

A Social Worker Speaks for Mars

Rollie Lobsinger

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” — Proverbs 29:18

The exploration of Mars is a social justice issue just as it is a scientific and economic issue because the process channels human resources and intelligence to create new possibilities for all of us – including the disenfranchised.

Why should we go to Mars? As a social worker I have been told that I cannot advocate for the exploration of Mars without contradicting my values and my profession. I am told we need to focus on the problems that we face here on earth and that the colonization of Mars is a luxury that we cannot fund without harming the struggle for freedom and dignity faced by minorities, women, immigrants and the poor. The message is the same from my colleges and from the general public. We have troubles right here; we cannot afford to divert either the money or our attention from them.

It is assumed that space exploration only drains resources away from the programs that address poverty, healthcare, education, therapy, and social justice. This is not only false; it is the opposite of what our history has shown us. The settlement of the new world allowed repressed and impoverished peoples from the old world undreamed of opportunities to own property, influence government, create new art forms and challenge the limitations placed on them by the old world.

We must go to Mars to create new economic and social opportunities for the poor and oppressed of earth. The settlement of Mars will create new opportunities by launching a new period of innovation and growth that is sustainable and independent of proprietary technologies or profit driven markets. Mars will create social and economic opportunities for the disenfranchised that will never be available with limited resources here on earth and the established hierarchy of haves and have-nots.

Where else will new and valued positions within the world economy come from? Certainly not from a global consumer economy that must continually deskill labor and automate the production of goods and services to compensate for rising energy and material costs.

As human labor continues to lose its value and become the cheapest and most negotiable component of the global economy, we need to ask where the political will may come from to end poverty. We need a new frontier to raise the value of every individual so that economic choices are made to invest more in human welfare instead of less.

The most powerful of the negative outcomes that result from global devaluation of people is hopelessness. This is demonstrated every day by worldwide drug abuse, religious extremism, expanding military budgets, and the growth of racial separatism. In the United States, generations of black youth have self destructed because participation in gang culture is the only option that appears to be attainable. This pattern is repeated the world over wherever the value of people is minimal and where people have no reason to believe that they can progress under their present circumstances.

This lack of hope is manifested as a lack of commitment to the values of the broader culture and it is not only seen among disenfranchised minorities and the poor but also among the youth of the middle and upper classes. Would so many youth be involved with promiscuity, drug abuse, violence and crime if they had something more to strive for? Would depression be the most commonly diagnosed mental illness in the Western world if more of our youth believed their efforts were meaningful and productive? In “The Pale Blue Dot” Carl Sagan states that without a “telos” a (sacred mission) we are left without hope of transcending our circumstances. This appears to be the case among our youth and among the poor.

The global expansion of religious and political extremism is another indicator of hopelessness and lack of direction. All of us search for meaning in our lives - in the absence of positive alternatives, violent and destructive choices can become more acceptable, especially among those who feel powerless. This new century has already been marred by campaigns of genocide and ethnic cleansing. It seems unlikely that this will ever end if we cannot create real hope and real opportunities.

No doubt there will be social problems on Mars, but there will also be new resources, new technologies, new social structures and new energy with which to address them. We will find new ways to solve the problems of those on earth as well as new reasons to live, learn and grow on Mars. We will also make discoveries and encounter problems we have never dreamed of. Ultimately, we may even find that the differences between the members of the human family are inconsequential compared to the challenges of colonization and vastness of the new frontier.

How will the future judge us? As visionaries or otherwise? Generations to come may ask why we did not act. And what could have been more important than our moral obligation to the future? Will we be condemned for our short term thinking?

As a social worker I know that personal or social change is not possible without hope. Hope for healing, for dignity, for a decent standard of living, for the future of our children.

Fortune favors the brave.