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### **“Cleaning Our Way to Black Liberation”**

Without a moralizing intent, we share the following travel incident. We were in Kyoto, Japan in March 2009 attending an academic conference. Each morning, while walking to the subway that would take us to Ryukoku University where the conference was held, we observed a streetsweeper—a person with a broom. One morning, we decided to pay close attention to the streetsweeper. To our great surprise, we noticed that there was no trash or refuse on the street, yet the streetsweeper swept anyway. We say that “cleanliness is next to godliness.” According to religious traditions, those grounded in godliness can achieve all things.

The US Census Bureau [reports](#) that 19.5 percent of Black Americans lived at or below the poverty line in 2020. It is common knowledge that many of those poor persons live in blighted neighborhoods. A common feature of such neighborhoods is trash and refuse that line the streets, alleyways, vacant lots, and abandoned structures. Often, the conditions in these neighborhoods facilitate drug dealing, drug use, and violent crimes—including murders. Unfortunately, these neighborhoods cause residents to experience fear, which generates anxiety and stress. We all know that stress can kill.

Consider the foregoing along with a 2018 study that was published in the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences. The study is entitled “[Citywide Cluster Randomized Trial to Restore Blighted Vacant Land and its Effects on Violence, Crime, and Fear](#).” It tells us that the US is home to a Switzerland-sized amount of vacant and abandoned lots and structures that reflect some of the blighted conditions outlined above. Importantly, the study describes steps that can be taken to modify these conditions and improve outcomes in these neighborhoods. Based on data collected after cleaning up and greening blighted lots and areas within poor neighborhoods, the study reports sizeable and statistically significant reductions in violence, crime, and fear.

Consequently, it is fortuitous that a Citizens Organized for Environmental Justice group is spearheading a [National Cleanup Day](#) (NCD) on May 21, 2022. The plan is for all Black Americans to engage in cleaning up our neighborhoods on that day and in the future.

The NCD effort can serve as an essential starting point for transforming our self-perceptions and for reducing fear, violence, and crime. Resolving these problems, in turn, places us on a certain path toward completing other important tasks that will help us arrive at Black Liberation.

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