

A Call to Action: A New Vision for America

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Essence Magazine, September 1996

As we approached the stop sign I saw her in the middle of a dangerous Miami intersection –a ragged woman in a wheelchair, one leg amputated and most of her teeth gone. She smiled as she rolled up to beg for coins. Over the next few days I saw dozens of such scenes in Miami, where we had attended my stepson's wedding–homeless veterans and Black men simply trying to feed their children, all hungry and in need.

I see these people everywhere as I travel. I've talked with young homeless mothers on the streets of San Francisco, with fathers desperately seeking work in Chicago and with destitute friends of my stepson in Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Los Angeles.

Contrary to many conservative opinions, these folks are not "monsters". They are simply ordinary working people who met bad luck and are struggling to do their best in frightening circumstances. Many of them were once employed in banks and other companies that downsized. Because of layoffs by huge corporations like AT&T, the face of poverty is changing and the numbers of the poor are rising.

These days African-Americans are experiencing a marginalization and desegregation unparalleled since slavery. Poor families with few resources are disproportionately headed by African-American women. Their sons have become the continued scapegoats for demonic attacks on young Black males. Prisons have turned into a hot growth industry because our leaders would rather lock them up than provide work opportunities for them. In addition, those in power continue to deny our people shelter, education and health care through social-program budget cuts. We are in the middle of an economic revolution designed to gorge the rich and starve the poor. Meanwhile, our elected leaders and the media continue to dramatically minimize the magnitude of homelessness and unemployment in our country. And many Americans feel helpless in the face of our wealthy nation's "inability" to feed, clothe, house, educate and provide adequate health care for our people.

The truth is, we don't have to just watch our country fall apart from the sidelines. Instead we must form a new leadership to create a new America

that uses its economic power to take people out of poverty. We must ensure that our nation helps poor people thrive, not simply survive. We can build a crusade for a new America that provides economic security for all citizens.

The leaders of this new movement should be Black women. Our goal must be to construct a society that concerns itself with the well-being of all—regardless of color, religion, sexual orientation, ability (or disability) or gender.

Our tactics should include building coalitions. Last year in Oakland, my struggling nonprofit organization, the Women's Economic Agenda Project, completed a mission that seemed impossible. Through a coalition of African-American professionals, city officials, city councilwomen and working-class Black women, we raised \$2.6 million and bought a profit-making downtown office building. Today we use this space for programs that revitalize small minority-owned businesses and empower low-income and single-parent families.

It's time to build a new economic revolution. Let's cultivate new leadership and provide platforms for the victims of poverty, abuse, exploitation and oppression. Let's find ways to support and empower low-income women and families by creating new partnerships and programs to revitalize our communities. Let's embrace new political movements aimed at the radical reorganization of society. Let's break the cycle of poverty through scholarly work, organizing in neighborhoods and volunteering in shelters and churches. Let's support tax programs that benefit us all.

Let's begin to speak out about the problems and solutions. Let the new America begin with us.