

In Last Decade, Leaders Say, Harlem's Dreams Have Died

By MICHAEL STERNE

*Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die/
Life is a broken-winged bird that cannot
fly—Langston Hughes.*

"Harlem is now that broken-winged bird. Its dreams are dead, its people are despairing and worse off than they ever were, and all the high hopes of the 1960's are gone."

That view of Harlem, 10 years after the Kerner commission summoned the

There also is the evidence of the streets: empty, boarded-up stores along the once-bustling 125th Street shopping corridor; burned-out abandoned buildings demeaning almost every block of Harlem's broad avenues, from 110th Street north to 155th; hundreds of idle men clustered at corners, drowning empty days in wine and whisky; youths barely in to their teens selling drugs as openly as other boys hawk newspapers.

In the last 10 years, an unknown number of Harlem residents—experts believe the figure is comparatively small, have clawed their way out of poverty, through their own efforts and through Government programs inspired in part by the Kerner commission's report. Many of these moved to other neighborhoods, seeking safer streets, better schools and more attractive housing.

Those who remain constitute a double distillation of poverty, and for them Harlem is a less satisfactory home than it was in the 1960's and offers fewer opportunities to get out.

"It's a bitter harvest after 10 years," said Father Chapman. "But looking back on them, we have no reason to expect

Two Societies America Since the Kerner Report

Last of a Series

nation to an attack on racism and ghetto poverty, was given by the Rev. Robert Chapman, Archdeacon of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and it is shared broadly by other black leaders.

An array of statistics indicates that no matter how Harlem is measured—by its infant mortality rate, its alcoholism, its unemployment, its housing abandonment, its welfare dependency, its population loss or its low level of school achievement—this section of Manhattan seems to be poorer and less equal today than it was a decade ago.

Continued on Page A13, Column 1

Harlem's Dreams Have Died in Last Decade, Leaders Say

Continued From Page A1

anything else. The will for change, real change, never was there. It was the constantly missing element in all the programs that were supposed to bring about equality."

Basil A. Paterson, who grew up in Harlem, became its State Senator and now is Deputy Mayor for labor relations in the Koch administration, endorses that view. He points out that President Johnson never adopted the recommendation of the Kerner commission for a vast program of assistance for black people, and neither did President Nixon.

As a result, Mr. Paterson said, none of the programs that were enacted had enough money to make them work. "Harlem cannot be revived on a piecemeal basis," he said.

Nevertheless, \$100 million was spent in Harlem over 10 years through the Model Cities Administration in what was supposed to be a broad attack on the area's major problems. Job training, educational grants, preventative health care, public safety, legal aid, sanitation services, housing maintenance and other programs were started.

Programs Were Reduced

"When you add it all up, that seems like a lot of money," said Henry R. Williams, director of the Harlem Model Cities office. "But we started out at \$12 million a year, and that was hardly enough to make an impression on Harlem. Later, when the Government reduced the funding, we dropped back to \$8 million a year and the 30 programs we started with became only 14."

Other money was pumped into Harlem by the welfare system and by Federal housing, education and antipoverty programs, but to Mr. Williams and others, these efforts were slight compared to what was being taken out of Harlem by the depression that hit the city economy in 1969 and has hung on ever since.

In the last eight and a half years, New York has lost more than 650,000 jobs. Even in last year's boom, when the national economy expanded by 4 million jobs, 40,000 disappeared from the city.

As a result, many of the job training programs initiated in Harlem became a cruel joke to the people who entered them. Some never got jobs. Others were hired and then dismissed.

Burden Fell on Blacks

"Black people were prepared to share the scarcity, but the way things worked out, the burden of the economic and fiscal crises fell disproportionately on them," said Carl H. McCall, the State Senator who represents Harlem.

"Those guys you see hanging around Harlem street corners aren't waiting around for a parade," Mr. McCall said. "They are waiting for a fair shot at jobs."

Movements in unemployment rates are one indication of how severely New York's economic troubles have hurt its black residents. Historically, the black jobless rate for New York City has been lower than the rate for blacks in the nation as a whole. In 1968, for example, the national rate was 6.7 percent while the city rate was 4 percent. By 1976, however, the national black jobless rate had not quite doubled to 13.1 percent, while the same rate in the city more than tripled to 12.8 percent.

Blocked due to copyright.
See full page image or
microfilm.

The New York Times/March 1, 1978

Welfare statistics also show a worsening of conditions for Harlem's blacks. In 1977, as in 1969, 24 percent of the population of Central Harlem was living on welfare payments.

Nowhere is the heavy toll of poverty on Harlem's people shown more dramatically than in the records kept by the Health Department. Those records indicate that its infant mortality rates, a generally recognized index of the overall health of a community, have been worsening.

In 1968, when the infant mortality rate for the city was 23.1 for each 1,000 live births, it was 37 in Harlem, higher than in any part of New York. By 1976, the city's rate had fallen to 19 while Harlem's had zoomed to 42.8.

For other age groups as well, Harlem has much higher death rates. The 1976 city death rate for all ages was 10.2 for each 1,000 people; in Harlem it was 14.5. The rate for deaths caused by accidents, homicides and suicides was 61.2 for each 100,000 people in the city, 134 in Harlem. The rate for cirrhosis of the liver, a disease of alcoholics, was 30.3 per 100,000 in the city, 127 in Harlem.

Children Recruited for Crime

To Dr. Moran Weston, rector of St. Philip's Church on West 134th Street, the most worrisome development of the late decade has been the recruitment of children into the ranks of organized crime. Harlem has had numbers rackets and drug rings for many years, but the involvement of large numbers of 12-, 13- and 14-year-old children is a relatively recent development.

"This is the worst failure of government that I know of," Dr. Weston said. "The law enforcement services did not protect our children. They turned the other way, and too many of them are growing up with no respect for the law."

Dr. Weston, who celebrated his 20th year at St. Philip's last year, also deplored what he called "the erosion of professional standards" in Harlem schools. "A generation ago," he said, "teachers believed in what they were doing and tried to teach the children. Now they don't believe in the children, they don't believe in themselves, and they don't teach."

Reading Levels Below Norms

In the reading tests given to New York City school children last spring, the two districts that cover Central and East Harlem had most children reading at levels well below national norms in 27 of the 32 elementary schools.

For Harlem's older youths, the last decade has brought both gains and losses. The coming of open enrollment to the City University made it possible for the first time for many of them to get a college education. But the imposition of tuition on fulltime students, a step the city took during its fiscal crisis, has forced some of them to drop out. Without the stipends provided by the Model Cities program to 500 Harlem youths, many of them would have had to leave school.

In the years since the Kerner report, Harlem has lost some of the symbolic institutions that once allowed its residents to boast that their city within New York City was the capital of black America. The Apollo Theater, for generations

a showcase of the best black talent, is shuttered and empty. Frank's Restaurant, a gathering place for black business and political leaders, closed, reopened under new management and now is closed again by a fire.

The Theresa Hotel, formerly Harlem's largest and grandest, is now an office building. And Lewis W. Michaux's National Memorial African Bookstore, a generator of black literary and historical scholarship for 44 years, is gone, as is its frail but determined owner, who died in 1976.

More Economic Losses

The loss of these landmarks, along with a decline in Harlem's night life, has also brought economic losses. Fewer visitors now come to Harlem and the shops and restaurants that line the street are doing less business.

There have been a few gains, as well, however. James H. Dowdy, president of the Harlem Commonwealth Council, points out that in the 1960's, only 2 percent of the businesses along 125th Street were owned by blacks. Today blacks own more than 35 percent of the shops, and the council itself, which was formed in 1967 to foster the economic development of Harlem, is the major property owner.

The council has been buying properties to create a large shopping mall including a major department store. It already has erected an office building on 125th Street and renovated another. It has also bought a lumberyard, a foundry, a store fixture factory, a wire works and other enterprises that together employed 365 people and generated a payroll of \$2.3 million last year.

Private Capital is Sought

"Our goal is to use the seed money we get from the Federal Government to attract private capital to Harlem businesses," Mr. Dowdy said.

Housing has been and remains the most obvious need for Harlem. According to Donald J. Cogsville, president of the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, the section has been losing about 3,000 apartments a year to decay, arson and abandonment since the beginning of the 1970's. Until 1974, new construction was replacing about 2,000 units a year, but the moratorium on Federal building programs in that year stopped all construction in Harlem and none of the losses are now being offset.

Those housing losses are generally considered to be the principal reason for the decline in Harlem's population. Since 1976, the population of Central Harlem has fallen by 74,000 to 159,000, and that of East Harlem by 50,000 to 133,000. Most of those who moved are believed to have resettled in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

The population that remains is, according to Father Chapman, "a time bomb, real social dynamite." Deputy Mayor Paterson eschews those words, but he does express a growing concern that the city's government has no ties, as it did in the administration of Mayor John V. Lindsay, with the youths and street people of Harlem.

"Those people are unconnected, and the city has no money to hire anyone to build some links with them," Mr. Paterson said. "This is something we all ought to worry about."