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THE BLACK SCHOLAR

"THE BLACK URBAN COMMUNITY", EDITORIAL  
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### THE BLACK URBAN COMMUNITY

Black people are an urban people, especially outside the South. Most of the black population resides in the nation's large cities. But the cities, as sociologist Robert Staples points out in this issue, are no Mecca for black people. On the contrary, the cities, once the hope of blacks fleeing poverty and oppression in the South, have become citadels of ~~despair~~ <sup>despair.</sup> Middle class blacks, along with middle class whites, are now leaving the cities by the thousands to take advantage of new opportunities in the suburbs and, ironically, the South. Increasingly the big cities are being left to the very poor and the very wealthy.

Working class blacks find it ever more difficult to survive in the cities with their skyrocketing cost of living and declining job opportunities. Good-paying industrial jobs (often unionized) are leaving the cities while minimum wage service jobs (often non-unionized) are increasing. Moreover, police violence remains a great problem, as evidence<sup>d</sup> by the recent police attack on the black MOVE commune in Philadelphia and unpunished police shootings of black men in other cities. At the same time the quality of public education, social services and health care is falling. City hall is in the grip of ~~the~~ private banks and other financial institutions which are ~~forcing~~ <sup>forcing</sup> cutbacks in funds for <sup>social</sup> services to "free up" money to pay interest on debts or other financial "services." These same banks "redline" and manipulate the housing market to maximize profits on deteriorating housing.

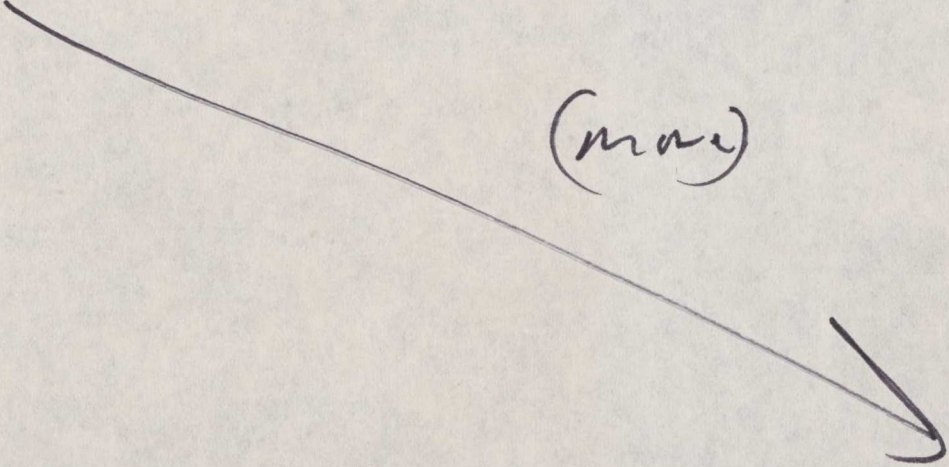
Ideologically, a new fascist climate is being fostered to justify further ~~attacks~~ <sup>attacks</sup> on the urban community. The Bakke case,

(man)



pseudo property tax relief measures such as Proposition 13, and now ~~several~~ proposals in California and other states to ~~deny~~ deprive homosexuals of their civil rights -- all of these are being used to promote a siege mentality among whites of all classes. Whites are being led to believe that their livelihoods, their property, and their values are being threatened by "overprotected" racial minorities, "welfare cheaters," and "immoral" sexual rights activists. Indeed, a whole class of urban scapegoats is being identified and labelled; and it is these scapegoats who will be forced to take the rap for the pillage of the cities by big business.

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all classes, who are being led to believe that their livelihoods, their property, and their values are being threatened by "overprotected" racial minorities, "welfare cheaters," and "immoral" homosexuals, *all of whom are concentrated in cities.* Indeed, a whole class of scapegoats is being identified and labelled; and it is these scapegoats who will be forced to take the rap for the pillage of the cities by big business.

Some have thought that the solution to urban woes lay in electing black mayors to office. It was thought that blacks would be more committed to urban ~~needs~~ needs. But commitment is not power. Regardless of their ~~personal~~ personal qualities black mayors often find themselves pawns of the capitalist political economy that dominates America. Black mayors are often reduced to being buffers whose job is to "take the heat" and ~~thereby~~ thereby deflect attention from the real causes of urban decay. And the fact that individual black ~~mayors~~ mayors alone cannot solve urban problems provides more "evidence" for the racist assertion of general black incompetence.

Despite deterioration, American cities remain centers of *transportation*, finance, commerce and culture. Hence, the cities are not going to be abandoned by white America. The question is: Who will be allowed to live in the cities, and under what conditions? It may well be that what we are witnessing today is only the first step in a long-range policy to "clense" the cities of "undesirable" elements in preparation for a triumphant return of the white middle class. What counts with the banks and real estate speculators is not who owns property, but how often it changes hands, since this is where the profit is made. By allowing central cities to deteriorate the stage is set for massive urban <sup>and rehabilitation</sup> renewal projects (financed by the government through the banks) which force property to change hands and ~~creates~~ creates a demand for <sup>new</sup> loans and ~~money~~ *(money)*



mortgages which the banks are only too happy to ~~fix~~ supply. Thus, urban property can be periodically recycled -- to the greater glory and profit of the banking system. [ Racism is essential to this process. ~~since it different racial groups can be slotted into different ecological role in the drama of urban decay and renewal~~ Blacks and other racial minorities are locked into housing the "scavenger" ~~scapegoat~~ role (while being bilked through high rents) while middle class whites are allowed to be "first owners" of new ~~developments~~ <sup>housing</sup> (while being bilked through inflated property values).

Urban decay (and ~~not~~ renewal) is therefore simply a symptom resulting from the unstated public policy that the cities themselves are only commodities which can be "bought" and "sold" to different population groups like any other commodity. ~~under capitalism.~~ There ~~is~~ is no technological reason why cities cannot be rehabilitated for the benefit of those who presently live in them. It is capitalism which ~~demands that rehabilitation~~ requires a change of <sup>rehabilitation process,</sup> owners so that a profit can be made in the ~~transaction.~~ This is the perverse logic of urban renewal/black removal programs.

Thus, while it is important to pinpoint and analyze the symptoms of urban deterioration, we must not forget that urban decay is not a natural law but is instead a "law" of capitalism. Consequently, efforts on behalf of the black urban community must not be limited to demands for more jobs and better social services; we must go further and expose the insanity of a system that reduces every aspect of social life to a commodity for the marketplace.

Cover art: ~~Bronze sculpture, "Target," by Elizabeth Catlett.~~