



**Eugene Patterson**

## Something New And Hopeful

Mayor Ivan Allen of Atlanta has handed Washington the first fresh idea to emerge from the smoke pall covering Detroit and the other devastated cities. Most suggestions for repairing the splintering society of the slums have been old stuff. And the antipoverty programs as presently constituted have not yet succeeded, obviously, in generating much community cohesion among the poor.

How, then, can programs grow out of the slums—instead of being pressed onto them—so the poor can develop a stake in their community that will hopefully discourage them from burning it down?

Allen's suggestion was simple, expensive, but promising.

The three great needs of the urban poor are jobs, housing and education, he reasoned. Supply the first two and education can follow.

So why not create jobs by building housing?

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Set up a three-to-five-year crash program, he said. Recognize that rebuilding of the slums is of the highest national priority, so pour \$20 to \$30 billion of federal money per year into the job and get it done.

Tear down the slums of urban America and build back decent low-cost housing. Everybody—not just the poor—will gain by this salvage of the cities.

Make it a provision of contracts with the builders that a reasonable percentage of the men they hire must be the slum dwellers themselves.

Thus provide jobs (or training, and then jobs) for the jobless poor while also providing housing.

Like most good ideas, Allen's proposal has the virtue of directness and simplicity. It would work, if there were a national will to make it work. Certainly the nation wants something done by now; whether this Congress is bold enough to move decisively is another question.

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Yet the mayor at least said something new. And he said it Monday in Washington, which is a place that needs to hear something new and hopeful. The President's mix of urban programs meets some needs; but a centerpiece project of such dimension as Allen proposes should appeal to him.

In the meantime, Atlanta's low-cost housing efforts must go on. And the Ebenezer Baptist Church, of which the Martin Luther Kings, father and son, are pastors, has joined the Rev. Sam Williams' Friendship Baptist and the Rev. William Holmes Borders' Wheat Street Baptist in setting an example that white churches might note. They formed a non-profit corporation, put up some seed money, and qualified under the federal 221-d-3 housing program to contract for the building of \$1.8 million worth of decent, low-cost housing on the site of a former slum, utilizing federal mortgage money at half the interest drawn by commercial loans. To the hundreds of slum poor who will be able to move into clean rooms at rents beginning at \$55, this is Christianity in action.