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100 Black Men

Reaching, Teaching and Empowering Our Youth



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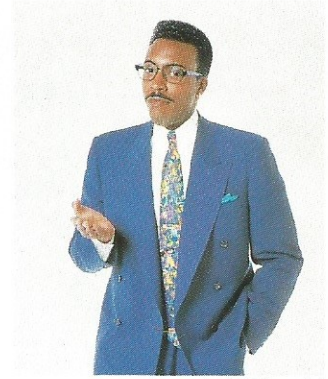
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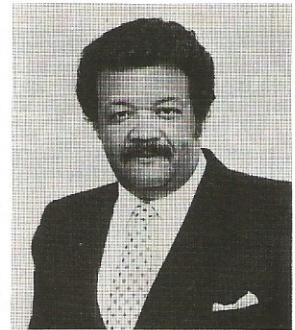
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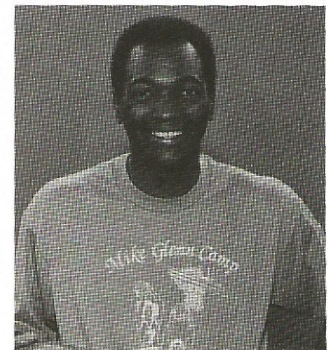
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Finding New Ways

Urban Communities Adopt Aggressive Approaches To Urgent Problems

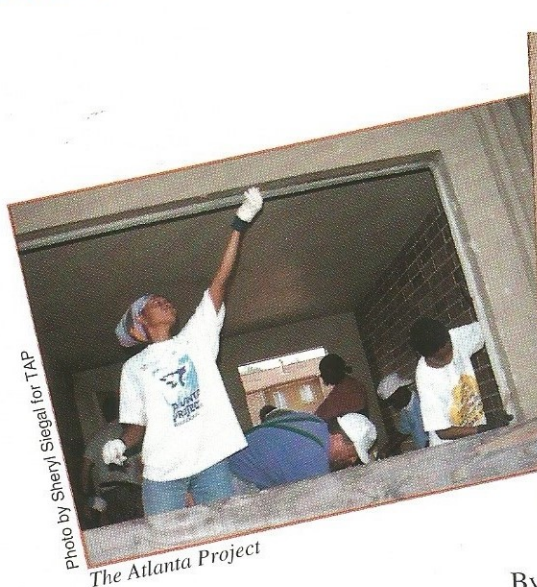


Photo by Sheryl Siegal for TAP

The Atlanta Project



New York's Project HUDC

By Stefanie P. Worth

In the '80s, there was self. We indulged ourselves in the pursuit of self-gratification through physical and fiscal fitness. Then came the '90s, a decade characterized by the decline of the Republican empire and the realization of what we had done to ourselves.

Thirty years after the trails blazed in the '60s, civil, social and economic trials have again come to visit. Poverty, illiteracy, drugs, crime and the apathy of hopelessness tear through our families and communities. The problems plaguing America's urban communities are the same from city to city, varying perhaps in intensity or prevalence.

As if on cue, leaders of urban centers coast to coast took the "I" of the '80s, added the two words, "am responsible," and set out to solve their ills. These communities are now making their own way, using their own resources and are achieving inspirational results. In an effort to bear the brunt of being under siege, cities across the country have

adopted initiatives small and large to prepare our communities to meet the educational, professional and economic challenges of tomorrow's world.

Atlanta

Atlanta, the decade's golden city, is an economic dichotomy. Flooded with the dollars of the upwardly mobile, Atlanta is also home to many of Georgia's most impoverished families. Here, where the haves and have nots square off in glaring fashion, The Atlanta Project (TAP) has intervened. TAP, a community-based initiative of former President Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center Inc., unites state, local and federal government agencies, nonprofit service groups and volunteers to combat economic blight.

"We really want to develop lasting collaborations and partnerships within the different entities of Atlanta," says Jane E. Smith. As TAP's program administrator, Smith is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the project. "The

difference between this and the '60s is TAP brought resources that have never been brought before." Those resources include a think tank and computer capabilities enabling TAP staff to adequately analyze social service needs within 48 hours.

To battle problems project leaders describe as being responsible for "bringing about the breakdown of our families and communities," TAP operates in 20 neighborhood clusters (from south Fulton and DeKalb counties and northwest Clayton county). These cluster neighborhoods are some of metropolitan Atlanta's poorest. According to the Carter Center, these clusters have the highest percentage of single-parent families and school-age mothers, with a high proportion on welfare, living in substandard housing and suffering chronic unemployment. Each cluster is assisted by a coordinator and assistant coordinator who live in the neighborhood and assist residents in identifying



New York's Project HUDC

resources for problem resolution.

The project is 2 years into a 5-year initial phase. This time period, says Smith, is important in terms of defining focus, direction and successes. TAP is still very young. One of the clusters is about 18 months old, but there are others that have just gotten off the ground. Most clusters are at various stages in between.

"We have been most successful with short-term projects and special events within the project," says Smith. "We facilitate, collaborate do partnerships. We bring people to the table and help people deliver services better."

TAP's biggest success thus far has been its immunization fair that provided much-needed health services to Atlanta children. Plans for "TAP Into Peace," an antiviolence campaign, are currently in the works.

Financial support for TAP has been encouraging. Since Carter proposed the project in 1991, more than \$15 mil-

lion has poured in from corporate and private donors toward a project budget need of \$33 million. Cash pledges will support programmatic implementation while in-kind donations supply everything from light fixtures and signs, to computers, software and furniture. This will enable TAP staff and volunteers to devote themselves more fully to the awesome task at hand.

First, they plan to comprehensively address a range of interlinked problems — not only poverty, homelessness unemployment, but also the despair, apathy and anger that can accompany them. Secondly, TAP aims to get corporations to provide the means of support for the project's goals.

TAP's aggressive and ambitious mission to "unite Atlanta" has ruffled the feathers of some cluster residents and local leaders who are feeling left out of TAP's neighborhood planning or trampled by its community-based programming. Smith is aware of the ten-

sions and says she has adopted a personal mission to resolve any misunderstandings.

In establishing TAP, Carter wanted it to serve as a model program other cities can look to. Ironically, its 5-year initial phase winds down as the 1996 Olympics roll into Atlanta, a time when eyes around the world will be fixed on the city. Smith says the project leaders are well aware that there is much to be learned. And by '96, there will be "some good stories and some bad stories with the research to back up" their findings.

Indeed, TAP's success will mean a breakthrough on the battle against poverty. The project's failure will send hundreds of agency leaders and community activists on a renewed search for something that works.

"I have never seen an opportunity such as this one in terms of the resources and talent we have available," says Smith. "This won't be a failure. There's

no way we can walk away from this without not only successes but also a story to tell."

Los Angeles

How fitting that in America's glamorous city, an international fragrance company would serve as a catalyst for change. Giorgio Beverly Hills has partnered with Los Angeles Cities in Schools for a fund-raising and awareness campaign.

Since 1977, Cities in Schools has led the move to partner private/public entities with schools to keep youth from dropping out and to help them turn their lives around. The program also addresses youth-destroying forces such as alcohol and drug abuse use and teen pregnancy. Los Angeles Cities in Schools Inc. is a locally-empowered initiative and a partner in the nationwide Cities in Schools project.

Giorgio kicked off fund-raising efforts for the group with an art exhibition at the Directors Guild of America Los Angeles. The "Winds of Change: Images of Contradiction and Consensus" photo exhibit featured life interpretations by world-famous photographers and students from Los Angeles Cities in Schools. The exhibit raised more than \$400,000 and exposed the Cities in Schools program to an audience who organizers felt "might not otherwise be aware of the very important role this program is playing in educating the leaders of tomorrow."

Bill Milliken, founder and president of Cities in Schools, believes, "It's not programs that change people, relationships do." Partnership organizers agree, noting that "the bond that has been formed between Giorgio Beverly Hills and Los Angeles Cities in Schools will also raise consciousness about the contribution companies can make to the community and individuals when they commit not only financially, but also of their time and involvement."

Other activities of the Giorgio and Los Angeles Cities in Schools collaboration include a career/mentoring program offering students the chance to

experience real-life work situations, and Grooming for Greatness, a national education program designed to teach young people about self-presentation and building esteem for career development.

New York

Of all the areas across this country, few manifest the rise and fall of America's urban communities as vividly as New York City's Harlem. Once a mecca of African-American culture, its legacy dissolved in time to a series of boarded buildings, shattered dreams and tales of "back in the day." But despite its decline, Harlem is supported by a faithful contingent who believe the city can again be what it once was.

In 1971, the New York State Legislature issued a mandate to formulate and implement a comprehensive program of social and economic development of the Harlem community. The result was

Bill Milliken, founder and president of Cities in Schools, believes, "It's not programs that change people, relationships do."

the Harlem Urban Development Corp. (HUDC), a community development agency governed by a board of directors representing city, state and federal elected officials and several institutions and organizations.

By the time HUDC was formed, New York owned about 65 percent of Harlem's land. HUDC's charge was to encourage private investment in housing development and in new and existing businesses; to provide technical assistance programs and services for commercial and industrial development; and to implement projects that would stimulate a broad array of revitalization throughout Harlem's community.

Harlem's cultural and economic impact on New York and beyond was well understood, even as the area decayed. Thus, when renewal efforts took hold, they were met with enthusiasm and solid support from community members and leaders. Former New York Mayor David

Dinkins was Harlem's borough president in 1979. With his assistance, HUDC outlined a comprehensive development program to stabilize the community and enhance the quality of life through renovation and restoration. Dinkins' support continued throughout his mayoral tenure.

HUDC is a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corp. With the active involvement of public and private organizations, HUDC generates residential and commercial projects that attract jobs, investment opportunities and services to Harlem. Its five-fold mission encompasses architecture and planning, housing, commercial development, community relations and neighborhood revitalization. This approach has successfully addressed the human, structural, cultural and social needs of a community nearly relegated to memories only.

Since 1982, HUDC has approved or developed more than 6,000 housing units, more than 3,000 brownstones have been "spruced up," and more than 2,000 low-income housing units have been weatherized. A slew of programs have likewise been implemented or developed including the Loew's Theatre/Harlem Victoria 5, the redesign of 125th St., Mart 125, Gateway to Harlem, Harlem-on-the-Hudson and the Bradhurst Area Revitalization Plan Phase I (300 low- and moderate-income units).

HUDC ensures involvement opportunities for minority developers, architects, contractors and others in the construction industry. It also joins with community groups to target viable resources and offers the chance of home ownership through cooperatives and condominiums for mixed-income groups. Beyond the buildings, HUDC has enlivened the people of Harlem. The organization provides services aimed at alleviating crime, homelessness and unemployment. It also works closely with neighborhood churches in revitalization efforts, hosts informational tours through Harlem and participates in mentoring and career develop-

ment programs with local public school students.

Chicago

In a time when so much boils down to money, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) is teaching a few of its residents about economic self-determination. While blacks are willing to work on our own behalf, we have generally been perceived as unwilling to give back. Giving back, however, has become a mandate for survival in the 21st century. CHA has gotten a jump start by joining with the ABLA housing developments to open a CHA-based dry cleaners and laundry service.

ABLA Satin Touch Inc. Laundry and Dry Cleaners resulted from the hard work of Melvin McReynolds, a former ABLA resident who wanted to do something for his community. President of Satin Touch, McReynolds worked closely with CHA to develop a business plan for the project.

The full-service cleaners operates within the development, providing low-cost, high-quality services as well as jobs for residents. Satin Touch currently employs six people but will eventually hire more as the plant expands and business grows. Those hired will receive two years of training that will enable them to eventually run the business on their own.

While CHA has also opened a similar business in the Ida B. Wells housing development, ABLA residents say their cleaners is just the beginning. They plan to open several other businesses in the future, enabling them to meet the needs of residents while providing a viable economic foothold in the community.

Detroit

For years, Detroit was branded the "Murder Capitol of the World." While it has relinquished its title, Washington D.C., St. Louis, Seattle, Houston and other cities are vying for the dubious top spot. The number of killings is actually on the decline in the Motor City; yet, violent crimes among adolescents is a major national concern vivified by an active gang population and a booming drug industry.

In 1990, a task force was set up to

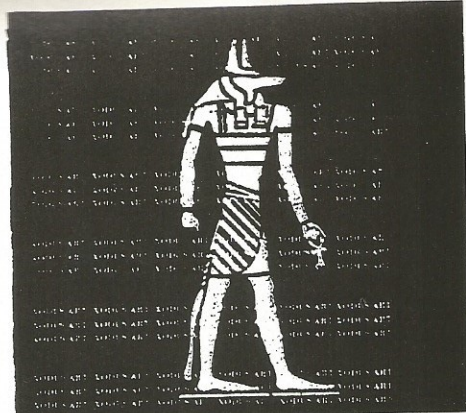
deal with the problem of youth aggression in Wayne County, of which Detroit is the largest city. One year later, the Wayne County Office on Violence Reduction was established. The project aims at the youngest offenders, teaching them alternatives to violent behavior. It also addresses issues such as domestic abuse and media violence.

"Need is pretty evident," says Alan Tumpkin, project coordinator. "The greatest increase in student code violations [assaults, carrying weapons] have been found in the middle schools." The middle school increase has surpassed the number of violations in high schools, Tumpkin continues. "They have been acting out at an alarming rate," he says.

A conflict resolution curriculum developed for Boston's public schools by Deborah Porthrow Stith, M.D., has been instituted in more than 30 middle schools in the Detroit area. The 10-week course is built on role playing and peer mediation techniques.

The program has its ups and downs, struggling, he says, against myriad forces pushing children to fail. One of the biggest obstacles to reaching teens and preteens is parental and environmental influence. Tumpkin laments that the environments of most high-risk children are diametrically opposed to peace, making him wish he could take them home and away from the negativity. Short of that, his only recourse is to keep trying. "You just have to believe what you do will bear fruit," he says.

The Wayne County Office on Violence Reduction plans to plant a few more seeds, thanks to a recent grant from the Skillman Foundation giving the project more than \$700,000 over the next three years. Originally funded solely by the Michigan Department of Public Health, MDPH's \$45,000 yearly allotment for the project is also joined now by the Hudson-Webber Foundation (\$71,000). The Skillman grant will be used to train elementary and high schoolers in peer mediation. The high schoolers will then go into middle schools and act as peer trainers so that after the conflict resolution program ends, the students can replicate and keep it going themselves. ☺



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