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## Getting the Politics Right on a National Gautreaux Program

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part of the answer involves improving relocation services.

Finally, Polikoff's embrace of the mixed-income vision is questionable. There is no evidence that mixed-income communities improve the lives of poor families — in fact, most exclude the poor because of unrealistic leasing criteria such as strict work requirements. Polikoff's career dis-

played the courage not to trust the beneficence of government officials. Why does he now trust private-market developers ruled entirely by the profit motive?

None of these points necessarily invalidate a voucher program. I endorse much of Polikoff's proposal, in spirit and substance. But there are dangers to forging policies solely on the assumption of middle-class resources and perspectives. One is that we become

blinded to their limits and we fail to appreciate when those who need the help do not accept it.

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## Getting the Politics Right on a National Gautreaux Program

by Sheryll Cashin

Alex Polikoff has provided an important national service in identifying the black ghetto as a singular, nation-threatening challenge that is also eminently redressable. His essay resonated greatly with me when I read it. After three years of working in the Clinton White House on urban policy and five years of writing academic articles about race and class segregation in America, I came to virtually the same conclusion about the costs and consequences of the black ghetto. In my recent book, *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (Public Affairs, 2004), I devoted an entire chapter to the subject, and my first public policy recommendation was to abolish the black ghetto through a combination of mobility vouchers and tax incentives for homeownership. So I wholeheartedly agree both with Polikoff's analysis of the devastating impact of the black ghetto on its residents and American race relations, and with his policy prescription: "mobility and ghetto-dismantling." I take issue, however, with his program design, largely because of the politics that are set against a rigid quota whereby half of the benefits would be available only to black people, albeit ghetto residents.

Beyond the serious constitutional challenges that will inevitably be raised against such a racial preference, I think

that Polikoff's proposal would be extraordinarily difficult to sell to Congress. The Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program was a modest, small-scale demonstration effort that used class rather than race as the means of targeting, and yet its expansion was

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blocked after white community opposition in only one key Congressman's district. The "reparations" justification Polikoff offers for his proposal is intellectually honest and consistent with our nation's history. There is an indelible trajectory from slavery, to Jim Crow, to the black ghetto. Following emancipation, with each succeeding generation America found different ways to suppress the racial minority it so greatly feared. However, given the political realities of a Republican-dominated Congress and White House — MTO was terminated when Clinton was President and Democrats led the Senate — I think there is a better way to pursue the ghetto-dismantling objective. I would use tight, geographic targeting as a rough proxy for race — i.e., residents

of the highest-poverty communities would be substituted for blacks in Polikoff's proposal. And I would sell the program as an effort to eliminate concentrated poverty, not to give poor blacks more mobility. Like the diversity rationale that ultimately held sway with the Supreme Court in the *Grutter* case (upholding certain of the University of Michigan's affirmative action policies), I believe a forward-looking, optimistic account of what diverse American cities *could be* like is more likely to persuade in legal and policy arenas. Metropolitan and city life will be much better for *everyone* in a metropolitan America where all concentrated-poverty neighborhoods have been replaced with vibrant mixed-income neighborhoods and where the poor have meaningful housing options in middle-class settings. A nationwide Gautreaux program ultimately would mean that one day ordinary Americans will be able to live in a diverse society without fear because no neighborhoods would be overwhelmed by poverty.

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