

## LEGACY

### Social Work Classroom Topics for Discussion or Assignments

**Synopsis:** Tod Lending's LEGACY is a compelling and inspiring story about transformation, self-determination and hope and a testimony to the power of faith.

For four generations, the Collins family was trapped in urban poverty, depending upon welfare and living in one of the oldest and most dangerous public housing projects in America-Chicago's Henry Horner Homes. Yet, unlike tens of thousands in their situation, they found the community support structures – and internal spirit – to strengthen their family and transcend the economic and social conditions of their lives.

The 90-minute LEGACY documentary captures a family passing through dramatic and unexpected transitions over a five-year period. Through the powerful and dignified voices of women from three generations of the Collins family, LEGACY tells the inspiring story of how members of one family broke free of welfare, recovered from substance abuse and escaped the specter of violence in their community. Family members succeeded in education and job training, secured employment, moved to a safe neighborhood and gained self-respect.

Nickcole Collins Pierre, twenty-one years old, is the narrator of LEGACY. She draws viewers into the compelling story of her family, telling us: "It begins with a tragedy and ends with our lives changed in ways we could never imagine."

As she speaks, viewers see aerial views of Henry Horner, then its confining and decrepit hallways. Through photographs, Nickcole introduces us to her grandmother Dorothy Jackson, mother Alaisa and aunt Wanda. She tells us that Dorothy moved to Henry Horner 25 years ago and, as the neighborhood violence worsened, "Grandma watched out for all of us grandchildren." Seemingly speaking for all of us, Nickcole says, "We couldn't believe the violence would touch us."

In September, 1994, Dorothy is the first person interviewed by filmmaker Tod Lending. She talks about how difficult it is to live in public housing, but that she has no choice. When she first moved there, the building and neighborhood were safe for families. Now, "you can't go outside because there's always shooting going on." Prophetically, she expresses a wish that the housing project would be torn down.

Two hours after the initial interview with Dorothy, her grandson, 14-year-old Terrell Collins, was gunned down two blocks from his home. Nickcole tells us that the family was "so proud of who he was." Terrell, called "Bam" by the family, was a leader in the neighborhood, a straight-A student with a scholarship to a private high school. Everyone believed he had great promise, that he would "make it out" and become a successful adult.

LEGACY is told in five segments, representing the years of filmmaking as well as the progress of individual family members. The stories of Nickcole, Alaisa, Wanda, Dorothy and Jack connect with one another and to the unrealized presence of Terrell. Together, they represent some of the complex issues inherent in families in poverty, the working poor and distressed neighborhoods, and the devastating impact of these economic realities on people's lives. The stories call forth our compassion and understanding as a response to the expression of human needs.

**Special Issues:** community action and advocacy, intergenerational, housing, economic literacy, child welfare, grandparents raising grandchildren, grief and loss, drug addiction, gang violence, aging across the life span.

### **Classroom topics for discussion or assignments:**

1. Discuss Dorothy's resiliency from a Strengths Perspective. What challenges did she face in the beginning of the filming and what did she overcome by the end? What personal resources did she draw from in order to overcome these challenges? What challenges will she continue to face despite moving out of the projects?
2. Discuss the intersection of gender, age, race and socioeconomic status as they apply to Dorothy and other older women. How is Dorothy especially at risk as an older, African American woman in poverty?
3. Discuss the risks to older adults of living in high crime, inner city neighborhoods. How was Dorothy personally affected by living in the projects? How did her life change after she left?
4. Discuss the role of older people as parents and grandparents using Dorothy as an example. In particular, how are grand parenting patterns affected by increasing rates of substance abuse and poverty?
5. Identify the policy issues and implications of Dorothy and her family's situation early on in the film. What social issues disproportionately affect older, racially diverse people, particularly women? What do you think social workers can do to advocate on their behalf?

The LEGACY National Outreach Campaign was developed and managed by Outreach Extensions. For more information, please contact:



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