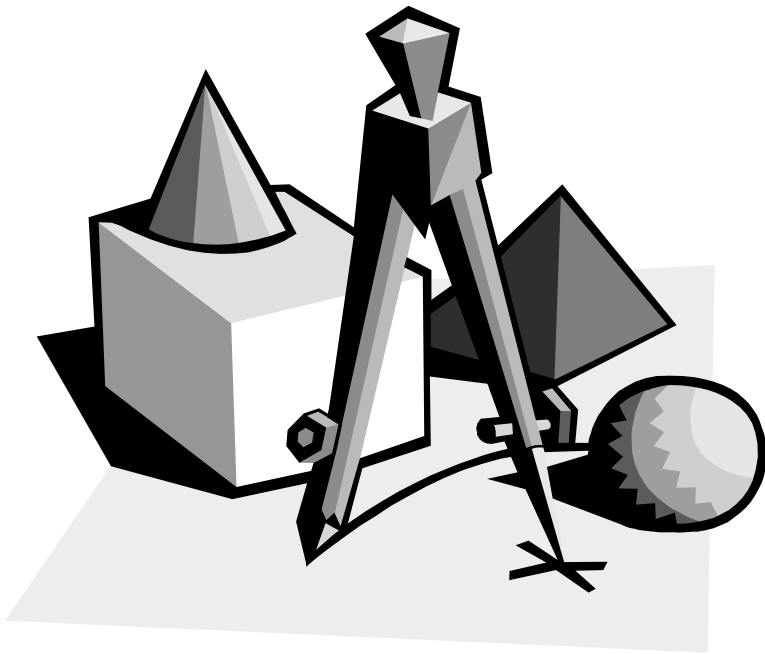




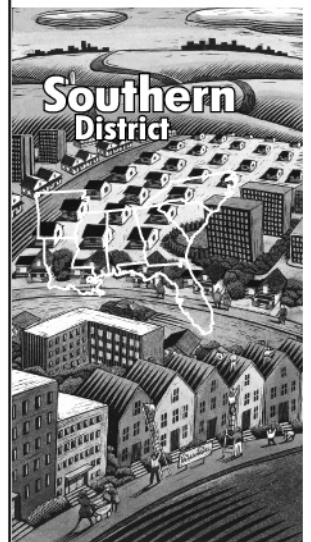
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation

Southern District

Historically Black Colleges & Universities Scholarship
Homeownership Essay Competition



2nd Place Winner
STEPHANIE WOODARD
Dillard University



OVERVIEW

Sponsor:

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation is a public, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in the Housing and Community Development Amendments of 1978 (P.L. 95-557) as a place where “new ideas and approaches could be studied, refined, pilot-tested and replicated in order to revitalize older, urban neighborhoods by mobilizing public, private and community resources at the community level.”

In carrying out its mandate, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation created the national NeighborWorks® system. The NeighborWorks® system includes the Corporation, member organizations collectively known as the NeighborWorks® network, and Neighborhood Housing Services of America, a financial-services and fundraising resource.

The NeighborWorks® network is comprised of more than 230 community-based and resident-led partnerships serving over 2,000 urban, rural and suburban communities across the country, including Puerto Rico. These partnerships are chartered as NeighborWorks® organizations by Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. Committed to revitalizing their communities, these organizations may be known locally as Neighborhood Housing Services, Mutual Housing Association or go by an altogether different name.

Statement of Objective:

Consistent Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation’s mission, its Southern District has announced sponsorship of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities essay competition.

The competition demonstrates the Southern District’s commitment to foster a stronger partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities by encouraging students to analyze important community development issues and rewarding students who demonstrate intellectual development, critical thinking, creative ideas and outstanding communication skills.

Essay Theme:

TAKING MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS: HOW AFRICAN AMERICANS CAN REDUCE THE HOMEOWNERSHIP GAP IN AMERICA

Describe in 1,500 to 2,000 words how African Americans can mobilize resources to increase homeownership in America for African Americans.

Cain Syndrome: Taking Matters into Our Own Hands

Cain, in the Bible, responded to God concerning his brother's death by saying sarcastically, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In the African American community, we suffer from "Cain Syndrome" by refusing to be our brothers and sisters keeper. Reflecting back into the night terror of slavery it was painfully true that we did not own a morsel of property including our selves or the rickety, splintered wood shacks that we called home. Now that metal laden shackles no longer bound our hands, feet, necks and minds, why is it that a large percentage of African Americans are not homeowners?

As I indulged myself in the constructive writings of Carter G. Woodson, I fell in love. Because not only did he state the problems that were brooding in the African American community but most importantly he stated solutions. We as a people are suffering because we are "mis-educated" believing that once one achieves success it is ok to abate the community from which you were reared (Woodson 47). Why is it that the "talented tenth" refrain from sharing their route taken to achieve success nor do they replant seeds of resources and knowledge?

I believe that the "talented tenth" which are the educated celebrities, doctors, attorneys and businessmen/businesswomen in the black community should invest in building quality homes. So when it comes time for an African American to purchase a home, stymies such as segregation and stereotypes would be avoided because the homes sought after would be black owned. We absolutely must be our brother's keeper.

Let us not overlook the fact that African Americans have made striking gains in reference to recent history. In 1991 4,635,000 Black Americans were homeowners (U.S. Census Bureau). That number has escalated to become 6,318,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). Although those facts are astonishing, they lag far behind the number of Caucasian homeowners. For example, in 1991 53,749,000 White Americans were homeowners and presently 62,465,000 are homeowners (U.S. Census Bureau). Sadly, 56,147,000 more homes in America are owned by Caucasians (U.S. Census Bureau). Why is it that a people freed more than 130 years ago struggle with investing in a home? Some say that it is our own fault and that we must pull our own weight as individuals. We must start by assessing our credit and our investments. We as African Americans speak of reparations or payments for the two centuries we spent in bondage, but are we responsible enough to handle such a privilege? Call it the investment gap. Nearly two-thirds of black households have zero savings or more debt than savings (The American Enterprise). At every income level, blacks save and invest less than whites do (The American Enterprise). And, at every income level, blacks have a smaller net worth, on average, than whites (The American Enterprises). Fifty-seven percent of black households with annual incomes greater than \$50,000 invest in the stock market, compared to 81 percent of whites in the same income bracket, according to a 1998 Yankelovich Partners survey (The American Enterprise). The National Urban League president of 1998, Hugh Price, says, "Without assets, each generation has to start anew (The American Enterprise). This is how the investment gap keeps many blacks poor.

To close the home ownership gap we must put investment at the top of the "to do list" and having a bad credit report at the very bottom. Let us make it a priority to expose ourselves to basic financial tools such as checking accounts, stocks, bonds, real state, businesses, etc. Only 37

percent of blacks now earning more than \$50,000 report that their family had a checking account while they were growing up compared to 52 percent of similarly situated whites (The American Enterprise).

Is it possible that we uplift our selves by our own boot straps and seek assistance in rebuilding good credit and investing? Did slavery and the resulting post civil war dependence upon the white Americans soil our self reliance as a people? Has the Negro preserved his old ideals as he migrates from one area of the country to another through time refusing to be reeducated? We must respond to greater opportunities. Let us not be the prodigal son who slept with pig instead of working for better in his father's house. We must be our brothers' and sisters' keeper.

On the other hand, there is the saga of a black family with an immaculate credit report, and two secure jobs that will provide for the house note and the utilities. But why are they turned away from home ownership? The tragedy of discrimination is that it provides an excuse for failure while erecting barriers to success. A study conducted by the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), reveals that the rate of discrimination in rental housing is substantially higher than in owner-occupied housing (The Transition to Home Ownership). In actuality, home ownership is associated with a decline in black-white segregation. This effect decreases slightly at higher income levels but increases substantially with the education of the head of household (The Transition to Home Ownership). This proves that owning a house is not only worth the financial gain but it proves to attract fewer opportunities for discrimination than renting a home.

Carter G. Woodson said,

“When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.”

Pools of immigrants to Asia in the post-1965 immigration era were wealthier and more educated than any other immigrant pool in the past including African Americans (How Race, Ethnicity and Immigration Shape the California Electorate). Among high school graduates aged 25 to 29 in 2000, 68 percent of whites, 61 percent of blacks, and 52 percent of Hispanics had completed some college (Education Attainment in the United States). Although the number of black students rose from approximately 1.1 million in 1990 to approximately 1.4 million in 1997 eventually the only credible response from the black community is to take responsibility for educating our own (Education Attainment in the United States).

There is a direct correlation between home ownership and higher education. For example Parents who own their own home may be helping to boost their children’s educational achievements and even reduce behavioral problems, according to a new nationwide study. The research showed that for children living in owned homes rather than rental units, math achievement scores are up to 9 percent higher, reading achievement is up to 7 percent higher and behavioral problems are 1 to 3 percent lower (Self Help Enterprise).

This proves that purchasing a home in the present reaps great benefits in the future for our African American youth. This also confirms that education is a valuable recourse accessible

through scholarships, grants, loans etc. We, as our brother's and sister's keeper, must see education as water, which would be utilized to refresh a thirsty people.

How can we reach the stars if we refuse to hold our heads up high and even acknowledge their presents? Carter G. Woodson states, "The lack of confidence of the Negro in himself and in his possibilities is what has kept him down. His mis-education has been a perfect success in this respect." It is time for us to stop worshiping other races as perfect beings and recognize our own greatness. After all, the Greeks did seek wisdom from the great scholars in Alexandria located in Africa the home of our forefathers (Library of Halexandria). This was the capital of humanities. So what is essentially stopping us from being home owners? Is it a resource that comes from within such as the lack of vision?

Cain in the bible was far too selfish to perceive a vision. His bitterness stopped him from seeking a way to please God. Once his focus was tainted he never regained his vision and became content with his ideals which cost him the life of his brother. Owning a home is an expensive endeavor. But it will cost you and your family more to not seek the recourses such as sponsorship from a black neighborhood association, education and vision to achieve the dream of being an African American Homeowner.

Let us refuse to be diagnosed with Cain Syndrome. Let us send our youth to college so we can shatter the glass jars that have surrounded us for centuries making our dreams opaque and untouchable. Upon Graduating from Dillard University, I know that it is my purpose to transform content minds. African Americans can and will be homeowners only if we, the educated, embrace the vision to uplift our people.

