

Poverty
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Our Urban Poor

*Promises
to Keep and
Miles to Go*

by St. Clair Drake

Introduction By Bayard Rustin

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Introduction

Promise, disappointment, and patience have been the grounds on which Negroes have built their lives in America. The post-slavery promise of forty acres and a mule, the first promise, never came through. Political freedom was promised and withdrawn and is now only painfully being recovered. And economic freedom is still to come. Today millions of Negroes are waiting all across the nation, but mainly in the cities. And as they wait, their plight worsens. Today they constitute a disproportionately large segment of America's urban and rural poor. Perhaps they can maintain their patience for only one more promise—the one held out by the war on poverty.

The history of this experience—with its advances and reverses, its rises and falls of hope—has been, if only from the standpoint of objective consideration, an enormously absorbing one. Aspects of it have engaged the thought and concern of our best scholars. Inevitably, however, all of it has been of the most serious interest and concern to institutions and organizations whose chief task it is to dedicate themselves to the search for a final fulfillment.

For this reason, the A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund is especially happy to publish this discussion by St. Clair Drake, one of our more involved social thinkers, and to recommend it as one of the more useful discussions of the unfinished story of the Negro's economic hope.

This is the third in a series of pamphlets on the changing nature of the civil rights challenge to be published by the Education Fund. The first dealt with a reexamination of the problems of the civil rights by C. Van Woodward, Paul Feldman, and Bayard Rustin. The second was a discussion by Frank Reissman of the need for New Careers as an anti-poverty strategy. And in the fourth, Ralph Ellison, Whitney Young, and Herbert Gans address themselves to the growing social and economic crisis of the cities.

Bayard Rustin

Our Urban Poor—

Promises to Keep and Miles to Go

St. Clair Drake

The last centennial celebration in which I was privileged to participate was at the university with which I am affiliated—in 1963 when I was asked to deliver a series of lectures in observance of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. We, like many groups throughout the nation, were honoring Abraham Lincoln's historic decision to call upon the slaves in the rebellious states to desert their masters. The promise Lincoln made was a promise of **FREEDOM**, so I chose to speak on **THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE NEGRO—A HUNDRED YEARS OF FREEDOM?** You will note that I placed a question mark at the end, for my mood was one of feeling that there were still unkept promises and many miles to go. The subject *then* was **FREEDOM** in all of its multiple dimensions.

Four years later, I have been forced again to think within an extensive time-span, for our Forum today is part of the celebration of a university's devotion—over a hundred-year period—to the goals stated on its crest—*Veritas et Utilitas*. These two centennial celebrations are related to one another in fact as well as in symbolic import, for I need not remind anyone here that this institution* bears the name of a remarkable man upon whose shoulders fell the task of trying to assure to the freed slaves something more than formal, legal freedom, who tried to lay the foundations for economic and social progress that would turn poverty-stricken chattel slaves into self-reliant citizens. He became the energetic and resourceful administrator of an institution founded to realize the promise—the Bureau of Refugees, Freedom and Abandoned Lands—usually referred to simply as the Freedman's Bureau. I speak, of course, of General O. O. Howard. Our Forum today might well be considered a memorial to him.

This is neither the time nor the place to detail the story of the Freedman's Bureau, nor could I hope to do so with anything approaching the insight and eloquence with which it has already been done—by the late Dr. W. E. B. DuBois in that famous chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* which begins with the words, "The problem of the twentieth century is

* Howard University.

the problem of the color line." Calling his chapter "The Dawn of Freedom," Dr. DuBois states that "In effect, this tale of the dawn of freedom is an account of that government of men called the Freedmen's Bureau—one of the most singular and interesting of the attempts made by a great nation to grapple with vast problems of race and social condition." In our own day—in 1964—the Congress of the United States passed an Economic Opportunity Act setting up machinery to grapple with these same problems. It is sobering to recall that one hundred years before this Congress set up the "Poverty Program," its predecessors were holding out to Negroes the prospects of freedom without poverty by creating the Freedmen's Bureau. Congress passed the Bill in the year 1864 with a slim majority of two. It is highly probable that if the nation had allowed General Howard and the Bureau to carry out the work they tried to do, we would not have the problem of the urban poor in its present form—predominantly a problem of the *Negro* poor.

The Bureau succeeded in many of its smaller tasks, but failed in its larger ones. Those failures left unfulfilled promises and increased the miles the ex-slaves had to go—literally as well as figuratively. The greatest hope had been to give the Freedmen land so that they could evolve into a stable, prosperous peasantry. This the nation would not allow. So they became a mass of landless sharecroppers held in bondage by debt-peonage until the outbreak of the first World War when they made the Flight to Freedom in their thousands, seeking in the northern ghetto what they never found on the southern plantation.

But the Bureau succeeded in its social welfare program, succeeded so well, in fact, that the South demanded its destruction. In fifty months it distributed 21,000,000 free rations to destitute freedmen. Within three years it founded sixty hospitals and asylums and treated a half-million patients. Within that same span of time 30,000 farm jobs were secured for able-bodied workers and the Bureau insisted upon labor contracts to protect them. Before it was dismantled the Bureau had negotiated 50,000 such contracts in a single state. It helped a minority of enterprising farmers to acquire land and started them on the way to a higher standard of living for themselves and their families. Within two years it helped 5,000 Negro soldiers to collect over \$6,000,000 in back pay and bonuses. One of the Bureau's major social services was given in the form of helping separated consorts to find their mates and settle down with them, supplying a preacher if they wanted one so they could move from a status of common-law to marriage.

The greatest successes of the Bureau were in the field of education. By the end of its first year it had organized 560 schools with 1,555 teachers and 68,241 pupils, in ten states, and helped them to organize defense

against those who terrorized the teachers and burned the school houses down. Between June 1, 1865 and September 1867, the Bureau spent over \$5,000,000 and could report 3,300 teachers and 150,000 pupils. DuBois points out that the Bureau also gave a stimulus to higher education and cites Howard, Fisk, Atlanta, and Hampton as institutions that benefitted from its efforts.

The conservatives and reactionaries, having refused to allow the Bureau to distribute land among the Freedmen, proceeded to attack it on the grounds that it was wasting the taxpayers money and destroying the Negro's initiative. One Congressional investigating committee commented in an official report as follows:

... four millions of Negroes became the pupils, wards and servitors and pliant tools of a political and extremely partisan agency, inimical and deadly hostile to the peace, order and best interest of southern society. Under the workings of the Reconstruction and Freedmen's Bureau Acts the foundations of the social and political order were uprooted and overturned. . . . The agents of the Bureau were preachers and had been selected as being the most devout, zealous and loyal of that religious sect known as the Northern Methodist church. . . .

Hostility to the Bureau did not remain on the verbal level. The investigating committees eventually court-martialed General Howard—although he was exonerated—and minor acts of bad bookkeeping were blown up into felonies and an image was painted of a government agency rampant with corruption and bribery—a bit of which was admittedly there, but not nearly so much as charged.

Why have I strung the comments on the Bureau out at such great length? For one thing it serves to remind us of the constants in the process of trying to fulfill the promise and shorten the miles to go. One constant is the unrelenting, unmitigated opposition that is to be expected from a coalition of honest penny-conscious Puritans and the Negro-haters against any government efforts to aid the poor and especially the Negro poor. Much of the comment about the Bureau strikes a familiar chord as we think of HARYOU and the Mississippi Head Start Project, or the speeches that are made when the budget for the Poverty Program is debated in Congress. Another constant is the fact that some money will be misused—some unwittingly, some deliberately—on any large-scale program, but a program cannot fairly be judged—in its total effects—by the degree of speculation associated with it.

These are some of the implications of the Freedmen's Bureau but there are factors of even more important significance. In sanctioning the Bureau's work, the Congress established the precedent of Federal provi-

sion for money and machinery to plan for the welfare of the underprivileged. Also, the concern for the plight of the Negro sensitized the nation to the needs of other underprivileged groups, and those who fought for Negro rights found themselves involved in the fight for human rights. Over and over as one reviews the reports and diaries of people connected with the Bureau one finds concern expressed for the poor whites, and an occasional sentence revealing the fact that ultimately race prejudice was only a special form of more general attitudes. Thus, for instance, one report from Georgia stated that "most of the white residents of this section took grounds against schools for the education of the people not only as labor lost, but some hold that it is injurious to all working classes to be taught from books." The A. Philip Randolph Institute in one of its recent publications reminds us of this historic connection between the struggle for Negro rights and the struggle for *human* rights in America when it observes that, The Negro's greatest role . . . is not as beneficiary, but rather as a galvanizing force. Out of his unique suffering, he has gone a long way toward awakening the American conscience with respect to civil rights and liberties. The debt which the whole nation owes him will be increased many times, as he helps to win the battle against unemployment and poverty and deprivation. But not every American's conscience is touched, and "backlash" is a constant in the picture, too. The Bureau was destroyed and dismantled in 1876 when the Federal Government decided to make a "deal" with white southern politicians, allowing them to disfranchise the Negro and to use intimidation and terror for the establishment of a caste system in the South.

Over the span of 90 years following the dissolution of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Hayes-Tilden Compromise that ended General Howard's great experiment in planned social welfare, the United States achieved a measure of sustained economic growth unparalleled anywhere else in the World. It drew villagers and peasants from all over the world to supply laborers for the industrial revolution while pinning the Negro to the southern soil, thus putting him at a competitive disadvantage when he faced the competition of the immigrants years later in the northern industrial cities. But however unfair the policies were toward the Negro during these years, the fact remains that—even more significant than the technological and managerial miracle that boosted the value of the Gross National Product and the per capita income to the highest on earth—Americans developed a blend of humanitarian sentiment, Jacobin egalitarianism, and economic rationality that not only idealized the Affluent Society but also set off a struggle to realize a New Deal, a New Frontier, and a Great Society.

By the outbreak of World War II, the people of this country were as

deeply committed to the concept of a Welfare State as they were opposed to socialism or communism for attaining it. This commitment came on the heels of the stock market crash of 1929 and found institutional expression in the efflorescence of new agencies established during the Roosevelt era. What was done then could never be undone! Today, aid programs under the Great Society are channelled through 21 federal departments and 400 regional and subregional federal offices. There are 221 grant-in-aid programs of which 105 are less than three years old! The New Deal brought intellectuals and social workers into high policy making positions for the first time (Harry Hopkins and Frances Perkins are outstanding examples) and involved every major university community. The Great Society programs continue this tradition.

The most remarkable thing about this unique American development was that it started as a movement to *alleviate* poverty and ended with a commitment to *abolish* it. This post World War II dream became a promise. It was rooted neither in the Utopianism of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* nor Marx and Engel's *Manifesto*, but seems, rather, to have developed from the guilt feelings of the successful, the efficiency norms of the technical and managerial bureaucracy, and a sense of the absurd among intellectuals. For, here was a country—the first on earth—in which the poverty-stricken were a relatively small minority. Even in New Deal days it was only a ONE-THIRD ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed which stirred the national conscience. Now it is only a one fifth. Yet, the nation expresses deep concern—and should. Was it not perfectly natural and logical to say, "If we have come this far toward abolishing poverty why can't we wipe it out completely? Is it not absurd to tolerate poverty within the framework of the Affluent Society—as well as immoral?" Why poverty in the midst of plenty?

The concept that poverty can and should be abolished has been nurtured and carried, to some extent, within the structure of the trade union movement, but its clarification and propagation has been the work of intellectuals who have influence in the liberal-labor-political coalition. And the base from which they have propounded the idea has been the university community—within departments of social work, economics, sociology and political science. Their role *vis-a-vis* the Democratic Party has been similar to that of the Fabians in relation to the Labor Party of Great Britain. I mention this point because I wish to speak briefly of the role of academic social scientists and social welfare workers in this process.

Prior to the Great Depression, the development of the social survey movement cultivated with skill and devotion by schools of social work and settlement houses, played a major role in focusing attention upon the needs of the poor in northern urban areas. Before World War I the Euro-

pean immigrant masses were defined as *the* urban social problem, but it should not be forgotten that the first scholarly study of the urban Negro, Dr. DuBois' *The Negro in Philadelphia* was sponsored by a settlement house which happened to have a few Negroes in its service area. During the 1920's the University of Chicago sociology department under W. I. Thomas and Robert Ezra Park (both of whom were influenced by Booker T. Washington) added studies of the Negro to their researches on immigrants. Charles S. Johnson carried out a study of the race riot of 1919 in Chicago under Park's direction and E. Franklin Frazier served his apprenticeship with him in the study of the Negro family, being associated jointly in those days with the University of Chicago and the Urban League. City governments and social work agencies developed a need for facts and university social science departments began to take on the role of supplying them in the period between the two World Wars. It was in this period, too, that the poverty problem in urban areas became increasingly defined as predominantly a problem of assisting Negroes in realizing the dream in the ghetto which they had fled from the plantation to pursue. The period of the Depression, particularly, was—for Negroes—a crucial one.

The provision of a theoretical framework in which to attack the problem of the one-third who were ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-fed during New Deal days was set by two groups of scholars—the Marxists who insisted that only a revolutionary struggle of black and white workers for the achievement of a socialist reorganization of society could do the job; and the Keynesian economists allied with liberal and labor social actionists who felt that America could develop its own unique way to solve this problem. The work of this latter group was strengthened by the research of sociologists and anthropologists who—on the basis of detailed community studies—stressed the point that two separate and distinct types of social stratification existed in the U.S., organically related to each other and interacting with each other. The pioneer study, made in a Mississippi town by Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardner, *Deep South*, was subtitled “a social anthropological study of caste and class.” The significance of the study was two-fold. It demonstrated that it was not some fixed sentiment of racial prejudice but a nexus of economic interests and a desire to preserve political and social dominance that kept the Negro in a caste position; and secondly, that when it was to the economic interests of white power holders and power wielders to change their behavior and attitudes toward Negroes they did so.

Increasingly, Allison Davis became interested in a problem that extended far beyond the caste question—the question of how underprivileged Americans, *regardless of their race*, suffered from middle-class biases

in the formulation of intelligence tests and in the schoolrooms of the nation. He and his colleagues at the University of Chicago eventually developed a sociology of education that has had repercussions throughout the United States. They highlighted the point that cultural deprivation is often *unwittingly* reinforced by the actions of good respectable people—who should be confronted sharply with the consequences of their actions.

This caste-class analysis of Negro-White relations in the U.S. became a framework which, in varying degrees, other scholars accepted, including Gunnar Myrdal in his definitive work, *An American Dilemma*. I served my own research apprenticeship working with W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis in Mississippi. Later, with my colleague, Horace Cayton, I decided to concentrate upon an attempt to understand the dynamics of life within a northern ghetto—the Black Belt of Chicago. Here we were more impressed by the fluidity of what we called an ethnic-caste situation than by its caste-like aspects. We saw the Negro poor as the most recent increment of poor people, arriving after several waves of European immigrants and trying to fight their way up against those who got there first and who preempted the privileged positions. The system allowed them to use the ballot and thus gave them a bit of what is today referred to as “Black Power”—something denied Negroes in both rural and urban areas of the deep south.

Community studies of the 1930 vintage (*Yankee City, Plainsville, USA, Elmstown, Jonesville, etc.*) are now out of vogue—and, I think, with good reason. The most recent addition to the ghetto literature, Kenneth Clark’s *Dark Ghetto*, is a quite different kind of book from these, problem-oriented, concerned about how to change the situation, not just interested in describing and analyzing it as we were, though our work was a necessary forerunner to contemporary research. The new type of research is a function of conditions which followed World War II.

For those who are interested in the type of theoretical analysis of the race relations situation which prevails in the U.S. today, I should like to commend to their attention a volume recently edited by Talcott Parsons and Kenneth Clark, *Negro Americans*, and made recently available in a Beacon paperback. The most significant research, on both poverty and race relations today, however, I think, is not at the theoretical level, but is action-related and much of it is federally funded. The empirical data will no doubt be as useful to the social scientists for theory building in the future as it is for planners now—but the interests of foundations as well as government agencies run more toward policy-related research and action-related research than toward basic social science research. This orientation is related, in part, to what might be called the race relations crisis that has gripped the nation since 1945 and to the decision to abolish poverty.

The two phenomena are intertwined.

By 1950, the proportion of Negroes living in cities had passed the 50 per cent mark. Negroes were becoming increasingly urbanized. Today over 70 per cent are urbanized. Because they were predominantly a low-income group they tended to be concentrated in the inner city occupying areas relinquished by whites as they climbed the socio-economic ladder. Awareness of the crucial position of the Negro in the ecology of the city coincided with a nationwide trend toward urban renewal and redevelopment and posed a series of problems that have been carefully analyzed by Robert Weaver in his book *Dilemmas of Urban America*. When restrictive covenants were declared unenforceable in the courts in 1948, the ghettos began to expand, with whites often fighting against the block by block movement of Negroes with bombing and arson. As Negro populations began to take over the inner city and whites fled to the suburbs, the spectre of cities became all-Negro, with a low tax base and culturally deprived inhabitants began to haunt politicians and city planners. It is no accident that the post of urban planning and housing seemed one which logically should go to a Negro. Trying to raise the standard of living of Negroes in urban areas gradually became defined as essential for the salvation of American cities—not just for Negroes themselves.

The concern for urban planning and redevelopment and the increasing ghettoization of Negroes has proceeded concurrently with a civil rights movement that unfolded in three phases: (a) 1945-1955: stepped up legal action to secure judicial decisions to give the quietus to the theory of "separate but equal." These efforts culminated in the school desegregation decisions of 1954. (b) 1954-1963: The militant civil rights movement in the South, culminating in the March on Washington in the summer of 1963; (c) 1964: Passage of the Civil Rights Bill and the "Poverty Program" and outbreak of rioting in northern ghettos; (d) 1965-1966: period of experiment and consolidation; beginning of so-called white backlash and the conservative reaction as expressed in Congressional elections. One fact is crucial—after 1964 we were all committed to "The War on Poverty," and with considerable amounts of Federal Funds allocated, professors as well as social welfare workers began to divide their time between grantsmanship and professional duties. The Job Corps, Head Start, Vista, Upward Bound, CAP—the new names began to slip easily from our tongues. At the moment the fight is on how to preserve what has been started.

Once the United States Government had made up its mind to launch the war on poverty, the Office of Economic Opportunity set its computers to work to define the parameters of the problem, and to analyze it in all dimensions. "Who are the poor and where are they?" became the first relevant question.

1. In 1964, some 9,100,000 multiple person families, embracing about 29 million people, were defined as living in poverty; i.e., they had an annual family income of less than \$3,130.
2. Adding 5,300,000 unattached individuals with less than \$1,540 brought the total of those living in poverty up to over 34,000,000 persons—or
3. Within these groups, half of the multiple family units had incomes of less than \$2,000 per year.
4. About 2/5ths of the U.S. poor are in the South.
5. About a third of the U.S. poor are in consumer units headed by women.
6. Over half of the poor were in consumer units whose heads had less than 8 years of education. Job training is essential.
7. About 40 per cent of all poverty in the U.S. involves families where breadwinners have inadequate job opportunities, while about 20 per cent receive substandard wages when employed.
8. Another 20 million people with incomes between \$3,000 and \$5,000 a year are living in a state of deprivation.
9. Most of America's poor are not Negroes—only 25 per cent are, but most of the *urban* poor are Negroes.
1. The Negro male unemployment rate is over double that among whites.
11. If comparisons of Negroes with whites are made, we find that 37 out of every hundred Negro families are below the \$3,140 poverty line, but only 15 out of every 100 white families are. Not only are over a third of the Negroes below the poverty line, but Negroes, viewed as a whole are over twice as poor as whites. Among the very poor (families with between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per annum) about 8 out of 100 non-white families were in this category, but only 3 out of 100 white families.

The problem has been placed before us. How far do we have to go? What are the favorable as well as the unfavorable factors in achieving the goals? What is the grand strategy? What are the tactics? In discussing these questions, I should like to refer briefly to three landmarks along the way:

- (1) A document prepared by a government agency, popularly referred to as The Moynihan Report.
- (2) A document prepared by an economist for a civil rights pressure

group—The Freedom Budget being circulated by the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

(3) The "Black Power" debate now currently going on.

(4) The Southern Christian Leadership Conference's anti-war orientation.

Each of these could be studied for its own sake, but I shall discuss them only in their implications for the drive to abolish poverty.

The Moynihan Report

Let us first consider the highly controversial report issued for sale to the public in March, 1965, with a printed note, "For Official Use Only." The title is **THE NEGRO FAMILY: THE CASE FOR NATIONAL ACTION**. The author's name does not appear on it. The economic framework is set in terms of relative deprivation; there is no discussion of poverty *per se*. The author notes that "between 1960 and 1963, the median non-white family income for Negroes slipped from 55 to 53 percent of white income." Negroes, viewed as a whole, in these terms, are only half as well off as whites. In the Northeast, where Negroes are over 95 per cent urban they are relatively better off (ratio is 65), as they are in the North Central area (ratio 73) and The West (ratio 76). The South brings the average down. The implications of the figures which interest the author most are stated in the words: "Because in general terms Negro families have the largest number of children and the lowest incomes, many Negro fathers literally cannot support their families." As a result 56 per cent of Negro women between 25 and 64 are in the work force as compared with 42 per cent of white women. The report does not give breakdowns by occupation but if it did it would show that in northern urban areas over half of the white women are in white-collar jobs while over half of the Negro women are in less desirable jobs. The family income situation is related to the general situation with respect to steady employment with a reference to Negro males which states that:

Work is precisely the one thing the Negro family head . . . has not received over past generations. The fundamental overwhelming fact is that Negro employment with the exception of the few years during World War II and the Korean War has continued at disaster levels for 35 years . . . this is particularly the case in the northern urban areas to which the Negro population has been moving . . . In 1963, a prosperous year, 29.2 per cent of all Negro men in the labor force were unemployed at some time during the year. Almost half of these men were out of work 15 weeks or more. The concern for income and stability of employment is discussed with reference to the major focus of interest, the family, on the assumption that

"... higher family incomes are unmistakably associated with greater family stability. . . ." The author concludes this sentence with a statement which strikes to the root of the whole controversy that has swirled around the report. He says "... *which* comes first may be a matter for conjecture, but the conjunction of the two characteristics is unmistakable." Civil rights activists feel pretty sure that they do know—they are convinced that the way to achieve greater family stability is to assure the Negro family a steady and adequate income. They would certainly say that it would be putting the cart before the horse to say that low and unsteady incomes are caused by family instability. At various other points in the report, the author expresses doubt as to whether or not altering the economic status of Negro families will have the extensive favorable results in changing family behavior that some people think it will have. And for him the social condition defined as poverty finds its crucial indices in family disorganization.

The feeling that Moynihan was not stressing the crucial variable, the economic one, in breaking the poverty syndrome—high illegitimacy rates, prostitution, narcotics addiction, high desertion rates, poor performance in school—traits more prevalent in the Negro subculture of urban ghettos than elsewhere—this feeling led to uneasiness about the report. But opposition to it had even deeper roots. Moynihan's name does not appear upon the document because he prepared the report in his role as civil servant, as background data for a speech which the President of the United States delivered at Howard University on June 4, 1965. The burden of the President's speech is contained in the opening words of the Report:

With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the demand of Negro Americans for full recognition of their civil rights was finally met . . . a new period is beginning . . . the expectations of the Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights . . . they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal results, as compared with other groups. . . . This is not going to happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made. . . . The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening. . . . The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case is that of family structure . . . the Negro family in the urban ghetto is crumbling . . . for vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated . . . so long as this situation persists the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself . . . a national effort is required that will give a unity of purpose to many activities of the Federal government in this area, directed to a new kind of national goal: the establishment of a stable Negro family structure. . . .

The tone is that of a manifesto not a social science document, and it ends with a promise:

The policy of the United States is to bring the Negro American to full and equal sharing in the responsibilities and rewards of citizenship. To this end, the programs of the Federal government bearing on those objectives shall be defined to have the effect, directly or indirectly, of enhancing the stability and resources of the Negro American family.

Moynihan, quoting from comments made by E. Franklin Frazier in 1950, states that:

The fundamental importance and urgency of restoring the Negro American family has been evident for some time . . . Nothing was done in response to Frazier's argument. . . . The problem is now more serious, the obstacles greater. *There is, however, a profound change for the better in one respect. The President has committed the nation to an all out effort to eliminate poverty wherever it exists, among whites or Negroes*, and a militant, organized, and responsible Negro movement exists to join in that effort.

This bid for the cooperation of the "militant, organized and responsible movement" to join in a crusade to refashion the Negro family was viewed with incredulity or contempt by some of them, resentment by others, and suspicion by all. "Why," they asked, "is the government trying to define a new stage in the civil rights movement by fiat? Is this not a clear call to stop pressuring and demonstrating, for asking the pressure groups to do the social workers job? This may serve the ideal of consensus but it flies in the face of the paradigm of social change in America. No group—labor, ethnic, or reform—ever dismantles its fighting ranks."

I shall not wade into the controversy over the motives of Moynihan and the President or the results of the Negro rebuff. Moynihan, now at Harvard and M.I.T., is still debating with his critics and recently charged them with having ruined the chances for extensive ameliorative legislation by their intransigence and hostility. I can only say that whoever advised a strategy of focusing attention upon the Negro family and its disorganization and publicizing it before the world showed a singular lack of understanding of Negro sensitiveness and of political realities. If they asked anybody for advice they were certainly ill-advised. Nobody denies the terrible price paid in family disorganization for being poor, but why overpublicize it?

What I would like to do, however, is to point to a theoretical weakness in the report. There is a strong tendency in American social science to refuse to weight variables, to act as though everything in a functional nexus is equivalent to everything else. Even without being a Marxist it would seem reasonable for a scholar to act upon the assumption that the

economic factor in the poverty syndrome, if not a causative or decisive variable, is at least a weighted one—to suggest tackling the problem of jobs and unemployment first, and then to wait for awhile to see what else happens. In the meanwhile, of course, one works on all the other fronts by the most sophisticated educational and social work techniques, although to speak of “treating the Negro family” seems to confuse vital day-by-day social work activities with the problem of the necessity for, and possibility of, structural alterations. To elevate reconstruction of the Negro family to a *national program* may be picking a problem which invites failure if approached directly.

Are there any other reasons aside from political ones (and a bad political assessment at that) which could account for this spotlighting the Negro family? The clue may lie in the setting of integration as the supreme goal of civil rights activity. The report states that “. . . it is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating upon one principle while the great majority of the population and the one with the most advantages to begin with is operating on another. This is the present situation of the Negro.” The reference is in a discussion of what the author calls the matriarchal family and which might be more properly called the *matrifocal* family. Moynihan concedes that such a family type might be defended by the functional anthropologist, but he quite rightfully insists that it’s going to be harder to integrate Negroes if their sex and family norms differ widely from those of whites.

(Some of the young alienated Negroes would say they aren’t that much interested in integration; they prefer “Soul.”) Closely related to this view of Moynihan’s is his observation that about half of the Negro urban dwellers have become middle class and that their children are “. . . constantly exposed to the pathology of the disturbed group and are constantly in danger of being drawn into it . . . caught up in the tangle of pathology.” (The militants would say, “Don’t try to treat the family. Fight for open occupancy so they can bring up their children somewhere else.”)

I think it is the assessment of the ghetto as a “tangle of pathology” that results in a one-sided view of ghetto life, for there is no recognition of the elements of strength within Negro communities (the superficial treatment of the Negro church is a case in point). Frank Riessman and Erik Erikson have suggested that we should not overlook the strength of many matrifocal families, and the research of Professor Hylan Lewis of Howard University has warned us against seeing the so-called Negro lowerclass as one monolithic unit insofar as child-rearing practices are concerned or the aspiration levels of its members. The fact is that we just do not know enough about the Negro community at this point to make definitions of

entire communities in terms of a "tangle of pathology." The ghetto is bad, but not all *that* bad.

Having made these criticisms of the Moynihan Report, I think we should face the question squarely, however, of whether or not there are aspects of family life among Negroes which if not changed will put the Negro at a competitive disadvantage even if a wide range of new opportunities are made available. The report challenges us all by arguing that Negro males are so "castrated" psychologically and the Negro family so "damaged" that more than good jobs and higher wages will be needed to motivate the acquisition of behavior that will stimulate upward mobility and win acceptance by middle class whites. If true, what do we do?

A. Philip Randolph's "Freedom Budget"

If the Moynihan Report tends to gloss over the problem of assuring full employment at adequate wages, and the wiping out of the ecological setting in which what he calls the "tangle of pathology" persists, the "Freedom Budget For All Americans" being vigorously pushed by the A. Philip Randolph Institute gives these matters first priority. This organization hired an outstanding economist to consider the feasibility of the nation so budgeting its resources as to achieve "Freedom From Want" by 1975. It secured the endorsement of over 200 prominent Americans for the proposal. Seven targets are set:

1. To restore full employment as rapidly as possible with a target of dropping the unemployment rate to 3 percent by 1968, by a concerted, co-ordinate effort of public and private initiative.
2. To assure adequate incomes for those employed with emphasis upon higher minimum wages and a broader coverage of occupational categories.
3. To guarantee a minimum adequacy level of income to all those who cannot or should not be gainfully employed.
4. To wipe out the slum ghettos, and provide a decent home for every American family within a decade, by a planned program of public and private building.
5. To provide, for all Americans, modern medical care and educational opportunity up to the limits of their abilities and ambitions, at costs within their means.
6. To overcome other manifestations of neglect in the public sector, by purifying our airs and waters, and bringing our transportation systems and natural resources development into line with the needs of a growing population and an expanding economy.
7. To unite sustained full employment with sustained full production and high economic growth, in order to reach a minimum G.N.P. by 1975 of \$422,300,000.

Targets are set such as 4,600,000 new jobs by 1967 to restore full employment by 1968 or housing starts for 400,000 low income units by 1968 rising to 500,000 between 1970 and 1975. The problem of possible inflation and measures to prevent it are analyzed in detail with constructive suggestions given, and the basic point is made that only an expanding economy can make the abolition of poverty by 1975 possible.

A study of the "Freedom Budget for All Americans" compounds the mystery of why a Moynihan Report was written to shift the emphasis away from the "all." The strategy of the Poverty Program was to emphasize the fact that it benefits whites as well as Negroes—a position defensible upon both strategic and moral grounds for the government to take, leaving to Negro pressure groups the emphasis upon the racial angle. Yet, paradoxically, it is a Negro protest leader and his organization which puts the problem in its broader setting. The introduction to the "Freedom Budget" states specifically:

The Freedom Budget leaves no room for discrimination in any form because its programs are addressed to all who need more opportunity and improved incomes and living standards—not just to some of them. . . . We call this a "Freedom Budget" because it embodies programs which are essential to the Negro and other minority groups striving for dignity and economic security in our society. But their legitimate aspirations cannot be fulfilled in isolation. The abolition of poverty (almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of whose victims are whites) can be accomplished only through action which enhances the totality of the victims of poverty, neglect and injustice."

Such a perspective comes naturally to a person with the socialist orientation of Randolph, but it also coincides with New Deal and New Frontier strategies and is at the heart of the ideology that animates the liberal labor-coalition. It stands, too, at the center of the concept of The Great Society, which certainly supports the statement in the Freedom Budget that "the war against want must be color-blind."

The "Freedom Budget" is not a socialistic document, and is, in some of its aspects actually conservative, for by the time it was prepared a surprisingly large number of American academics and a few trade union leaders were propagating the concept of a guaranteed annual wage. The "Freedom Budget" alludes to the concept but stresses two somewhat more limited goals:

- (a) to assure adequate incomes for those employed
- (b) to guarantee a minimum adequacy level of income to all those who cannot or should not be gainfully employed.

It sees the Federal government as a catalyst stimulating an outpouring of capital by private businesses to create more jobs, although it does demand

that a higher burden of taxation be placed upon corporations and the wealthy if a tax increase is needed, and to secure a desirable redistribution of inflationary "costs." The "Freedom Budget" insists upon *not* tying up a plan for the abolition of poverty with a demand for reduced military expenditure, a point which I shall discuss a little later.

The Black Power Movement

The slogan, "Black Power," was born out of the struggle against small landlord minorities by Negro farmers in southern Black Belt counties. Its proponents are currently involved in trying to work out its implications for black ghettos in urban areas. In essence, the concept is one of self-determination, insisting that Negro communities should mobilize their strength for such ends as they deem important and should develop an ideology of black pride and solidarity to infuse their action. Its proponents feel that emphasis upon integration diverts attention and energies from facing the problems within Negro ghettos and also destroys confidence in the Negro's ability to solve his own problems. A Black Power concept would seem to be inconsistent with the Freedom Budget orientation, but is not necessarily inconsistent with some of Moynihan's positions. For instance, Black Power advocates refuse to commit themselves as to whether or not they think integration is desirable sometime in the future. Moynihan states that,

A national effort towards the problems of Negro Americans must be directed towards the question of family structure. The object should be to strengthen the Negro family so as to enable it to raise and support its members as do other families. *After that, how this group of Americans chooses to run its affairs, take advantage of its opportunities, or fail to do so, is none of the nation's business.*

Black Power advocates would part company with Moynihan not on the ultimate goal, but would on timing and means. They would say it is nobody's business how Negroes wish to order their affairs, *now*. They also conceivably may not want a conventional family structure. On the other hand Black Power advocates would insist, too, that strengthening the Negro family is an important goal, would agree with him that the role of the Negro male is exceedingly weak, but would argue that participation in the struggle against the white oppressor is one way to restore the manhood of the Negro male and thus begin to break the grip of insecurity and a sense of personal inadequacy.

We cannot possibly discuss the topic "Our Urban Poor—With Miles to Go" without touching upon the problem of the current military operations in Viet Nam. The Freedom Budget faces the question squarely, but

refuses to take any stand on either the moral issues or the strategic ones, insisting that, on straight economic grounds, it is entirely possible to carry the present defense burden or even to escalate the war and at the same time finance the Freedom Budget as they present it. They concede that higher taxes may be necessary, but argue that the burden must not be allowed to fall on the poor or the deprived. This seems to be the weakest part of the entire proposal for it does not recognize the realities of the distribution of power. While it might be theoretically possible to support increasingly heavy military expenditures and a Poverty Program it seems naive to think that the powerful economic interests in the U.S. will allow themselves to be made to pay a substantial part of this dual operation.

Freedom Budget point of view coincides with that of the more conservative leaders in the NAACP and the Urban League who insist that the civil rights issue should not get tangled up with the anti-war issue. The Randolph plan says, "nor with the anti-poverty fight, either." But the burden of proof is on those who claim we can have both more napalm and more bread.

The militants in SNCC and CORE were the first to assail both the Freedom Budget and the NAACP positions and to link the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement with the war against poverty. The case of Julian Bond is now enshrined in American legal history. Black Power advocates also add another dimension, insisting that the Viet Nam war is white aggression against the independence of colored people, that American Negroes are being used as gendarmes and mercenaries against their racial brothers. They raise the question sharply as to why black men should fight overseas when there are things at home to fight for. Stokely Carmichael has called for a coalition of Black Power forces with the New Left to fight against the war and for a total renovation of American institutions.

The Black Power opponents of the Viet Nam war do not stress the effects it might have upon the poverty program but rather take the line followed in a half page ad in the Sunday *New York Times* recently in which CORE stated that

Self determination in Viet Nam cannot be suppressed by guns and napalm any more than the quest for human rights can be suppressed by racism at home. Our country is in a mess, President Johnson. Get us out of this immoral war. Fast.

They also cite data such as that which occurred in an article in the *New York Times* for Sunday, April 9th, captioned "Negroes on the Fighting Front," which mentioned that,

Observation by correspondents of many combat units indicates that this is, for both whites and Negroes, a war being largely fought by the poor boys and the dropouts.

The statement in terms of "the poor" takes the edge off of the figures presented which outrage the Black Power advocates:

1. In every infantry, artillery, armor and engineer's unit Negroes are at least 25 per cent of the total
2. Among paratroopers Negroes may be 40 per cent of the total.

The comment is also made that "... since the Negro makes up only about 10 per cent of the nation's population, he is actually doing something more than double his share ... The Negro is also doing more than his share of dying. Last year statistics showed that about 22 per cent of the men killed in action were Negroes."

The SCLC is also emphasizing the war-on-poverty angle. Within the past month Martin Luther King, Nobel Peace Prize holder as well as civil rights leader, has not only released Bevel, his assistant, to organize an anti-Viet Nam war crusade, but has also secured the endorsement of the SCLC executive for a strong anti-war stand including resistance to the draft. Dr. King takes sharp exception to the position of the Freedom Budget and aligns himself with those who argue that it is impossible to carry on the war against poverty and the Viet Nam war at the same time and who cite figures such as those given in the CORE advertisement:

1. Job training of poor people has been cut from 504,000 promised by the President to 385,000 in fiscal 1968
2. Job Corps trainees have been cut from 40,000 promised by the President to 10,000 in fiscal 1968

King also interjects a pragmatic note, "If the war escalates and we have nuclear war, there will be no lunch counters for desegregated Negroes to eat beside whites in."

Whatever we may feel about the economic, moral, pragmatic or political aspects of the problem, I assume that all of us have a desire and a right to know what effect the Viet Nam operation is actually having upon the urban poor — black, white and other — and upon the rural poor, too. We *must* be concerned with what realistic moves citizens can take to make sure that the Viet Nam war does not slow up our movement along the remaining miles to go.

Not being either an economist, political scientist or defender of the Freedom Budget, I would not try to pass an opinion upon the economic

aspects of the Freedom Budget's contention that it is theoretically possible to fight the war and end poverty, too. Nor is this any place for the kind of opinionated moral strictures I am inclined to make when participating in a Teach-In on Viet Nam, but I think I have the duty as a Negro and the right as an indignant humanist to take issue with the Moynihan Report's long section on "The Armed Forces" which talks about what a superb opportunity they offer to poverty-stricken young Negroes to secure the training they cannot get in civilian life, and to function in a social situation where they can feel like men in a sense they cannot at home. The Report bemoans the fact that so many Negroes fail the army qualification test and points out how greatly unemployment could be reduced if more Negro men could get in the army. The article in *The Times* referred to above also stressed the fact that Negroes achieve a sense of equality in the army unknown in civilian life and cite this to account for the high rate of Negro reenlistment. Whatever satisfactions may actually accrue to Negro males from being in the army, however proud they may be of their uniforms and stripes however heroic and patriotic their individual acts, and no matter how much their performance improves the image of the Negro, the situation constitutes a moral indictment of our society. All this may be true but it is not right.

If, one hundred years after General Howard and his Freedmen's Bureau swung into action, the only place this nation can provide for masses of Negro young men to realize their manhood is in the army, every body in this Government should hang his head in shame. The crisis is not in the Negro family it is in white society. It is not the Negro family that needs the treatment but some minds in high places.

Moynihan's supporters, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Black Power partisans, and the anti-war crusaders all agree that there are "promises to keep and miles to go." But there are basic disagreements about proximate end, legitimate means, points of emphasis, estimates of the play of political forces, and even as to the facts. It is easy for a social scientist with a functionalist orientation to say, each approach has its usefulness since the American paradigm of change is one in which the clash of opinion and of activities generates forward movement. Yet this still leaves individuals confronted with the problem of how each will make his own intellectual and moral decision as to where in the nexus of social action he will find his place in the struggle to see that the promises are kept and the miles to go are covered. One need not take a stand on Congressman Powell's conduct or character to accept his charge phrased in the argot of the ghetto, "Keep the faith, baby."

But how does a complex institution like a university "Keep the faith" other than by providing a forum and platform for ideas? This is a univer-

sity centennial and such a question inevitably comes to mind.

The Moynihan Report sounded a call for strengthening the Negro family, but offered no concrete specific suggestions as to how. It would have been far more constructive (and astute) to have focused attention upon the Negro *community*, and to have posed the problem of how do we simultaneously fight for jobs and open occupancy while assisting ghetto residents to isolate and cope with their family and individual problems. It is here, using what I call a "total approach" strategy that Howard University is pioneering. This university can, in its centennial year, take pride in its programs which are doing a 20th century version of what General Howard's Freedmen's Bureau attempted in post-civil war communities.

Howard's staff has made lasting contributions in the field of community action and civil rights during the past 40 years. It was here that the Joint Committee on National Recovery was organized in early depression years with faculty members Ralph Bunche, Robert Weaver and Abram Harris, prominently involved. The law school gave countless hours to helping prepare the historic briefs in the 1940's and 1950's which won favorable decisions from the Supreme Court. President Mordecai Johnson fought to maintain a milieu in which progressive thought and action could flourish and intellectual criticism have full rein. It was a Howard sociologist who hurled stinging barbs in his book *Black Bourgeoisie*, and it was a Howard President, Dr. Nabrit, who, in tune with the temper of the times, took actions which led the *Howard University Magazine* of January 1965 to say:

On assuming the presidency of the University in July, 1960, he challenged students and teachers alike to come down from their "ivory tower" and go out into the community with their knowledge and skill to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Some, of course, had never been in the ivory tower such as staff and students of the School of Social Work. But in answer to his challenge a number of interdisciplinary experiments in community action began which were able to expand later with Federal funding. Their record is impressive.

There are still miles to go. In covering them, it is well to remember that many roads lead to the same destination and that "wisdom is justified of all her children." It is helpful, too, to look back some times, as we have done here, and then to face forward in the spirit of Langston Hughes' poem:

We have tomorrow
Bright before us,
Like a flame;
and yesterday,
A nightgone thing,
A Sundown name;
And Dawn, today,
Broad Arch above the road
We Came —
We March.

And Jamaican-born, Harlem-adopted Claude McKay steels us against disappointment with an admonition:

So live in rich imperial growth, touching the surface and the depth of things. Instantly responsive unto both. Tasting the sweets of being and the stings. Sensing the subtle spell of changing forms, like a strong tree, against a thousand storms.

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