

WHY IS POVERTY PERSISTING...
IS COMMUNITY ACTION DREAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

“ **ROCKETS, MOON SHOTS, SPEND IT ON THE HAVE NOTS,** MONEY, WE MAKE IT; 'FORE WE SEE IT, YOU TAKE IT; OH, MAKE YOU WANNA HOLLER! THE WAY THEY DO MY LIFE!.....
-THIS AIN'T LIVIN', NO, NO BABY, THIS AIN'T LIVIN', NO, NO, NO.....**INFLATION NO CHANCE! TO INCREASE FINANCE. - -BILLS PILE UP SKY HIGH.SEND THAT BOY OFF TO DIE. ...MAKE ME WANNA HOLLER, ...THE WAY THEY DO MY LIFE; DAH,DAH, DAD - -HANG UPS, LET DOWNS; BAD BREAKS, SET BACKS, NATURAL FACT IS....I CAN'T PAY MY TAXES.....OH, MAKE ME WANNA HOLLER...THE WAY THEY DO MY LIFE!”** INNER CITY BLUES; BY THE LATE MARVIN GAY 9/1971

THIS POPULAR SONG WAS A PROLIFIC HIT IN THE 1970'S AND IS STILL OFTEN HEARD TODAY. THE LYRICS SEEM TO GET THE ATTENTION OF MORE ADVOCATES AND SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS WHO EXAMINE THE SYMBOLISM THAT PORTRAYED THE ATROCITIES OF WAR AND THE PHENOMENON OF INNER CITY POVERTY. CURRENTLY, THE LYRICS CONTINUE TO “APPLY” TO THE PERSISTENT , CYCLICAL STATE OF ECONOMICS EXPERIENCED IN THE LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA AND ALL OVER THE WORLD.

NOW THAT AMERICA IS FACING THE CURRENT PANDEMIC IDENTIFIED AS COVID-19, IT CAN BE TRULY NOTED THAT THE PHENOMENA OF AMERICAN POVERTY SEEMS TO BE GENERATIONALLY CYCLICAL. REGARDLESS OF RACE, THE POOR CONTINUE TO REMAIN POOR AND THE REALITY IS THAT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THIS LIFESTYLE SEEM TO HAVE EXTREME DIFFICULTY REALIZING THE AMERICAN DREAM.

A RECENT MEETING WITH PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN FULTON ATLANTA'S SINGLE PARENT SOCIETY REVEALED A DEEP FEELING OF HOPELESSNESS ON THE PART OF SEVERAL ATTENDEES. THE CORE OF THE DISCUSSION INVOLVED AN EXAMINATION IS WHAT MUST BE DONE TO ‘GET OUT OF THE “*RUT*”KNOWN AS POVERTY. THE ATTENDEES SEEMED TO MENTION THE TRADITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS... JOB AVAILABILITY, MORE ACCESS TO TRAINING AND SERVICES THAT ARE ATTAINABLE IF ONLY THERE IS EASIER ACCESS TO CHILDCARE, TRANSPORTATION AND MANAGEABLE WORKING HOURS. .

DESPITE WHAT ANYONE FEELS ABOUT THE POOR, I HAVE LEARNED THAT MOST ARE VERY DISTURBED ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN THEIR LIVES, AND WHETHER THERE WILL EVER BE ANY RELIEF FROM THEIR PLIGHT.AS WELL. MOST PEOPLE IN POVERTY DO ATTEMPT THE OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE FROM THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS OFFER JOB DEVELOPMENT, CRITICAL THINKING/PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CLASSES, AND REFERRALS TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS IN ADDITION TO THEIR OWN SERVICES.,.

ANOTHER FACET OF POVERTY INCLUDES INCARCERATION IN THAT MOST PRISONERS, ONCE RELEASED... CANNOT OVERCOME THEIR PUBLIC RECORD UNTIL THEY ARE ACTUALLY PARDONED OR CAN DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO AVOID FURTHER CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR.

ON ANOTHER NOTE, THERE ARE COUNTLESS SENIOR CITIZENS WHO GREW UP POOR, WORKED MINIMUM WAGE POSITIONS THROUGHOUT THEIR ADULthood (WITHOUT BENEFITS OR RETIREMENT PLANS) AND CONTINUE TO LIVE IN POVERTY... RESIDING IN SENIOR CITIZENS' HOUSING PROGRAMS DESIGNATED FOR THEM, NEARER TO LOW INCOME BORDERS) AND DEPEND ON PUBLIC SUPPORT BECAUSE MOST COULD NOT ASCEND FROM POVERTY OR EXPERIENCE LUCKY BREAKS FOR VARIOUS REASONS.

MY FINAL REFERENCE IS MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE. MOST POOR PEOPLE DELVE IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE SIMPLY TO OVERCOME THE EMOTIONAL PAIN OF BEING 'ALONE' IN THIS WORLD. FACTUALLY, MOST INCARCERATED YOUTH, UNABLE TO ATTAIN EMOTIONAL HAPPINESS OR ACCEPTANCE BY OTHER HUMAN BEINGS ACTUALLY BECOME HARDENED. THERE IS THE ANGER THAT SOCIETY REJECTS THEM FOR REASONS BEYOND THEIR CONTROL AND AN ACQUIRED CRIMINAL MIND ROOTED IN SURVIVAL MENTALITY. . THESE CHARACTERISTICS APPLY TO THE HOMELESS POPULATION, AND ADULTS WHO GREW UP IN FOSTER CARE HAVING EXPERIENCED ALL KINDS OF ABUSE. .MOST COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS PROVIDE DIRECT SERVICES AND REFERRALS TO HELP THESE CITIZENS AND MANY ARE VERY EFFECTIVE. ,

EPILOGUE: COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES CONSIST OF A NATIONAL CONGLOMERATION OF DEDICATED SERVANTS OF THE POOR, WE HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY, PROVIDING SERVICES THAT HAVE HELPED THOUSANDS , AND PROBABLY MILLIONS EMERGE FROM HOPELESSNESS TO SERVANTS HELPING OTHERS , SOME HAVE ATTAINED ELECTED OFFICIAL STATUS AND THEREFORE SETTING EXAMPLES FOR LEADERS TO FOLLOW.

WE ARE ALSO A RARE BREED OF MULTI-FUNCTIONAL AGENCIES THAT SERVE EVERY COUNTY IN THE UNITED STATES. AS TIMES CONTINUE, WE ARE WITNESSING SHIFTS IN THE ECONOMY WHICH POSE SETBACKS TO THE MOST VULNERABLE ...THE PEOPLE WE SERVE. BUT STILL, WE PARTICIPATE IN THE LARGE PICTURE OF HELPING AMERI THRIVE.

MILLIONS OF COMMUNITY ACTION PARTICIPANTS HAVE EMERGED FROM UNUSUALLY TOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES, AND THIS PROVES THAT COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS DO WORK. IN SPITE OF THE DIFFICULTIES WE ARE SEEING AT THIS TIME, TOGETHER, WE ARE ASSISTING THOSE WHO ARE VULNERABLE TO SUCCUMBING TO THE COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC. FROM COMMUNITY EDUCATION, TO FAMILY ASSISTANCE, TO LIHEAP & COMMUNITY SERVICE BLOCK GRANTS AND SPECIAL FUNDING....COMMUNITY ACTION REMAINS IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL.

IT'S BEEN LIKE THIS FOR OVER 50 YEARS AND WE ARE STEADILY AND STRONGLY INVOLVED, NATIONALLY YOU SEE, IT'S LIKE THAT!...AND THAT'S THE WAY IT IS!!! ...(RUN DMC)

WRITTEN IN TRIBUTE TO THE MILLIONS OF AMERICA'S POOR WHO ASCENDED FROM THE WOES OF POVERTY AND NOW WORK IN DEDICATION TO HELP PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES. by
Dr Joyce J. Dorsey, PRESIDENT /CEO OF THE FULTON ATLANTA COMMUNITY ACTION AUTHORITY. SHE IS AN ADMINISTRATIVE SOCIAL WORKER AND ORDAINED MINISTER.