

Observer Newspapers

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People to People

Life In The Negro Slums (Tell It Like It Is, Baby)

By CAROL SCHMIDT

(Mrs. Schmidt, guest writer for *The Livonia Citizen* for Better Human Relations, is 24 years old and the only white woman in the *MICHIGAN CHRONICLE*, Detroit's Negro weekly newspaper. She uses the pen name "Lorraine" and the *Chronicle* is the only Negro newspaper in the state. She has written for *the Detroit Free Press* and *the Michigan Daily*, and at present also helps the *West Central Organization*, which publishes a weekly newspaper. She is listed in the *Who's Who in Negroes* and is a member of the *Negro Women's Political Council*. She is a member of the *Michigan Association of Negroes* and a member of the *Michigan Association of Suburban Areas* such as Livonia.)

"Some of my best friends are Negroes, why should I want them to integrate the suburbs?" said Alinsky asks.

"Why should we have to move out of our homes just as those suburbs can drive to work faster in a new ditch?" wonder residents displaced by freeway construction.

And Stokely Carmichael can crack up an audience by imitating a suburbanite hearing the words "Black Power."

The image of you out there in white suburbia, your self-imposed ghetto, is not cool with the inner-city.

A freedom song verse goes: "Our philanthropists go wild over us. They give money to the NAACP; And the money that they give Comes from slums where I live. They go wild, simply wild over me."

And this song sums up, perhaps, what the antagonism toward the suburbs is all about: hypocrisy, mixed with a good-sized chunk of utter ignorance.

Lately about the only time I put out to suburbia is to picket some slumlord with West Central Organization. This breeds its own form of ignorance and cultural deprivation. I just can't understand, for example, why a suburban housing development can get so stirred up about what kind of mailboxes they have.

On your part, too many of you, including all you "good white liberals," just can't see why we inner-city dwellers persist in dwelling in filth, throwing garbage around and breaking out windows, then blaming the slums; some nice guy who is doing a favor by letting us live somewhere. I mean, we're mad as a Birch at a peace march when I hear this argument, and I hear it constantly, in anonymous mail from

the suburbs, everytime we do a story on slumlords.

On the surface there is a grain of truth about placing the blame on the tenants. A tradition in the South is to sweep down the dirt in front of your house, not to plant a lawn. Those who have recently come from some parts of the South are completely ignorant about the care of a lawn.

Three hundred years of deliberate attempts by whites to destroy the Negro family, from breaking up families during slavery to hiring Negro women as domestics, keeping them away from their own families during the day, while not hiring the men, have led to well-documented family problems among Negroes today.

Too frequently no male is around to take out the garbage, replace a window, shovel snow, or mow the grass. When he is, twice as often as among whites, he is unemployed, facing the particular brand of frustration men face when they feel used, rejected by their families and society. That frustration can come out in an angry word, wall, or when it is blamed for the root of these problems?

Not all, by any means, of the "slub" around a slum building can be blamed on the tenants, of course, only a small percent. When there are slumlord giants like the Goodman Brothers, the largest owners of inner-city apartments in the city, there is someone much more directly to blame.

Sam Goodman admitted in a FREE PRESS article his only sim-in-life was money, and money was the sole measure of success. I covered a story where tenants in one Goodman-owned building staged a rent strike after two children were bitten by rats. You stepped into the building through the front window, jagged edges sticking out from the door pane. No lock was on any inner door. No window frames or doors had flimsy locks, even a child could break them out. Windows were out of the second floor landing, and wind cut through the apartments. They were tissue paper.

The only way you could get hot water was to start a fire in the boiler room, and I'll show you how water going through the a

heating system, which was fine in the winter but effectively discouraged you from taking a bath in the summer, when you knew drawing hot water would drive your apartment temperature over 100 degrees.

A rail hole under the old fashioned standing bathtub had never been filled, in spite of frequent requests by the tenants, who often found rats and mice in the tub and toilet taking a dip. You had to sleep at night and dream that that sat scratching around was headed for your baby's bed.

In the basement old refrigerators with the doors and locks still intact involved young people. A hole matriates at the base of the stairs surrounded with mice. Yet got an electric shock from the coin washer in the basement, when you dared go down to use it. The basement was open to the alley through another broken lock. Clothes were stolen right from out of a running machine if you left it running for a minute.

In the alley, the view from the windows showed garbage heaped and sliding out of an incinerator, which was only emptied once a week by the city? not nearly enough folks, building supplying 26 families. But Goodman ignored requests that he supply extra picnics during the winter. The people just expected, as you might think if you ever got off of that ditch that drives you down town blocking off your view of the real city; they only put out a normal amount of garbage. It just wasn't collected often enough. But that's not what you would think as you drove by.

By the way, all the tenants who took part in the rent strike were evicted. Could they move into those good apartments in Livonia then?

Sam and Al Goodman are highly respected members of your community. Just as you easily generalize about inner-city residents when you encounter one sloppy Negro, we can easily generalize about all of you white suburbans, from our unpleasant encounters with a few of you.

You're not like Sam Goodman. Fine, I'd like to meet you. Call me up at 963-5522 some time and I'll show you the real Detroit.

At least once a month, the mailman delivers some sort of an advertisement or facsimile announcing a dinner, dance, or what-have-you, that may be attended for a certain fee. Additional information promises there will be door prizes.

Such announcements contain all the elements of a lottery: consideration, prize and chance; and are consequently frowned upon by the United States Post Office Department.

A publication entitled "The Law vs.

Lotteries" may be obtained for free from

— BILL GAIL

In The Mail

local postmasters.

It explains the basis of determining what type of scheme constitutes a lottery and why Congress intended to prohibit the use of the mails in any way to serve the interests of a lottery or those taking part in it.

Most organizations that send out such letters are making charitable appeals but, at the same time, are in violation of the postal regulations. Perhaps without being aware that they are.

— BILL GAIL

Snowballs Firemen



OBSERVING the Scene . . .

By MYRA CHANDLER

There is a battle swirling around our suburban area — a war without bloodshed or bullets but with plenty of verbal fire.

In Livonia it is about to break into open warfare. the eye of the holocaust is partly (or equal pay) for police and firemen.

The Mayor of Livonia is against it. The Livonia Firefighters and the contract negotiators at the Board table are so battle-worn they just want to get a contract signed. To date there have been 21 meetings with the two teams of negotiators and still the issue remains unsolved.

To complicate matters, the City Council is giving advice to the firefighters and the Council is split — some for and some against equal pay for Firemen. The Mayor is firm and stubborn on the project and refuses to allow the City negotiators to compromise. At this point it is a three-way tug of war with the City negotiators being stretched out of legal shape.

With all of this spilling over to other communities, the waiting game to see if Livonia approves parity pay, The Observer might as well add to the static.

Logically, fellow citizens, can you think of any reason why one branch of service in Livonia dedicated to protecting the lives of citizens of the community, should not be rewarded the same as another?

Particularly is this true in Livonia which is a heavy industrial and commercial community — where there is a greater degree of more complicated fires?

The Mayor argued Firemen sleep and play checkers and watch television on the job.

The point is the Fireman is on duty. He is "ear-ready" for action in a split second and on shift that take him away from home every other night. Away from his family, and normal home life.

The Mayor claims because of this he can "moonlight" (get other jobs).

Maybe he can but that is after he puts in a 58-hour week for the Livonia Fire Department. The Livonia Policemen work a 48-hour week and some of them have other jobs too.

Each, on occasion, has a dangerous job. Each must be respected — and each should get equal pay.

Presently the Livonia Firemen receive as a base pay \$7,000 — the Policemen \$8,216.

Over the country, in the suburban communities, to maintain efficiency the paying men wage competitive with other professions. Police and Fire Departments are integrating, each learning the other's tasks. Thus the tools and equipment of both departments are utilized to their fullest. The Mayor was gun-shy for this plan and shouted himself blue over it — The Observer supported it. The Mayor was agreeable to the integrated employees receiving the same rate of pay. But he was angered over their lack of enthusiasm for merging the departments.

Change is always fought — but would not the first step in winning a war be agreeing on the battle of equal pay?

The Mayor is always interested in winning the battle and all too frequently loses the war.

Redford Township recently voted Parity Pay — but Westland and Garden City and Plymouth have not. The Firemen want it and are anxious to see the results in Livonia. In Farmington they have worked the successful integrated departments, and so their pay is equal.

It can and should happen in Livonia.

is hockey equipment at

the new ice rinks and funds and Algonquin Park and were just approved by the City Council for two official size hockey rinks.

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