I would like to begin by thanking you for honoring me with this award. I must say that I was surprised and pleased to learn that it was named for Mr. Ed Blakely. It had me thinking: I wonder what I could have done and been about to receive such a distinct honor. So again, thank you.

It is interesting, however, to stand here and think about the reality that we still do need a caucus of like-minded people, people who realize that, in the total organization, we need a way to express what we believe is in the best interest of folks who look like us -- the assumption being, frankly, that the total body just does not get it. There remains a need to stand together to get both recognition and action for the problems and issues that folks of color need addressed. So the question for us in this caucus of like-minded people is, “What have been the changes in public policy, economic development, and standards of living?” Let us name the criteria. Let us address the implications and facts portrayed in the New Jim Crow and the New Slave Master.

Together, the New Jim Crow and the New Slave Master paint a striking picture of the conditions that folks of color find themselves in: A schools-to-prisons pipeline, more folks of color in jails than 30 years
ago. Reduction in income compared to white folks. You call it . More important is the lack of response from the communities of color as we watch the civil-rights gains unravel.

Author Michelle Alexander sees what is happening as a systematic approach to return to the pre-sixties relationships. She cites the introduction of crack, the harsh penalties to folks of color, and the institution of the three-strikes laws, all resulting in prison expansion and leading, in turn, to more jobs for white rural communities. These developments are followed by a move to privatize prisons. Who said crime does not pay? Then there is racial profiling. We could go on.

I must admit that as I listened to the president talk about what he has done with his foreign policy to protect the American people. I wondered whether he thought about the youth being killed on our streets in greater numbers than soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and greater numbers than people who died on 9/11. I pondered how it didn’t appear as if American youth of color deserved the same kind of protection as what he called the American people.

I cannot understand the lack of outrage from many of us, and the lack of push for resources based on the fact that we are spending
billions of dollars to fight wars overseas but we have difficulty doing what is necessary to stop the wars in our streets.

We are letting go of the pig’s tail of racism and exploitation. Yes, we grabbed and straightened the pig’s tail for a period of some twenty years. But it’s curled again. And what the New Jim Crow and the New Slave Master forces us to ask is, “Were we asleep, like Rip Van Winkle?”

As we gather here, are we prepared to take a good look at what our situation is more broadly in this country? One of the things we need to understand is the impact of the exploitive capitalistic economic system. Yes, it exploits people and the planet. Remember slavery. We have not spoken to the exploitation as SYSTEMIC and understood how we are impacted and what is required to change it.

I think of my own story and my awakening about the clothing factory I worked in during summers as a college student. When it was time to return to Claflin College, I gave my address in Orangeburg, South Carolina so they could mail my last week’s pay to me. I learned the factory was moving to South Carolina! It was to avoid organized unions in the right-to-work South where they could exploit the racist environment. Later I learned they moved to Mexico. Their approach
was to go where they could exploit the people. The Capitalist system at work.

Where are our ideas and solutions? Are they in worker-controlled co-ops? I understand that in Spain the co-ops were able to loan money to some of the local governments. Can we here come up with a development process that respects the culture and provides opportunities for people everywhere in employment, housing, education, health care, clean air, and access to potable water? Do we remember FDR’s economic bill of rights program? Johnson’s Office of Economic Opportunity? There are programs that have worked. Where are they? Where are we? Where are the North Carolina Mutuals? The Access under Maynard Jackson that built an airport on time and under budget?

Remember the Kerner Commission’s report: the two societies, black and white, separate and unequal. That is supposed to be history. Instead, more of us are in jail. What happened? How do we work and figure this out? Well, let me get to it.

Vincent Harding -- in his book, There is a River -- talks about the river as a metaphor for the changes we have made, struggled for. Now he implores us that our task is to build “a new and informed humanity
and not equal opportunity in a dehumanized society.” Franz Fanon said each generation must fulfill its mission or betray it.

Many years ago, we had the push to fulfill that generation’s mission. What was the mission? Civil rights. Howard University Law School made its mission to overthrow the separate and unequal laws of these United States.

Have we articulated our mission?

I want to bring us back to those statements: “new and informed humanity” and “each generation must fulfill its mission.” In terms of the cities and communities where folks of color live, what is happening today? Grace and James Boggs wrote the City is the Black Man’s Land. We sang and wrote about Chocolate Cities. What is the approach that will lead us today to “a new and informed humanity” and city?

What is the plan for economic participation, for community development? The Humphrey-Hawkins bill for full employment -- based on regional planning and worker participation in cooperative ownership, regional needs in education, and environmental protection skills-building -- was stymied. What happened to it? Should our planning efforts move us in this direction, and challenge the feudal system that exists here and throughout the world.
What guides us in our roles as planners? Are we following the path which -- if I understand the anthem -- is consistent with the goal the anthem says: “for what our fathers [and mothers] died”? We must ask, “Is our mission true to what they died for?”

Another insightful guide is the experience I had with a high-school student who asked, “When are you going to stick up for us? Don’t you know what we are up against? We even get put down by our Black teachers!” Before I could respond, he said, “You don’t stick up for yourselves! How can you stick up for us?"

He was asking for love and did not believe he could get it from those who did not love themselves enough to fight for themselves.

In writing my book, Chain of Change, I started with this quote from Before the Mayflower by Lerone Bennett Jr.: “This is how it was to be powerless and curse oneself for cowardice, to be conditioned by dirt and fear and shame and signs. To become a part of these signs and feel them in the deepest recesses of the spirit... to be Black in a white fire, and finally to believe in one's own unworthiness. To be without books and pretty pictures, without the rationalization of psychology and sociology. To give in finally, to bow, to scrape, to grin, and to hate oneself for one's servility and weakness and Blackness.”
How would we respond to Lerone Bennet today? Vincent Harding provides a path. When asked about our responsibility as adults, he answered: first, we must protect our youth physically and psychologically. Second, teach them about their history and culture. Third, provide them with productive work and responsibility.

Along with that, I would address technology. All the talk about today’s innovations has referred primarily to technology of the earth. I believe we need to think of technology of the heart and to understand that “art” is imbedded in both “earth” and “heart.” Art makes technology. Sadly, most of today’s technology and the art it represents have gone from tools for human development to swords for human destruction.

Let us be the ones who move toward the innovations of the technology of the heart -- toward Harding’s proposed “new and informed humanity.” This technology of the heart is the art that leads to love of each other. It develops the cities as described in the Book of Revelation where all the tribes are welcomed and all the gifts are shared. And where the power of love opens doors that the love of power closed. With Love the only sustainable energy, we can all share it without depletion. It’s infinite. Thank you.