poor have been hardest hit by cuts in such programs. There has been a decline of about one-fourth in the numbers of minorities served by senior citizens centers and an almost 15 percent decline in minorities served by nutrition programs. And when the Act was reauthorized in 1981, amendments targeting community service jobs for the hardest-to-employ were eliminated.

As it considers reauthorizing the Act in 1987, Congress should give top priority to strengthening programs that serve older people in most economic need.

That's especially important at a time when poverty remains a serious problem for older Americans, despite the massive attempts to construct a myth that paints the elderly as being in better financial circumstances than other groups.

In fact, the elderly are the poorest adult age group in America. And a third of older blacks are poor, a rate three times that for whites.

Even those figures are skewed, because the government calculates living costs for the elderly in ways that artificially deflate the number of older poor people.



John E. Jacob

According to a recent study by the Villers Foundation, "if poverty among the elderly were measured in the same way as for the non-elderly, we would find that at least 45 percent of the elderly — close to half the entire elderly population — are either poor or economically vulnerable."

Even under current definitions of poverty, over forty percent of older Americans are economically vulnerable. For blacks, the figure is a catastrophic 70 percent, and even higher for elderly black females.

The Foundation's study effectively demonstrates that programs designed to assist the elderly poor are not effective.

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, for example, has failed in its mission to move people out of poverty.

Maximum benefits fall far below the poverty line and eligibility is restricted by absurdly low asset limits. Red tape and lack of effective outreach also make SSI an ineffective vehicle to eliminate poverty among the elderly.

As the Foundation states: "SSI simply does not reach most of the elderly in need."

Medicaid, too, has failed to meet the health care needs of the poor. Only about a third of the elderly poor have Medicaid protection, primarily because state eligibility requirements are so restrictive they appear to be aimed at keeping people off the rolls rather than helping those in need.

Other safety net programs are also ineffective. Less than a third of older poor households receive food stamps, and benefit levels are low. Less than one of six live in federally-assisted housing. And the economically vulnerable elderly who do not count as

poor under federal definitions, are hit by health costs not adequately covered by Medicare.

1987 should be the year to assure that programs are effectively aimed at serving the elderly poor and at moving them out of poverty.

### Black leaders lament growing underclass

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—While growing numbers of blacks are entering the middle class, black leaders say poverty among minorities has become almost institutionalized.

"The paradox is that while we have an expanding black middle class, we also have an expanding black underclass," said Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, addressing a church-sponsored forum Monday.

Also appearing on the forum were the Rev. Jesse Jackson; Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and John E. Jacobs, president of the Urban League.

Jackson, who spoke first and then quickly departed to catch a plane, told bishops and other members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church that his presidential candidacy would be easier than in 1984.

"We can win the nomination; we have the numbers," he said. "It's not just a matter of whether

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### CITIES WORSE THAN BEFORE '67 RIOTS MUST BE CHANGED

By Larry A. Still  
NNPA News Service

WASHINGTON, D.C. — NNPA — Meeting on the 20th anniversary of the sprawling "urban riots" or civil disorders of 1967, a new coalition of private sector, political, professional and grass roots leaders was convened again here by the National Urban Coalition to forge another "new urban agenda for 1988 and beyond."

Jobs and economic growth, welfare reform, education, homelessness and drug abuse were among the key topics addressed at 14 forums during the three day conference, May 20-22. Participants included Arthur Barnes, New York NUC president; Hyman Bookbinder, American Jewish Committee leader; Raul Ysaguirre, National Council of LaRaza president; Rev. Jesse Jackson, National Rainbow Coalition founder, and numerous mayors and congresspersons.

"While we can point to many positive accomplishments which have been achieved during the past 20 years, we must also not lose sight of the fact that America's cities are faced with an even larger and more complex roster of social and economic ills than were faced in 1967," said M. Carl Holman, NUC national president.

One of the enduring outcomes of the '67 riots' was the founding of the Urban Coalition and its affiliates for the purpose of trying to stir government and the private sector to give serious attention to the problems and potentials of the nation's cities, said NUC officials.

"Convocation '87 will draw on the experience, expertise and recommendations of moderates, liberals and conservatives from all strata of the society to address a range of critical priorities," Holman emphasized. "We are looking for every way possible to ensure that this 1988 agenda

will reflect not only those who make national policy but those whose lives are affected by these policies," he added.

Although he is still an undeclared candidate for the 1988 Democratic party presidential nomination, Jackson was considered the leading contender as he told the conferees "I know that we can do better. We can develop a national action agenda for urban America that will do better... I want to talk with you about my Invest in American strategy..."

Apparently holding out an olive peace branch to opponents, critics, and doubters who say he cannot win despite his early leadership in every major poll following the sudden withdrawal of Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo), Jackson declared "the cities will succeed because we will choose coalition over polarization. We must end the reign of the self righteous and behold a magnificent rainbow of all of America's people..."

Top NUC awards were presented to Mayors Richard G. Hatcher, Gary (Ind), William H. Hudnut, III, Indianapolis, Henry W. Maier, Milwaukee, and George V. Voinovich, Cleveland; Lynn R. Williams, president, United Steelworkers of America; John J. Gunther, retired executive director, United States Conference of Mayors, and Curtis A. Brooks, executive director, Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Area Community Action Organization.

NUC Founders awards were also presented to Floyd H. Hyde, AFL-CIO housing official, and Aileen Hernandez, consultant, as well as Marian Wright, Edelman, president, Children's Defense Fund, and William S. Woodside, chairman, Primerica and NUC chairman.

# VOTE

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