

# Blight, unemployment cripple Black areas

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Despite what many bigots and ignorant minds would like to think, Black neighborhoods are blighted for a reason other than a biological one.

The reason or reasons are calculated schemes by sinister and greedy minds that conspire to exploit naive entities to quench their thirst for money and power. For every exploited Black family or household there are these conspirators profiting and solidifying their grip on a disparity that benefits them at the cost of others.

We learned this early in forming the National Black Chamber of Commerce in Indianapolis. Prompted by a complaint from a local Black contracting group we began to investigate a particular Community Development Corporation in a particular all Black neighborhood. This CDC was managed by Whites who did not live in the neighborhood. They were adding new homes into the community but were blocking Black contractors who lived in this neighborhood from working.

We also learned that they were building homes for three times the actual costs. Why would they accept such high bids? They could retail them at that price and that would cause the existing homes to increase in comparable price. Property taxes and rents were beginning to skyrocket, thus forcing existing resi-

dents to flee or be forced out. The beginning of "gentrification" was forming in another Black community. White yuppies were beginning to arrive and bust up a stable historical Black community.

It was time to go on the offensive. We teamed with the Concerned Clergy and demanded the board of directors of this CDC be solely made up of long-time residents of the neighborhood it was serving. All contractors working there would be local residents. Any workers with cars having license plates not from that or neighboring communities would be noted.

Appraisers and realtors were warned not to consider the latest home prices, as they were instruments of price fixing and gouging. Home prices would be monitored, and the residents will appreciate their properties consistent with normal markets. We saved this neighborhood and created vast employment for the local residents. What are your local CDCs doing?

City housing authority agencies are authorized to train and hire public housing residents for 30 percent of the jobs created through HUD monies. This is Section 3 of the HUD Act, which became law in 1968. The problem is that no more than 10 percent



HARRY C. ALFORD

of cities and housing authorities offer this. They want the residents to remain poor and unemployed so that their little futures are guaranteed. You can't service poverty if there is no poverty.

Please consider your local housing authority corrupt and noncompliant with Section 3. Section 3 complaints are supposed to be resolved in 6 months. Our complaint against the city of Jacksonville has been kicked around for 12 years and counting. It is probably going to take civil disobedience to get the city to move. Remember it was the Watts Riot that caused Section 3 to get on the books.

Banks in Washington, D.C., were touting their Community Reinvestment Act activity by offering 2-3 percent mortgages to first time homeowners in the Shaw District. The only problem was that the first time homeowners were yuppies making \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year, and they were buying new homes and converted condos at exaggerated prices the locals could not afford.

Today, the Shaw District is about completely gentrified with the old established Black families pushed out. At the same time, the Washington Housing Authority has been offering Section 8 rental vouchers to residents — as long as they leave Washington, D.C.

Some have been displaced as far as Hagerstown, Md., 70 miles away. I understand that Chicago has been transplanting people as far as Danville, Ill., hundreds of miles from the south side of Chicago.

A CDC in downtown Indianapolis built the Madame CJ Walker building with a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The grant was to provide full-time employment to people living on welfare and under the poverty level. The building ended up providing low rent for the Indiana University School of Optometry and a large law firm friendly to the Governor. Not one job went to anyone living under the poverty level.

I asked the federal government for a copy of the grant specifications and application from that CDC. I pressed and pressed, and eventually they proclaimed, "The file is lost. We cannot give it to you because we don't know where it is." Yes, they were in on the scheme, too.

These are just a few of the games played on us. They are harmful and, in fact, lethal in more ways than one. If we had jobs, there would be no need to sell crack and to rip off people.

As long as they block us, high unemployment will continue. Let's begin to fight it.

Harry Alford is Co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

# Failure on immigration compromise a blessing

By Marc H. Morial  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate nearly paved the way for compromise immigration legislation that we at the National Urban League fear would have undermined labor protections for all workers in this nation and would have exacted a great toll on an already frayed social safety net.

Fortunately, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid failed to muster the necessary number of votes to end debate on the measure, which enjoyed bipartisan support and sponsorship by GOP presidential hopeful Sen. John McCain and liberal stalwart Sen. Edward Kennedy.

Now, federal lawmakers will be forced to take a second look at the so-called "grand bargain" if they hope to help President George W. Bush achieve his top domestic priority — immigration reform.

Not since 1986 has the U.S. Congress and White House succeeded in enacting legisla-

tion designed to tackle the escalating problem of illegal immigration. Put into effect during the Reagan administration, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 provided for a beefing up of security along the U.S.-Mexican border, established harsh penalties for employers who knowingly hired illegal immigrants and, most notably, granted amnesty to 2.8 million undocumented workers already in the United States.

But the effort largely failed to curb the tidal wave of immigration that is estimated to have brought as many as 24 million new immigrants — nearly 12 million or so legal and an estimated 12 million undocumented — to our nation's shores since 1990.

We are all aware of the important role that immigrants play in our nation's history and economy. In 2006, one in seven legal work-



MARC H. MORIAL

ers was foreign born, and half of the 23 million had arrived since 1990. Over the past decade, they've accounted for at least half the growth of the U.S. labor force, according to the Congressional Budget Office. In addition, a recent Pew Hispanic Center study finds that one in 20 U.S. workers is undocumented.

The least-educated immigrants end up taking the lowest-paying jobs, which makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitation, especially if they are guest workers or undocumented. To some extent, they compete with less-educated Americans for jobs, but not as much now as in the past when the number of native-born workers with less than a high school diploma was greater. CBO estimates that the recent influx of less-educated immigrants "probably slows the growth" of wages of Americans with com-

parable skills in the short term but only modestly.

Our greatest concern revolves around the legislation's temporary worker provision that allows U.S.-based companies to bring as many as 200,000 foreign-born guest workers a year into the nation to stay for up to six years in three-year stints. Any effort to issue these visas should be narrowly tailored and combined with a requirement that the nation's current workers — Black, White, Hispanic, Asian and Native American — be given the first right to jobs employers are seeking temporary visas for.

We're worried that, in the words of the *Washington Post*, "the cumbersome, unrealistic and unseemly regimen" will produce a new class of exploitable and exploited workers. It will also require a major commitment to enforcement, which doesn't appear to be a huge Bush administration priority. In 2004, the feds issued only three notices that it intended to fine companies for immigration law violations, down significantly from 417 notices in 1999, according to a 2006 Associated Press story.

That's where our agreement with the *Post*, which voiced its support for the compromise as a whole, ends. We're not so sold that enacting flawed legislation just to fulfill some grand campaign promise or to win a vote on Election Day is in the best interest of Americans.

We do support establishing a process for illegal immigrants residing in the United States to eventually obtain legal residency or even citizenship, but we oppose linking amnesty with temporary worker visas. These are two separate and distinct issues that should not be confused. It makes the compromise untenable in our eyes.

There's a dire need for the nation to in-

(See Morial, Page 10)

## Clingman

(Continued from Page 8)

freedom, although that's great for those brothers and sisters who have attained that status, but rather collective economic freedom. When we reach that status as a group of people in this country, we will have completed that long journey that began at the Door of No Return.

How can we do it?

Well, we can begin by loving and trusting one another enough to be willing to make an individual sacrifice for the betterment of our group. We will accomplish it when we are able to maintain our own institutions and organizations with our own dollars, rather than having to close them down or downsize because corporate donations dry up. We will do

it when we care enough about our children to educate them ourselves, or at least take more control over what they are taught in school.

We will reach the zenith of true freedom when we own and control a proportionate share of this country's assets; when we have more banks, more hotels, more office buildings, more manufacturing, more distribution, more development rights, more equity funds, more investment funds, more real estate investment trusts, more revolving credit associations, more bartering associations, and more collective activity among Black people.

Yes, the culmination of freedom, even after all of the times we have been "freed," is economic freedom.

In this capitalistic society where the almighty dollar rules, people are truly free when they are economically free, not just free to eat where they want, free to go to the bathroom when and wherever they happen to be, free to attend public school with other folks, or free to cast a vote.

The culmination of freedom, economic freedom, for Black people is our last charge in this country — our "final imperative," as George Fraser puts it — the final movement in our Freedom Suite, and the final chapter in our historic and heroic existence in this land of plenty.

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