

# Point of View

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## TO BE EQUAL

# INNER-CITY GANGS

By Hugh B. Price

There's a huge void in the lives of inner-city teen-agers which, tragically, is being filled by gangs.

Do you realize that during the 1980's, spending on prison construction soared by 612 percent.

Meanwhile, society disinvested in the very program-settlement houses, after-schools activities and park rec. facilities that keep young people off the streets, out of the clutches of gangs and in the hands of adults who genuinely care that they do well.

Amazingly enough, politicians label these initiatives social programs or worse, "pork." This is an outrage, because it shows how oblivious they are to reality.

I believe that we must be tough on crime. But given how tight things are financially these days, we've also got to be smart about curbing crime. Prevention-oriented youth development programs



HUGH B. PRICE

may be among the most cost-effective ways of combating crime.

Mayor Bob Lanier of Houston told me recently that with the reopening of park-rec facilities in the evening, violent youth crime in inner-city neighborhoods has declined sharply.

Mayor Emanuel Cleaver of Kansas City testifies that on the nights when midnight basketball is on the crime rate plummets by 25 percent. This is why I've called on our Urban League movement to mount a campaign to place caring adults regularly in the lives of inner-city adolescents.

I know that those of us who have made it, thanks to the civil rights movements, can afford \$250, \$500 or more per year.

We'll aim this campaign at young professionals who are doing well but don't yet have heavy family obligations.

And at my generation. I call us the post-college tuition, pre-AARP generation. There's a window of a few years when we have some disposable cash to spare and wouldn't miss \$500 or so after all those tuition payments. I've been working with the National Guard for the past five years. They've created a terrific program for dropouts, called the National Guard Youth Challenge Corps. The youngsters

live on a military base for six months.

They take GED preparation courses, team-building and self-esteem courses, as well as participate in community service.

The Guard is getting some amazing results from this program, which operates in 15 states.

Imagine designing a school for disinterested students which draws heavily on what the military knows about fast-track learning, ranks and rewards, service and mission, purpose and planning, team-building and pride.

I'm pleased to report that National Urban League is partnering with a defense policy think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, to inventory all the tangible and intangible assets of the military that might be helpful in addressing the problems of inner-city youngsters.

Finally, have you ever thought about the fact that the U.S. military is the world's biggest and best organized "gang?" Imagine how wonderful it would be if we could tap all of that expertise, to organize "community service" gangs that give kids a constructive alternative to the lawless and violent gangs that now lure them.

## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

# DOES ANYONE GIVE A DAMN ANYMORE?

By Bernice Powell Jackson

That was the headline of the *New York Times* article recently. It recalled a 1968 public service television campaign of the New York Urban Coalition, urging the public to care what happened to the 16 first-graders featured in the ad. Then it showed what these young people are doing now.

The little boy who wanted to be a lawyer is believed to have drowned in a childhood accident. The one who wanted to be an engineer is a shoe store manager. The one who wanted

to help people is incarcerated. The one who aspired to be a football player is a shipping clerk. The one who wanted to be a genius is lost.

The girls seemed to fare a little better. The one who wanted to be "a lady in the United States Army" is a teacher. The one who wanted to become a medical doctor is a Navy petty officer. The one who aspired to be a teacher is a nurse. The one who wanted to be an artist is a make-up artist.

The answers of those little black children to that age-old

question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" were, for the most part, hopeful ones. There was the one youngster who answered, "I always wanted to be 29." And the one young man whose reply was he didn't think he could answer that question, but that he "didn't want to be no garbage man, that's for sure."

Twenty-seven years later it seems these children's dreams remain largely unrealized. That's what the son of the advertising executive who created the original campaign found out.

Adam Isidore, who was himself in the first grade in 1968 when his father was working on the Urban Coalition campaign, has become a film-maker. His curiosity about those Harlem first-graders led him to make a documentary film, "Give a Damn Again."

Mr. Isidore also found out that whether those Harlem children were children of the projects or children of the middle-class, few of them were able to realize their childhood ambitions. That young man who didn't want to be a garbage man was,

ironically, a garbage man when Isidore found him, although he is now loading trucks. The young man who is incarcerated, but who wanted to help other people said, after many arrests, "There's got to be a better way. It's getting too dangerous out there."

The *New York Times* article said that some of those now thirty-something young people were willing to talk about growing up black in a white society. The boy who wanted to be President gave up acting because of his concern about being typecast. Instead, he chose puppeteering, where color makes no difference. The girl who became a teacher instead of joining the Army believes that the U.S. is still two nations, one black and one white. I don't think white America really understands that, "she is quoted



Bernice Powell Jackson as saying.

Those Harlem youngsters who have achieved some success in life all pointed to a role model or mentor who helped them along. A teacher, a parent, ore, as the *New York Times* article said, "somebody who gave a damn."

If the *New York Urban Coalition* still existed—which it doesn't—it could do that same ad today, twenty-seven years later.

(See *Civil Rights*, Page 4)

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

# Death Penalty Can't Stop Violent Crime; The American People Can

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Recently, New York State Governor George Pataki signed a death penalty bill, restoring capital punishment after nearly 20 years. This was Governor Pataki's big campaign promise — to make New York tougher on crime by making the most heinous murders punishable by death.

It's certainly true that more and more people — white and Black — have come to believe that the death penalty is in no way a deterrent, it has become more popular as a "solution." Why? In my view, it is because

most people feel powerless in the face of rising crime and violence and the death penalty seems like something to do that might make a difference. It isn't. But the politicians have deftly capitalized on the public's fear and anger at being so important. Many believe support for the death penalty was a key to Pataki's victory over Mario Cuomo in New York. And on a national level, the Democratic-sponsored Clinton Crime Bill, which passed last year with Republican support, identified 60 new crimes for which Americans could be executed. Both crime

and violence or for changing the conditions which produce them.

While I am completely sympathetic to the lack of trust in liberal solutions (prison rehabilitation has been one of the most monumental social policy failures of this century), I do not believe that capital punishment is the answer. I have always opposed the death penalty and still do. Study after study proves conclusively that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent to murder or any other violent crime. But the death penalty does have a huge impact on the Black community. Thanks



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to the racist nature of the American judicial system, no white person has ever been executed for killing a Black person. Moreover, a disproportionately high number (See *Blk Empowerment*, Pg 4)

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