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Reflections After a Trip to Chicago

Abstract

It is very important that we rebuild the horrible American ghettos and make them habitable. The inner cities of this country must no longer be ignored. Instead of saying, "Oh, isn't it a shame", it is up to us as a nation to form communities where pride and dedication-rather than laziness and despair-form the most admirable role models.

by suburban commuters. Institutions with money are not willing to reinvest in an environment of decay, even though it is their very lack of reinvestment that promotes the decay. Therefore, the remaining jobs are difficult to find and are low paying.

However, there are some solutions designed to bring the inner city out of decay and back to life. Most importantly, the people of the inner city and underclass must be willing to get involved.

In downtown Chicago, for example, housing projects are being planned where residents would not be exclusively low-income families. This mix of residents provides a source of disposable income to provide for upkeep. Integrating different economic classes can also provide more positive role models, which are badly needed in an environment rich with crime, poverty, and failure. Other cities have instituted pilot programs where police move into public housing complexes to provide a deterrent on crime.

The welfare system is in dire need of reform. There is no excuse for a system which effectively taxes outside income at ridiculous levels—in some cases 100 percent, for the people it claims to help. It encourages and even requires families to spend their periodic allotments; those who save some each month are penalized or prosecuted for fraud because they tried to help themselves. The system encourages cheating, it discourages initiative, and it tends to degrade those who are on the dole.

Instead, the welfare system should be simple and direct— it should keep people on their feet in hard times, rather than keeping them hovering below the poverty line indefinitely. The money saved could be better spent in areas such as education as a hedge against poverty in future generations.

There also is hope with regard to reinvestment in the inner cities. With the return of the middle class, there will be more demand for rebuilding urban areas as more consumers with disposable income appear. This could lead to revitalization of cities. The presence of active business would increase employment opportunities and hopefully reduce the grip of poverty on the underclass.

With the right solutions and enough hard work, there is a chance that inner cities can become revitalized. It cannot happen overnight, but if the government and the people cooperate—it will happen.

Reflections After a Trip To Chicago

by

Dan Hobbs

I grew up in a town of about 2,000 people. My parents decided to settle in western Nebraska, where my mother spent her childhood.

I went to very small schools, where the entire enrollment was a mere fraction of many schools' graduating classes. No one could really choose which school to attend, since there was only

one. Consequently, I grew up with a large variety of people. My classmates were prominent businesspersons' children as well as the destitute. Society was much less economically stratified than in a city, and I got acquainted with all sorts of people. My parents did not want my brothers and me to live in a socioeconomic vacuum.

I have seen some of the worst neighborhoods in Chicago. They are places where thousands and thousands of people live in abject poverty. How have we let an urban underclass emerge silently in such a prosperous nation?

An absence of community throughout the inner city is one major reason why, I believe, the urban underclass has grown. Several years ago, as the urban underclass appeared, the look of certain neighborhoods changed dramatically. Middle-class blacks and whites moved to the suburbs, and the predominantly black poor were concentrated in the core of American cities. Housing projects, once an exciting new atmosphere which people were anxious to move into, deteriorated, and to live in one was a shame. Entire neighborhoods were ripped apart by expressways, leaving many people homeless. Public schools became places where personal security and survival became far more important than academics.

I did not experience any of these problems in my hometown. I strongly believe this is because I always lived in a community. It is important that there be people in your neighborhood you know and trust.

The role models for too many inner-city children are drug-dealing gang members, offering immediate protection from other gangs, transparent friendship, money, and status. The people inner-city youngsters see every day provide no inspiration for success. Life expectancy is much shorter than in the outside world, and inner-city youth feel they must become rich and powerful before they get shot like so many others. The concept of delayed gratification is foreign to the inner-city-residents who live day-to-day and have no long-term goals. In a community, there are people with high ambitions and those who have been left far behind; but in the inner city, no one feels inspired to achieve.

Environment plays a huge role in determining who we are. No one is born knowing they always will be poor. What a person sees daily defines their boundaries. In a true community, where success and satisfaction are admired and coveted, people see opportunity. In the inner cities of America, success is reserved for those on the outside. The urban underclass constantly is reminded that they are nothing but poor. The inner cities of America must become integrated not only racially, but economically.

Part of the solution to the plight of the inner city—a solution often overlooked—is the establishment of true communities instead of "housing." How can one succeed when surrounded by pessimism and crime?

A few businesses nationally have been provided tax breaks

in order to relocate in the inner city. They have been successful in making a profit and bringing jobs to the inner city. When working becomes routine for even one resident that person shows the neighborhood that success in the inner city is not impossible. Soon other residents would adapt a lifestyle in which employment is central. The trick is keeping good role models in the inner city and not letting success be strictly for the suburbs.

It is very important that we rebuild the horrible American ghettos and make them habitable. The inner cities of this country must no longer be ignored. Instead of saying, "Oh, isn't it a shame", it is up to us as a nation to form communities where pride and dedication—rather than laziness and despair—form the most admirable role models.

Poverty in Chicago

by

Laurel E. Martin

Expensive condos and luxurious high rises adorn Chicago's gold coast. Ritzy restaurants cater to the affluent and Michigan Avenue's pricey department stores attract only those waving Visa and MasterCard.

However, behind the glamour there is a growing population that remains trapped in poverty. Many reasons contribute to poverty in Chicago—and they all seem linked together in a chain that's almost impossible to break.

A few decades ago, cities were rich with development symbolized by numerous industrial and manufacturing jobs available to blue collar workers. Wages were sufficient to support a family and a middle class lifestyle. This offered an attractive scene for immigrants and minorities who came to Chicago to find a better life.

However, a wave of deindustrialization eventually flew across the Midwest. Industries moved to the sunbelt, or even out of the country in search of cheaper labor. Other businesses relocated to the suburbs in hopes of avoiding the city's high costs. The jobs that were left in the city required extensive skills, education, and experience—things inner-city dwellers did not have. A mismatch was created between available jobs and the qualifications of those looking for work. People were caught in urban entrapment. They were stuck in **the** city without jobs or the income to move to where the jobs had relocated.

A depreciation in land values followed urban entrapment as businesses and financial institutions that once catered to city neighborhoods closed down or moved to higher income areas. Landowners couldn't afford the upkeep on their property and the tax base spiraled downward.

The city's shrinking tax base played a pivotal role in the