

# Hope for Harlem?

Nothing has been more persistently documented than the decline of Harlem; a continuing statistical saga keeps the rest of the city informed of the ups and downs of despair. But facts and figures can't deliver housing or hope.

The most recent survey, a comprehensive analysis of the physical, social and economic conditions of life in Harlem with a proposal for a massive, community-wide, ten-year revitalization program, differs from its predecessors on two counts.

First, it offers a searching and sensitive profile of the community in terms of conditions, attitudes and appropriate solutions.

Second, it is sponsored by the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corporation, a government agency that enjoys the advantages of power, money and ability to get things done.

This sponsorship, in fact, is the source of both the proposal's strengths and its weaknesses. U.D.C. is a building agency, and this study is primarily a building plan. If one were to balance desperately needed housing and rehabilitation against desperately needed jobs — dubious acrobatics at best—jobs would come first. But the premise of this monumental proposal for the physical redevelopment of the greater Harlem area is that building makes jobs and a renewed physical environment sustains social ends.

Nor can it be forgotten that U.D.C., as a government authority with a mandate to go where bankers fear to tread, may be the only sponsor with the remotest possibility of doing the job. Because it has its own funding and access to other government resources, it can invest in areas that the private sector will not touch.

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Ten years ago the sophistication of this research would not have been possible; much has been learned since then about the complex interrelationships of people and plans. But ten years ago it would have had a better chance of getting off the ground. The irony, or tragedy, is that when we have developed the know-how, we no longer have the means.

Of the total ten-year price tag of over \$6 billion, U.D.C. proposes to put up more than \$1 billion in mortgage funds. To do so it will have to have new state legislation to increase its present \$2-billion borrowing power. The overwhelming goal of 33,400 new housing units and rehabilitation of 17,800 units, plus supporting facilities, must compete for state funds and Federal grants and subsidies at a time when appropriations and resources are sharply reduced and inflation is cutting them further.

No one can quarrel with the quality of the study; it is a solid, perceptive, professional piece of work of remarkable scope and unarguable goals. Right now its most important ingredient is hope. But optimism is no substitute for money, and without continuous, aggressive action by an established and funded Harlem Planning and Development Administration, hope can die with the plan.