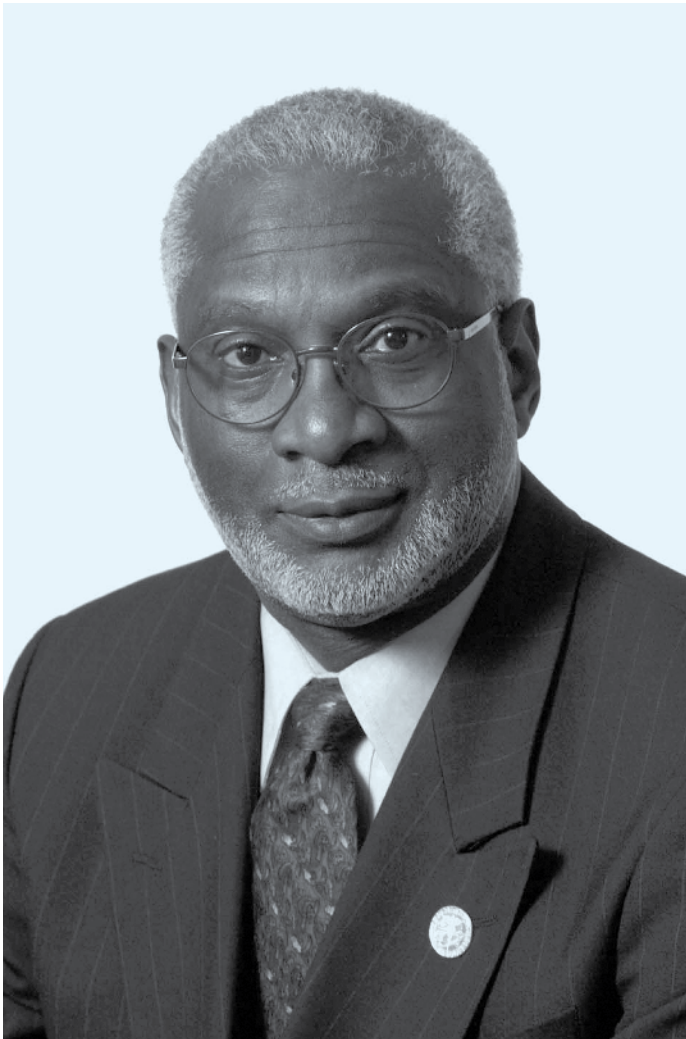


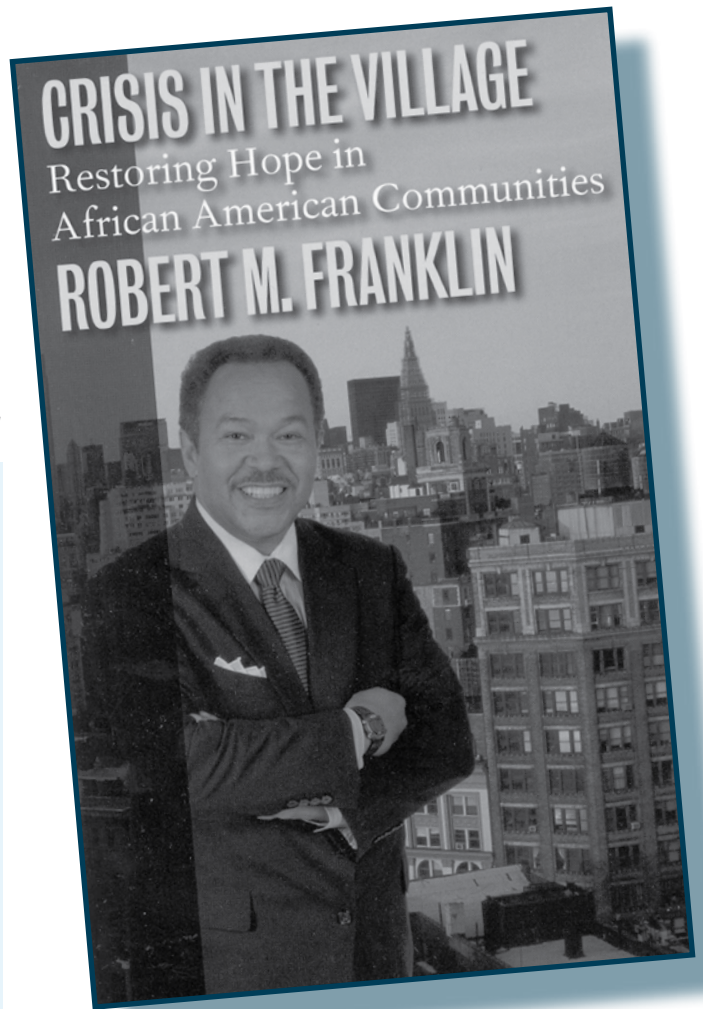
Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities

By Kappa Boulé Archon Robert M. Franklin
(Fortress Press, 2007)

Reviewed by Kappa Boulé Archon David Satcher



Archon David Satcher



In *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*, Archon Robert Franklin has taken on one of the most important, difficult and controversial issues facing us today. The restoration of our communities, a massive undertaking, is certainly not a topic for the faint of heart. Those who tackle it risk criticism and attacks from many sectors in and out of the black community. One of the most prominent commentators on the plight of African Americans, Bill Cosby, who has put this issue squarely in the middle of the black agenda, has received criticism he never experienced before.

So who is Archon Robert Franklin to take on this difficult issue, and why should we listen to him? Has he earned the right to challenge us to adopt strategies for renewing



Archon Robert M. Franklin

the black community? In my opinion, Robert Franklin has certainly done so. On July 1, 2007, he became the ninth president of Morehouse College, an institution from which he graduated in 1976. Previously he was a Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at Emory University. He is a scholar, an insightful educator and perhaps one of America's greatest preachers. He has been on the faculties of the University of Chicago, Harvard Divinity School and Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, and he was president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta for six years. He has also been instrumental in the field of philanthropy as a project officer of the Ford Foundation.

This book reflects his commitment to teaching, preaching and leading. Every chapter begins with "What everyone should know" – about the black family, the black church and black educational institutions. Although I have spent much of my life living and working in these same arenas, I must confess I was enlightened by Franklin's remarks on what everyone should know, including a truly in-depth, moving discussion of education among Africans and African Americans before, during and after slavery.

Franklin's goal is to lead us to a strategic plan of action for restoring the strength and vitality of the black community. This book is more than a commentary; it is a call to action for black America. Franklin is kind to those who have raised this issue to its present level of dialogue. He is especially gracious, respectful and appreciative in his discussion of Bill Cosby and the role he has played in this important dialogue, beginning with the long-running TV series *The Cosby*

Show. He salutes with gratitude the role of Cosby's critics and supporters alike, as well as that of such other giants as Oprah Winfrey, Tavis Smiley, Juan Williams and Sidney Poitier, who have commented in their own ways.

Franklin takes on some of the most sensitive and provocative issues confronting black people, including the need for healthy relationships in dating, marriage and parenting. He ends his examination of our attitudes toward the difficult issue of homosexuality, as well as our treatment of those with "alternative lifestyles," by stating that "our love for and grace toward others are closer to the nature of God than our anger and our pride." Franklin also boldly examines the church and the current controversy regarding its mission. He is clear, decisive and even harsh in denouncing the gospel of prosperity as diametrically opposed to Christian principles, and he points to "prophetic stewardship" as the "most adequate and authentic expression of Christian faith."

Franklin makes it clear that historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) must also be a part of the renewal process; he challenges alumni to become more involved in building greater moral purpose within the HBCUs. But he does not limit his call to the black community: He speaks to our entire society when he quotes from Benjamin Elijah Mays's final commencement address at Morehouse College in 1967, in which Mays stated that "the abolition of economic, political and philanthropic discrimination is the first order of the day, not for the good of Negroes alone, but for the nation as a whole." As Franklin makes clear, the government and the institutions within our society must join in this struggle.

Indeed, Franklin challenges all of us to move from dialogue, commentary and criticism to a strategic plan of action for renewing the black community. What sets this book apart from others that have addressed this issue is the six-step plan in the final chapter; he presents this plan as a call to action that can be adopted at every level of our population:

1. Begin a focused conversation among leaders of the various sectors of our communities to launch a national dialogue.
2. Move forward with collaborative stewardship and the initiation of partnerships.
3. Develop a comprehensive action plan with timetables and checkpoints.
4. Make accountability an integral part of this effort.
5. Build lasting strategies among governmental and philanthropic organizations that address fund-raising and relationship building.
6. Document and celebrate progress as it takes place.

Perhaps this is what we have been waiting for: a how-to book on dealing with the awesome problems that our families and communities face.

The great preacher who is Robert Franklin leaves us with one of his most important sermons. As you would expect, it is a message of hope – hope that our village can and will indeed be renewed, restored and revitalized. Just as the community was called upon to "roll away the stone" after Lazarus rose from the dead, Franklin calls on each of us to do our part in reviving the black community by rolling away the stones that have prevented us from springing forth and moving forward.

