

*The New Urban Poverty and the  
Problem of Race*

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I am very pleased to have the honor of delivering this year's Obert C. Tanner lecture at the University of Michigan. My remarks this afternoon on the new urban poverty and the problem of race are based largely on two research projects that we have recently conducted in the city of Chicago, although I believe that my general conclusions can be applied to any large industrial city in the United States. Let me begin by putting things in proper focus with a brief, but important, historical perspective that highlights previous research on race and poverty conducted in Chicago.

THE INNER CITY FROM THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE  
OF THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Since the early twentieth century, the city of Chicago has been a laboratory for the scientific investigation of the social, economic, and historical forces that create and perpetuate economically depressed and isolated urban communities. Much of this research has been conducted by social scientists affiliated with the University of Chicago. The most distinctive phase of this research, referred to as the Chicago School of urban sociology, was completed prior to 1950.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the publication of W. I. Thomas's *The Polish Peasant* in 1918, the Chicago School produced several classic studies on urban problems, especially those under the guidance of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess during the 1920s–40s. These studies often combined quantitative and qualitative analyses in

Parts of this chapter are based on a larger study, *Jobless Ghettos: The Disappearance of Work and Its Effect on Urban Life*, to be published by Knopf in 1995.

<sup>1</sup> Representative studies by those identified with the Chicago School include Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *The City* (1925); N. Anderson, *The Hobo* (1923) and *Men on the Move* (1940); F. Thrasher, *The Gang* (1927); L. Wirth, *The Ghetto* (1928); H. W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929); R. E. L. Faris and W. Dunham, *Mental Disorder in Urban America* (1931); and E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932), all published by the University of Chicago Press.

making distinctive empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions to our understanding of urban processes, social problems, and urban growth, and especially commencing in the late 1930s the nature of race and class subjugation in urban areas (O'Connor 1992).

The Chicago social scientists made the neighborhood — including the ghetto or inner-city neighborhood — a legitimate subject for scientific analysis. “In contrast to the problem-oriented surveys conducted by their reform-minded counterparts in Chicago’s settlement house movement,” states the historian Alice O’Connor (1992), “the university’s studies would take a detached look at the social forces and processes underlying social problems, geographical and related forces. . . . Chicago, a community of neighborhoods, would be a laboratory from which one could generalize about the urban condition more broadly.”<sup>2</sup>

The perspectives on urban processes that guided the Chicago School’s approach to the study of race and class have undergone subtle changes down through the years. In the 1920s, Park and Burgess argued that the immigrant slums and the social problems that characterized them were temporary conditions on the path toward inevitable progress. They furthermore maintained that blacks represented the latest group of migrants involved in the “interaction cycle” that “led from conflict to accommodation to assimilation” (O’Connor 1992).

The view that blacks fit the pattern of immigrant assimilation appeared in subsequent studies in the 1930s by E. Franklin Frazier,

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to O’Connor (1992) for much of the discussion to follow in this section. O’Connor correctly points out that “subsequent historical research on immigrants and the black urban experience have shown the inadequacies of the Chicago school assimilationist framework, whether as a description of the migrant experience or as a predictor of how black migrants would fare in the city. Their view of poverty, social ‘disorganization’ and segregation as inevitable outcomes — albeit temporary ones — of the organic processes of city growth virtually ignored the role of the economy or other structural factors in shaping the trajectory of newcomers’ mobility patterns. Their analysis also overlooked the role of politics and local government policies in creating and maintaining ghettos, while its inherent optimism and air of inevitability suggested that there was little room or need for intervention” (O’Connor 1992, p. 5).

a black sociologist trained at the University of Chicago. However, Frazier's awareness of the black urban condition in the 1930s led him to recognize and emphasize a problem ignored in the earlier work of Park and Burgess — namely the important link between the black family structure and the industrial economy. Frazier believed that the upward mobility of African Americans and their eventual assimilation into American life would depend in large measure on the availability of employment opportunities in the industrial sector.

In 1945, a fundamental revision in the Chicago framework appeared in the publication of St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's classic study, *Black Metropolis*. Drake and Cayton first examined black progress in employment, housing, and social integration using census, survey, and archival data. Their analysis clearly revealed the existence of a color line that effectively blocked black occupational, residential, and social mobility. Thus, any assumption about urban blacks duplicating the immigrant experience has to confront the issue of race. Moreover, as O'Connor puts it, "Drake and Cayton recognized that the racial configuration of Chicago was not the expression of an organic process of city growth, but the product of human behavior, institutional practices and political decisions" (O'Connor 1992).

*Black Metropolis* also deviated from the Chicago School in its inclusion of an ethnographic study, based on W. Lloyd Warner's anthropological techniques, of daily life in three of Chicago's south side community areas (Washington Park, Grand Boulevard, and Douglas) that were labeled "Bronzeville." In the final analysis, the book represented an "uneasy hybrid of Chicago school and anthropological methods and, ultimately, a much less optimistic view of the prospects for black progress" (O'Connor 1992).

In the revised and enlarged edition in 1962, however, Drake and Cayton examined with a sense of optimism the changes that had occurred in Bronzeville since the publication of the first edition. They felt that America in the 1960s was "experiencing a

period of prosperity” and that African Americans were “living in the era of integration” (p. xv). They, of course, had no way of anticipating the rapid social and economic deterioration of communities like Bronzeville since the early sixties.

#### THE INNER CITY TODAY

The most fundamental change is that many inner-city neighborhoods are plagued by far greater levels of joblessness than when Drake and Cayton published *Black Metropolis* in 1945. Indeed, there is a new poverty in our nation’s metropolises that has far-ranging consequences for the quality of life in urban areas. Unless we try to understand the basic aspects of this new urban poverty and the forces that have created it, we stand little chance of addressing the growing racial tensions that have plagued American cities in the last few years. The very forces that have created the new urban poverty have also produced conditions that have enhanced racial tensions in our cities. The recent growth of the new urban poverty and the escalating problems associated with it have in turn aggravated these conditions. This vicious cycle has resulted in heightened levels of racial animosity.

By the “new urban poverty,” I mean poor segregated neighborhoods in which a substantial majority of individual adults are either unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force. For example, only one in three adults (35 percent age 16) and over in the twelve Chicago community areas with poverty rates that exceeded 40 percent were employed in 1990.<sup>3</sup> Each of these community areas, located on the south and west sides of the city, is overwhelmingly black. We can add to these twelve high jobless

<sup>3</sup>The figures on adult employment presented in this paragraph are based on calculations from data provided by the 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census and the *Local Community Fact Book for Chicago, 1990*. The adult employment rates represent the number of employed individuals (14 and over in 1950 and 16 and over in 1990) among the total number of adults in a given area. Those who are not employed include both the individuals who are members of the labor force but are not working and those who have dropped out or are not part of the labor force.

areas three additional predominantly black community areas, with rates of poverty of 29, 30, and 36 percent respectively, where only four in ten (42 percent) adults worked in 1990. Thus, in these fifteen black community areas, representing a total population of 425,125, only 37 percent of all the adults were gainfully employed in 1990. By contrast, 54 percent of the adults in the seventeen other predominantly black community areas in Chicago, with a total population of 545,408, were employed in 1990, which is close to the city-wide figure of 57 percent. Finally, except for one largely Asian community area with an employment rate of 46 percent and one largely Latino community area with an employment rate of 49 percent, a majority of the adults were employed in each of the forty-five other community areas of Chicago?

To repeat, the new urban poverty represents poor segregated neighborhoods in which a substantial majority of the adults are not working. Let me take the three Chicago community areas that represent most of Bronzeville—Douglas, Grand Boulevard, and Washington Park—to illustrate the magnitude of the changes that have occurred in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods in recent years. A majority of adults were gainfully employed in these three areas in 1950, five years after the publication of *Black Metropolis*, but by 1990 only four in ten in Douglas worked, one in three in Washington Park, and one in four in Grand Boulevard. These employment changes have been accompanied by changes in other indicators of economic status. For example, in Grand Boulevard median family income dropped from 62 percent of the city average in 1950 to less than 37 percent in 1980; and the value of housing plummeted from 97 percent of the city average in 1950 to

<sup>4</sup> Community areas are statistical units developed by urban sociologists at the University of Chicago for the 1930 census in order to analyze varying conditions within the city of Chicago. These units were drawn up on the basis of the history and settlement of the area, local identification and local institutions, natural and artificial barriers, and trade patterns. Although there have been significant changes in the city of Chicago since 1930, the community areas continue to reflect much of the contemporary reality of Chicago neighborhoods and therefore are still useful in tracing changes over time.

about half the city average in 1980, with the most rapid declines occurring after 1970.<sup>5</sup>

When the first edition of *Black Metropolis* was published in 1945, there was much greater class integration in the black community. As Drake and Cayton pointed out, Bronzeville residents had limited success in “sorting themselves out into broad community areas which might be designated as ‘lower class’ and ‘middle class.’ . . . Instead of middle class *areas*, Bronzeville tends to have middle-class *buildings* in all areas, or a few middle class blocks here and there” (pp. 658–60). Though they may have lived on different streets, blacks of all classes in inner-city areas such as Bronzeville lived in the same community and shopped at the same stores. Their children went to the same schools and played in the same parks. Although there was some degree of class antagonism, their neighborhoods were more stable than the inner-city neighborhoods of today; in short, they featured higher levels of social organization.

By “social organization” I mean the extent to which the residents of a neighborhood are able to maintain effective social control and realize their common values. There are two major dimensions of neighborhood social organization: (1) the prevalence, strength, and interdependence of social networks and (2) the extent of collective supervision that the residents exercise and the personal responsibility they assume in addressing neighborhood problems. Social organization is reflected in both formal institutions and informal networks (Sampson 1992). In other words, neighborhood social organization depends on the extent of local friendship ties, the degree of social cohesion, the level of resident participation in formal and informal voluntary associations, the density and stability of formal organizations, and the nature of

<sup>5</sup> Figures on median family income and the value of housing are based on calculations from data presented in the *Local Community Fact Book, 1950* and the *Local Community Fact Book: Chicago Metropolitan Area, Based on the 1970 and 1980 Censuses*.



informal social controls. Neighborhoods in which the adults are connected by an extensive set of obligations, expectations, and social networks are in a better position to control and supervise the activities and behavior of children and monitor developments in the neighborhood, such as the breaking up of congregations of youth on street corners and the supervision of youth leisure-time activities (Sampson 1992).

Neighborhoods plagued with high levels of joblessness are more likely to experience problems of social organization. The two go hand-in-hand. High rates of joblessness trigger other problems in the neighborhood that adversely affect social organization, ranging from crime, gang violence, and drug trafficking to family breakups and problems in the organization of family life. Consider, for example, the important relationship between joblessness and the organization of family life. Work is not simply a means of making a living and supporting one's family. It also constitutes the framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because of the disciplines and regularities it imposes. Thus, in the absence of regular employment, what is lacking is not only a place in which to work and the receipt of regular income, but also a coherent organization of the present, that is, a system of concrete expectations and goals. Regular employment provides the anchor for the temporal and spatial aspects of daily life. In the absence of regular employment, life, including family life, becomes more incoherent. Unemployment and irregular employment preclude the elaboration of a rational planning of life, the necessary condition of adaptation to an industrial economy (Bourdieu 1965). This problem is most severe for jobless families in neighborhoods with low rates of employment. The relative absence of rational planning in a jobless family is reinforced by the similar condition of other families in the neighborhood. And the problems of family organization and neighborhood social organization are mutually reinforcing.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE INCREASE IN NEIGHBORHOOD  
JOBLESSNESS AND DECLINE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Although high jobless neighborhoods also feature concentrated poverty, high rates of neighborhood poverty are less likely to trigger problems of social organization if the residents, both poor and nonpoor, are working. To repeat, in previous years the working poor stood out in neighborhoods like Bronzeville. Today the non-working poor are heavily represented in such neighborhoods. Since 1970, two factors largely account for both the rise in the proportion of adults who are jobless and the sharp decline in social organization in inner-city ghetto communities such as Bronzeville.

The first is the impact of changes in the economy. As pointed out in my book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, in the United States, historical discrimination and a migration to large metropolises that kept the urban minority population relatively young created a problem of weak labor force attachment among urban blacks and, especially after 1970, made them particularly vulnerable to the industrial and geographic changes in the economy. The shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries, the increasing polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors, innovations in technology, the relocation of manufacturing industries out of central cities, and periodic recessions have forced up the rate of black joblessness (unemployment and nonparticipation in the labor market), despite the passage of antidiscrimination legislation and the creation of affirmative action programs. The rise in joblessness has in turn helped trigger an increase in the concentrations of poor people, a growing number of poor single-parent families, and an increase in welfare dependency.

Although these processes have had an adverse effect on all poor minorities, they have been especially devastating for the lower-class black male. In 1950, 69 percent of all males 14 and over worked in the Bronzeville neighborhoods of Douglas, Grand Boulevard,

and Washington Park; by 1990, only 37 percent of all males 16 and over worked in these three neighborhoods."

Thirty and forty years ago, the overwhelming majority of black males were working. Most of them were poor, but they held regular jobs around which their daily family life was organized. When black men looked for work, employers were concerned about whether they had strong backs because they would be working in a factory or in the back room of a shop doing heavy lifting and labor. They faced discrimination and a job ceiling, but they were working. The work was hard and they were hired. Now, economic restructuring has broken the figurative back of the black working population.

Data from our Urban Poverty and Family Life Study show that 72 percent of Chicago's employed inner-city black fathers (aged 15 and over and without bachelor degrees) who were born between 1950 and 1955 worked in manufacturing and construction industries in 1970. By 1987, that figure fell to 27 percent. Of those born between 1956 and 1960, 52 percent worked in manufacturing and construction industries as late as 1978. By 1987, that figure had declined to 28 percent. And of those born between 1961 and 1969, 36 percent were employed in these industries in 1978. By 1987, that figure had been reduced to 35 percent.<sup>6</sup> These employment changes have recently accompanied the loss of traditional manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs in Chicago. As a result, young black males have turned increasingly to the low-wage service sector and laboring jobs for employment or have gone jobless.

The attitudes of inner-city black men who express bitterness and resentment about their poor employment prospects and low-wage work settings, combined with their erratic work histories in

<sup>6</sup> The figures on male employment are based on calculations from data provided by the 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census and the *Local Community Fact Book for Chicago, 1950*.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these findings, see Krogh 1993.

high-turnover jobs, create the widely shared perception that black men are undesirable workers. This perception becomes the basis for employer discrimination that sharply increases in a weak economy. Over the long term, discrimination has also grown because employers have been turning increasingly to an expanding immigrant and female labor force,

Many young men in inner-city neighborhoods today have responded to these declining opportunities by resorting to crime, drugs, and violence. The association between joblessness and social dislocations should come as no surprise. Recent longitudinal research by Delbert Elliott (1992) based on National Youth Survey data from 1976 to 1989, covering ages 11 to 30, demonstrated a strong relationship between joblessness and serious violent crime among young black males.

As Elliott (1992) points out, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is usually associated with a sharp drop in most crimes, including serious violent behavior, as individuals take on new adult roles and responsibilities. "Participation in serious violent offending (aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery) increases from ages 11 and 12 to ages 15 and 16 then declines dramatically with advancing age" (Elliott 1992, p. 14). Although black and white males reveal similar age curves, "the negative slope of the age curve for blacks after age 20 is substantially less than that of whites" (p. 15). The black-white differential in the percentage of males involved in serious violent crime was close to 1:1 at age 11, increased to 3:2 over the remaining years of adolescence, and reached a differential of nearly 4:1 during the late twenties. However, when Elliott (1992) only compared *employed* blacks and whites, he found no significant differences between the two groups in rates of suspension or termination of violent behavior by age 21. Employed black males experienced a precipitous decline in serious violent behavior following their adolescent period. Accordingly, a major reason for the substantial overall racial gap in the termination of violent behavior following the adolescent period is the

large proportion of jobless black males, whose serious violent behavior was more likely to extend into adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

The high rate of violence among jobless black males has in turn fed the image of young black men as dangerous. So, when they look for work in competition with immigrants, women, or whites, employers prefer not to hire “trouble.” As one employer in our Urban Poverty and Family Life Study put it:

All of a sudden, they take a look at a guy, and unless he’s got an in, the reason I hired this black kid the last time is cause my neighbor said to me, yeah I used him for a few [days], he’s good, and I said, you know what, I’m going to take a chance. But it was a recommendation. But other than that, I’ve got a walk-in, and, who knows? And I think that for the most part, a guy sees a black man, he’s a bit hesitant, because I don’t know.

In 1940, a typical black man would be employed for 37.8 years, unemployed for 4.0 years, and out of the labor force for 3.2 years from age 20 to age 65. This was almost identical with the employment experiences of the average white man in 1940. By 1985, as he ages from 20 to 65, the average black man will be employed for 29.4 years, unemployed for 5 years, and out of the labor force for 11 years. His white counterpart will experience 35.6 years of employment, 2 years of unemployment, and 7 years of non-labor-force participation. The greatest declines in years of employment for both black and white men have occurred since 1970. The expected years of employment for the typical white man decreased from 39 to 36 from 1970 to 1985. For the typical black man, it declined

<sup>8</sup> In Elliott’s study 75 percent of the black males who were employed between the ages of 18 and 20 had terminated their involvement in violent behavior by age 21, compared to only 52 percent of those who were unemployed between the ages of 18 and 20. Elliott also found that involvement in a marriage/partner relationship was associated with a sharp termination in violent behavior among black males. No significant differences in the termination of serious violent behavior by age 21 were found between black and white males who experienced one or more years in a marriage/partner relationship between ages 18 and 20. Racial differences remained for persons who were not in a marriage/partner relationship or who were unemployed.

even more sharply from 36 to 29 years (Jaynes and Williams 1989). The joblessness of black men is severest in the inner city. For example, whereas urban black fathers aged 18 to 44 nationally had worked approximately 7 out of every 8 years since age 18, inner-city Chicago black fathers had worked an average of only 2 out of every 3 years. Those aged 18 to 24 in the inner city had only worked 39 percent of the time (Tienda and Steir 1991).

The employment prospects of black women have also declined because they have had to compete for service jobs with the growing number of white women and immigrants who have entered the labor market. Historically, white women have had lower rates of employment than black women. However, since the early 1980s, largely because of the increased unemployment of black women, white women spend more years working (Jaynes and Williams 1989). Again, the problem is most acute in the inner cities. Urban black mothers, nationally, had worked over half of the time since age 18, whereas mothers from Chicago's inner city had only worked 39 percent of the time (Tienda and Steir 1991).

The growing joblessness in the inner city has accompanied a decreasing percentage of nonpoor residents. This brings us to the second factor in the rise in the proportion of jobless individuals and families and the increase in problems of social organization in ghetto neighborhoods — changes in the class and racial composition of such neighborhoods.

Concentrated poverty is positively associated with joblessness. This should come as no surprise. As stated previously, poor people today are far more likely to be unemployed or out of the labor force. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), I argued that inner-city neighborhoods have experienced a growing concentration of poverty for several reasons: (1) the outmigration of nonpoor black families; (2) the exodus of white and other nonblack families; and (3) the rise in the number of residents who have become poor while living in these areas. Additional research on the growth

of concentrated poverty has suggested another factor — the movement of poor people into a neighborhood.

The research findings do not consistently demonstrate the relative importance of each of these factors, and no firm conclusions can be reached.<sup>9</sup> However, I believe that the extent to which any

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Massey and Mitchell Eggers (1990) questioned the extent of this outmigration of higher income blacks from inner-city communities. They stated that “although the levels of black interclass segregation increased during the 1970s, we could find no evidence that these trends account for the rising concentration of black poverty.” They argued that because of persisting segregation higher-income blacks have been “less able to separate themselves from the poor than the privileged of other groups” (Massey and Eggers 1990, p. 1186). Accordingly, an increase in the poverty rate of a highly segregated group will automatically be accompanied by an increase in the concentration of poverty. However, their measures of segregation are census tract averages of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs). The use of metropolitan averages obscures changes that have occurred in the outmigration of nonpoor blacks from the more impoverished inner-city neighborhoods — the focus of analysis in *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

In a more recent study, Douglas Massey and Andrew Gross (1993) were able to analyze the movement of the poor and the nonpoor at the neighborhood (i.e., census tract) level by utilizing data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, which recently appended census tract data to individual records. Because of missing address lists from 1975 to 1978, they were only able to compute the probabilities of movement between 1970 and 1973 and 1979 through 1984. Their results show that in the early 1970s nonpoor blacks moved out of poor neighborhoods at a higher rate than did poor blacks. However, “by the early 1980s this differential had reversed itself and the poor had become more outwardly mobile than the nonpoor” (p. 14). They found three factors that contributed to the growth of concentrated poverty. Two of these factors, as noted above, had been suggested earlier in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Wilson 1987)—the outmigration of nonpoor whites and the rise in the number of residents in concentrated poverty areas who have become poor — and a third involved the movement of poor people into poor neighborhoods.

Three other recent studies on the significance of demographic shifts in the growth of concentrated neighborhoods also relied on neighborhood measures instead of metropolitan averages. All three studies revealed that the outmigration of higher income families from poverty areas contributed to the rise of concentrated poverty in these areas.

Dividing neighborhoods into traditional, emerging, and new poverty areas in Cleveland, Claudia Coulton and her colleagues at Case Western Reserve University found that, although more persons became poor in all of these areas during the decade of the 1970s, the most important factor in the growth of concentrated poverty in these areas was the outmigration of the nonpoor (Coulton, Chow, and Pandey 1990).

Paul Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane (1990) of the Kennedy School at Harvard focused their research on Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Memphis. Using census tracts as proxies for neighborhoods, they designated ghetto neighborhoods (that is, neighborhoods with rates of poverty of at least 40 percent) and nonghetto neighborhoods and reported a significant geographic spreading of ghetto neighbor-

one factor is significant in helping to account for the decrease in the proportion of nonpoor individuals and families depends on the poverty level and racial or ethnic makeup of the neighborhood at a given point in time. For example, as pointed out in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, the community areas of Chicago that experienced the most substantial white outmigration between 1970 and 1980 were those with rates of family poverty between 20 and 29 percent in 1980. Today four of these communities are predominantly black, but only one, Greater Grand Crossing, can be classified as a

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hoods from 1970 to 1980. Areas that had become ghettos by 1980 had been mixed-income tracts in 1970, although they were contiguous to areas identified as ghettos. Their results reveal that a major factor in the growth of ghetto poverty has been the exodus of the nonpoor from mixed-income areas: "the poor were leaving as well, but the nonpoor left faster, leaving behind a group of people in 1980 that was poorer than in 1970" (p. 56).

As the population spread out from areas of mixed income, Jargowsky and Bane went on to state that the next ring of the city, mostly areas that were white and nonpoor, became the home of a "larger proportion of the black and poor population. The white nonpoor left these areas, which also lost population overall" (pp. 56–57). Thus, the black middle-class outmigration from the mixed-income areas that then became ghettos did not result in a significant decrease in their contact with poorer blacks because they relocated in areas that at the same time were being abandoned by nonpoor whites, areas that therefore experienced increasing segregation and poverty during the 1970s.

The most important of these studies was conducted by the economist Kathryn Nelson (1991) of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Using new data from HUD's American Housing Survey, Nelson identified zones of population within large metropolitan areas and traced the residential mobility among them during the 1980s. The zones of population can be interpreted as proxies for neighborhoods. Because she was able to identify both the current and previous residence for most of the intermetropolitan movers in these areas by zone, Nelson examined "intra-metropolitan movers at a finer level of geographic detail than the city-suburb level typically available in Census publications or microdata" (Nelson 1991).

She found that during the 1980s all households, including blacks and other minorities, had high rates of outmigration from the poorest areas. Moreover, she discovered that the movement out of poor ghettos increased "markedly with income, among blacks and other minorities as well as for all households; and that . . . rates of black outmovement from the poorest areas were higher and more selective by income in the more segregated metropolitan areas" (Nelson 1991). However, she also found that the white exodus from the poorest zones in the more segregated metropolitan areas was even higher than that of blacks and more positively associated with income. This led her to speculate that higher-income blacks in the more segregated metropolitan areas may have fewer nonghetto neighborhoods accessible to them, so that when they leave ghetto areas they have less space to disperse because of patterns of residential segregation and, as Massey's research suggested, are more likely to have poor people as neighbors.



new poverty area. This community area, unlike the other three black community areas with poverty rates in the 20 percent range in 1980, remained virtually all black between 1970 to 1990 (98.8 percent in 1970 and 99.1 percent in 1990). Since a clear majority (61 percent) of the adults in Greater Grand Crossing were employed in 1970, the transformation into a new poverty area (44 percent adult employment rate in 1990) cannot be associated with the exodus of white residents (who usually record higher employment rates).

Considering the strong association between poverty and joblessness, the sharp rise in the proportion of adults who are not working in Greater Grand Crossing could have been related either to the outmigration of nonpoor families or, perhaps even more significant, to the increase in the number of poor families. Between 1970 and 1990, despite a 29 percent reduction in the population (from 54,414 to 38,644), the absolute number of poor individuals in Greater Grand Crossing increased by 57 percent (from 7,058 to 11,073). This could have been caused either by the downward mobility of some nonpoor residents who became poor or by the immigration of poor individuals and families during this period.

It should be pointed out, however, that between 1950 and 1960, Greater Grand Crossing drastically changed from 6 percent black to 86 percent black. To the extent that whites were no longer represented in the neighborhood in substantial numbers by 1960, the chances of the neighborhood becoming a new poverty area increased because African Americans in general are at greater risk of experiencing joblessness. In other words, even though Greater Grand Crossing's change to a new poverty area from 1970 to 1990 cannot be directly related to a white exodus, the emptying of the white population out of the neighborhood from 1950 to 1960 increased the area's vulnerability to changes in the economy after 1970.

Of the fourteen other new poverty areas, five—including the three Bronzeville neighborhoods of Douglas, Grand Boulevard,

and Washington Park — have remained overwhelmingly black since 1950.<sup>10</sup> Therefore their transformation into new poverty areas is mainly associated with economic and demographic changes among the African American residents.<sup>11</sup>

The declining proportion of nonpoor families and increasing and prolonged joblessness in the new poverty neighborhoods make it considerably more difficult to sustain basic neighborhood institutions. In the face of increasing joblessness, stores, banks, credit institutions, restaurants, and professional services lose regular and potential patrons. Churches experience dwindling numbers of parishioners and shrinking resources; recreational facilities, block clubs, community groups, and other informal organizations also suffer. As these organizations decline, the means of formal and informal social control in the neighborhood become weaker. Levels of crime and street violence increase as a result, leading to further deterioration of the neighborhood.

The neighborhoods with a significant proportion of black working families stand in sharp contrast to the new poverty areas. Research that we have conducted on the social organization of Chicago neighborhoods reveals that, in addition to much lower levels of perceived unemployment than in the poor neighborhoods, black working- and middle-class neighborhoods also have much

<sup>10</sup>These five communities are Oakland (77.4 percent black in 1950 and 99.5 percent black in 1990), Grand Boulevard (98.9 percent black in 1950 and 99.5 percent black in 1990), Riverdale (84.1 percent black in 1950 and 97.8 percent black in 1990), Washington Park (97.5 percent black in 1950 and 99.1 percent black in 1990), and Douglas (97.1 percent black in 1950 and 91.3 percent black in 1990).

<sup>11</sup> In contrast, of the nine other new poverty neighborhoods that experienced a significant drop in their white population, three, like Greater Grand Crossing, had become overwhelmingly black by 1960 because of the precipitous decline in the white population during the 1950s. One had moved from a majority black to overwhelmingly black during the same period, one from overwhelmingly white to overwhelmingly black from 1960 to 1970, two from a majority black to overwhelmingly black from 1960 to 1970, and one from a majority white to overwhelmingly black from 1970 to 1980. Finally, the one neighborhood that has actually experienced a decrease in its black population since 1970, but remains predominantly black, went from 59 percent white in 1950 to 72 percent black in 1970 and then dipped to 67 percent black in 1990.

higher levels of perceived social control and cohesion, organizational services, and social support.

The rise of new poverty neighborhoods represents a movement from what the historian Allan Spear (1967) has called an institutional ghetto — in which the structure and activities of the larger society are duplicated, as portrayed in Drake and Cayton's description of Bronzeville — to an unstable ghetto, which lacks the capability to provide basic opportunities, resources, and adequate social control (Wacquant and Wilson 1989).

Although changes in the economy and changes in the class and racial composition of inner-city ghetto neighborhoods are the two most important factors in the shift from institutional to unstable ghettos since 1970, we ought not lose sight of the fact that this process actually began roughly four decades ago. Many black communities were uprooted by urban renewal and forced migration. The building of freeway networks through the hearts of many cities in the 1950s produced the most dramatic changes, as many viable low income communities were destroyed (Sampson and Wilson 1994).

Other government policies also contributed to the growth of unstable ghettos, both directly and indirectly. De facto federal policy of tolerating extensive segregation against African Americans in urban housing markets and opposition from organized neighborhood groups to the construction of public housing in their communities have resulted in massive segregated housing projects (Sampson and Wilson 1994). Accordingly, since local acceptance dictated federal housing policies, public housing was overwhelmingly concentrated in the overcrowded and deteriorating inner-city ghettos — the poorest and least socially organized sections of the city and the metropolitan area. Public housing represents a federally funded institution that isolates families by race and class and has therefore contributed to the growth of unstable inner-city ghettos in recent years.

Finally, since 1980, the shift from institutional to unstable ghettos has been aided by a fundamental shift in the federal government's support for basic urban programs. Spending on direct aid to cities — including general revenue sharing, urban mass transit, public service jobs and job training, compensatory education, social service block grants, local public works, economic development assistance, and urban development action grants — was sharply cut during the Reagan and Bush administrations. The federal contribution to city budgets declined from 18 percent in 1980 to 6.4 percent in 1990. In addition, the latest economic recession, which began in the Northeast in 1989, sharply reduced urban revenues that the cities themselves generated, thereby creating budget deficits that resulted in further cutbacks in basic services and programs and increases in local taxes (Caraley 1992).

Unlike during the Ford and Carter presidencies, in which countercyclical programs such as emergency public service jobs, emergency public works, and countercyclical cash payments were used to fight recessions, there was no antirecession legislation in 1990 and 1991 to combat economic dislocations in urban areas. As Demetrios Caraley (1992) has pointed out, if the antirecession package voted by Congress in 1976 and 1977 had been introduced during the early 1990s it would have amounted to 17 billion dollars (in 1990 dollars).

The combination of the New Federalism, which resulted in the sharp cuts in federal aid to local and state governments, and the recession created for many cities, especially the older cities of the East and Midwest, the worst fiscal and service crisis since the Depression. Cities have become increasingly underserved, and many are on the brink of bankruptcy. They have therefore not been in a position to combat effectively three unhealthy social conditions that have emerged or become prominent since 1980: (1) the outbreaks of crack-cocaine addiction and the murders and other violent crimes that have accompanied them; (2) the AIDS epidemic and its escalating public health costs; and (3) the sharp rise in the homeless

population not only for individuals, but for whole families as well (Caraley 1992).

Although these unhealthy social conditions are present in many neighborhoods throughout the city, the high jobless and socially unstable inner-city ghetto areas are natural breeding grounds for violent crime, drug addiction, AIDS, and homelessness. Life in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, already imperiled by unprecedented levels of joblessness and social disorganization, has become even more difficult in the face of these new epidemics. Fiscally strapped cities have had to watch in helpless frustration as these problems — the new urban poverty, the decline of social organization of inner-city neighborhoods, the rise of unhealthy social conditions, the reduction of social services — escalated during the 1980s and made the larger city itself seem like a less attractive place in which to live. Accordingly, many urban residents with the economic means have followed the worn-out path from the central city to the suburbs and other areas, thereby shrinking the tax base and further reducing city revenue. I will now turn to the effect of these changes on the quality of urban race relations.

#### THE SITUATIONAL BASIS OF URBAN RACIAL TENSIONS

Books such as Andrew Hacker's *Two Nations* (1992) and Derrick Bell's *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992) promote the view that race is so deep-seated, so primordial, that feelings of pessimism about whether America can overcome racist sentiments and actions are justified. If these feelings were already high when the nation entered the 1990s, they were strengthened by the recent rebellion in Los Angeles, the worst race riot in the nation's history. However, in this atmosphere of heightened racial awareness an important issue is often obscured or forgotten, namely, that racial antagonisms are products of situations — historical situations, demographic situations, social situations, economic situations, and political situations.

To understand why racial tensions either increase or decrease during certain periods and what has to be done to alleviate them, it is necessary to comprehend the situations in which these tensions surface. Failure to grasp the significance of this point leads one to conclude that there is little we can do about racism and its effects in America until deep-seated feelings of racial hatred are removed. Permit me to briefly elaborate on this point, by focusing first on some changing demographic situations.

Since 1960, the proportion of whites inside central cities has steadily declined, while the proportion of minorities has steadily increased. In 1960, the nation's population was evenly divided among cities, suburbs, and rural areas. By 1990, both urban and rural populations had declined, leaving suburbs with nearly half of the nation's population. The urban population dipped to 31 percent by 1990 (Weir 1993). And as cities lost population they became poorer and more minority in their racial and ethnic composition — so much so that in the eyes of many in the dominant white population the minorities symbolize the ugly urban scene left behind. Today the divide between the suburbs and the city is, in many respects, a racial divide. For example, whereas 63 percent of all the residents in the city of Chicago were minority in 1990—blacks (1,074,471), Hispanics (545,852), and Asian and others (152,487), and whites (1,056,048) — 83 percent of all suburban residents in the Chicago metropolitan area were white. Across the nation, in 1990, whereas 74 percent of the dominant white population lived in suburban and rural areas, a majority of blacks and Latinos resided in urban areas (Caraley 1992).

These demographic changes are associated with the declining influence of American cities. By creating the situation whereby minorities tend to be identified with the central city and whites with the suburbs, they provided the political foundation for the New Federalism, an important political development that has increased the significance of race in metropolitan areas. The shift of the population to suburban areas made it possible to win national

elections without a substantial urban vote. Suburbs cast 36 percent of the vote for president in 1968, 48 percent in 1988, and a majority in the 1992 election (Weir 1993).

Suburban voters are increasingly in a position to outvote those who reside in large cities. In each of the three presidential elections prior to the 1992 election, the Democratic presidential candidate scored huge majorities in the large cities only to lose an overwhelming majority of the states in which these cities are located. This naked reality is one of the reasons why the successful Clinton presidential campaign designed a careful strategy to capture more support from voters who do not reside in central cities. The increasing suburbanization of the white population influences the extent to which national politicians will support increased federal aid to large cities and to the poor. Indeed, the sharp drop in federal support for basic urban programs since 1980 is associated with the declining political influence of cities and the rising influence of electoral coalitions in the suburbs (Weir 1993).

However, although there is a clear racial divide between the central city and the suburbs, racial tensions in the metropolitan areas continue to be concentrated in the central city and affect the relations and patterns of interaction among blacks, other minorities, and the whites who remain, especially lower-income whites.

The new poverty in ghetto neighborhoods has sapped the vitality of local businesses and other institutions and has led to fewer and shabbier movie theaters, bowling alleys, restaurants, public parks and playgrounds, and other recreational facilities. Residents of inner-city neighborhoods are therefore often compelled to seek leisure activity in other areas of the city, where they come into brief contact with citizens of different racial, ethnic, or class backgrounds. Sharp differences in cultural style and patterns of interaction that reflect the social isolation of neighborhood networks often lead to clashes.

Some behavior of residents in socially isolated inner-city ghetto neighborhoods — for example, the tendency to enjoy a movie in a

communal spirit by carrying on a running conversation with friends and relatives during the movie or reacting in an unrestrained manner to what is seen on the screen — offends the sensibilities of or is considered inappropriate by other groups, particularly the middle classes. The latter's expressions of disapproval, either overtly or with subtle hostile glances, tend to trigger belligerent responses from the inner-city ghetto residents, who then purposefully intensify the behavior that is the source of middle-class concerns. The white and even the black middle class then exercise their option and exit, to use Albert Hirschman's (1970) term, by taking their patronage elsewhere, expressing resentment and experiencing intensified feelings of racial or class antagonisms as they depart.

The areas left behind then become the domain of the inner-city ghetto residents. The more expensive restaurants and other establishments that serve the higher-income groups in these areas, having lost their regular patrons, soon close down and are replaced by fast-food chains and other local businesses that cater to the needs or reflect the economic and cultural resources of the new clientele. White and black middle-class citizens, in particular, complain bitterly about how certain conveniently located areas of the central city have changed following the influx of ghetto residents. The complaints have inevitably come to be directed at the ghetto poor themselves.

Meanwhile, racial tensions between poor blacks and working-class whites reflect an even more serious consequence of the social transformation of the inner city. Like inner-city minorities, lower-income whites have felt the full impact of the urban fiscal crisis in the United States. Moreover, lower-income whites are more constrained by financial exigencies to remain in the central city than their middle-class counterparts and thereby suffer the strains of crime, higher taxes, poorer services, and inferior public schools. Furthermore, unlike the more affluent whites who choose to remain in the wealthier sections of the central city, they cannot easily



escape the problems of deteriorating public schools by sending their children to private schools, and this problem has grown in the face of the sharp decline in urban parochial schools in the United States.

Many of these people originally bought relatively inexpensive homes near their industrial jobs. Because of the deconcentration of industry, the racially changing neighborhood bordering their communities, the problems of neighborhood crime, and the surplus of central-city housing created by the population shift to the suburbs, housing values in their neighborhoods have failed to keep pace with those in the suburbs. As the industries in which they are employed become suburbanized, a growing number of lower-income whites in our central cities find that not only are they trapped in their neighborhoods because of the high costs of suburban housing, but they are also physically removed from job opportunities as well. This situation increases the potential for racial tension as they compete with blacks and the rapidly growing Latino population for access to and control of the remaining decent schools, housing, and neighborhoods in the fiscally strained central city.

Furthermore, the problems associated with the high joblessness and declining social organization (e.g., individual crime, hustling activities, gang violence) in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods often spill over into other parts of the city, including these ethnic enclaves. The result is not only hostile class antagonisms in the higher-income black neighborhoods adjacent to these communities, but heightened levels of racial animosity, especially among lower-income ethnic groups whose communities border or are in proximity to the high jobless neighborhoods.

Although the focus of much of the racial tension has been on black and white encounters, in many urban neighborhoods Latinos have been prominently featured in incidents of ethnic antagonisms. According to several demographic projections, the Latino population, which in 1990 exceeded 22 million in the United States, is

expected to replace African Americans as the nation's largest minority group between 1997 and 2005. They already outnumber African Americans in Houston and Los Angeles and are rapidly approaching the number of blacks in Dallas and New York. In cities as different as Houston, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia "competition between blacks and Hispanic citizens over the drawing of legislative districts and the allotment of seats is intensifying" (Rohter 1993, p. 11). In areas of changing populations, Latino residents increasingly complain that their concerns and interests cannot be represented by the black officials currently in office (Rohter 1993).

The tensions between blacks and Latinos in Miami, as one example, have emerged over competition for jobs and government contracts, the distribution of political power, and claims on public services. But it would be a mistake to view the encounters between the two groups solely in racial terms. In Dade County there is a tendency for the black Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Panamanians to define themselves by their language and culture and not by the color of their skin. Indeed, largely because of the willingness of Hispanic whites and Hispanic blacks to reside together and mix with Haitians and other Caribbean blacks in neighborhoods relatively free of racial tension, Dade County is experiencing the most rapid desegregation of housing in the nation (Rohter 1993).

By contrast, native-born, English-speaking African Americans continue to be the most segregated group in Miami. They are concentrated in neighborhoods in the northeast section of Dade County that represent clearly identifiable pockets of poverty (Rohter 1993). Although there has been some movement of higher-income groups from these neighborhoods in recent years, the poorer blacks are more likely to be trapped because of the combination of extreme economic marginality and residential segregation.

Finally, racial tensions have been aggravated by the political and racial rhetoric of charismatic group leaders. As President Clinton emphasized in some of his campaign speeches, during periods of hard economic times, it is important that political

leaders channel the frustrations of citizens in positive or constructive directions. However, for the last few years just the opposite has frequently occurred. In a time of heightened economic insecurities, the negative racial rhetoric of some highly visible white and black spokespersons has exacerbated racial tensions and channeled frustrations in ways that severely divide the racial groups. During hard economic times people become more receptive to demagogic messages that deflect attention from the real source of their problems. Instead of associating their declining real incomes, increasing job insecurity, and growing pessimism about the future with failed economic and political policies, these messages force them to turn on each other — race against race.

As the new urban poverty has sapped the vitality of many inner-city communities, many of these messages have associated the increasing social dislocations in the inner city such as crime, family breakdown, and welfare receipt with individual shortcomings, lack of initiatives, and the solidification of a welfare culture. Blame the victim arguments resonate with many urban dwellers because of their very simplicity. Given its complex nature, it is not surprising that most people neither understand the forces that have generated the new urban poverty, nor have much sympathy for the people who represent or are directly affected by it. It is therefore unfortunate that the sharp increase in media attention to the problems of the ghetto poor coincided with a conservative political atmosphere, particularly during the Reagan presidency, that not only reinforced the dominant American belief system that poverty is a reflection of individual inadequacy but has resulted in minimal support for new and stronger social programs to address the growing problems of inner-city poverty.

CONCLUSION: SOCIAL RIGHTS, HUMAN VALUES,  
AND PUBLIC POLICY

The effects of joblessness on the poor in the United States are far more severe than those experienced by disadvantaged groups

in other advanced industrial Western societies. While economic restructuring and its adverse effects on lower-income groups have been common to all these societies in recent years, the most severe consequences of social and economic dislocations have been in the United States because of the underdeveloped welfare state and the weak institutional structure of social citizenship rights. Although all economically marginal groups have been affected, the inner-city black poor have been particularly devastated because their plight has been compounded by their spatial concentration in deteriorating ghetto neighborhoods that reinforce weak labor-force attachment.

In short, the socioeconomic position of the inner-city black poor in American society is extremely precarious. The cumulative effects of historic racial exclusion have made them vulnerable to the economic restructuring of the advanced industrial economy. Moreover, the problems of joblessness, deepening poverty, and other woes that have accompanied these economic changes cannot be relieved by the meager welfare programs targeted at the poor. Furthermore, these problems tend to be viewed by members of the larger society as a reflection of personal deficiencies, not structural inequities.

Accordingly, if any group has a stake in the enhancement of social rights (i.e., the right to employment, economic security, education, and health) in the United States, it is the inner-city black poor. Unfortunately, given the strength of the American belief system on poverty and welfare and the resistance to targeted programs for the truly disadvantaged, any program that would significantly improve their life chances, including increased job opportunities, would have to be based on or address concerns beyond those that focus on life and experiences in inner-city ghettos. The point raised by the late black economist Vivian Henderson almost two decades ago is even more true today:

The economic future of blacks in the United States is bound up with that of the rest of the nation. Policies, programs, and politics designed in the future to cope with the problems of the

poor and victimized will also yield benefits to blacks. In contrast, any efforts to treat blacks separately from the rest of the nation are likely to lead to frustration, heightened racial animosities, and a waste of the country's resources and the precious resources of black people. (Henderson 1975, p. 54)

The poor and the working classes of all racial groups struggle to make ends meet, and even the middle class has experienced a decline in its living standard. Indeed, Americans across racial and class boundaries continue to worry about unemployment and job security, declining real wages, escalating medical and housing costs, child care programs, the sharp decline in the quality of public education, and crime and drug trafficking in their neighborhoods.

These concerns are reflected in public opinion surveys. For the last several years, national opinion polls consistently reveal strong public backing for government labor market strategies, including training efforts, to enhance employment. A 1988 Harris poll indicated that almost three-quarters of the respondents would support a tax increase to pay for child care. A 1989 Harris poll reports that almost 9 out of 10 Americans would like to see fundamental change in the health care system of the United States. A September 1993 *New York Times*/CBS poll, on the eve of President Clinton's address to the nation on his plan to deal with the crisis in our health care system, revealed that nearly two-thirds of the nation's citizens would be willing to pay higher taxes "so that all Americans have health insurance that they can't lose no matter what." And recent surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reveal that a substantial majority of Americans want more money spent on improving the nation's educational system and on halting rising crime and drug addiction.

It should be emphasized that programs created in response to these concerns — programs that increase employment opportunities and job skills training, improve public education, provide adequate child and health care, and reduce neighborhood crime and

drug abuse — would, despite being race-neutral, disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged segments of the population, especially poor minorities. Nonetheless, are there not severe problems in the inner-city ghetto that can only be effectively addressed by programs targeted on the basis of race? For example, Roger Wilkins (1989) has argued persuasively that the cumulative effects of racial isolation and subjugation have made the plight of the black poor unique. Many inner-city children have a solo parent and lack educational support and stability in their home. Wilkins contends that they need assistance to enable them to become capable adults who can provide their children with emotional and educational support. Accordingly, he maintains that special social service programs are needed for inner-city (presumably, minority) schools.

No serious initiative to address the problems of urban inequality could ignore problems such as poverty, social isolation, and family instability, which impede the formal education of children and ultimately affect their job performance and prospects. Service programs to meet these needs could easily fit into a comprehensive initiative to improve the economic and social condition of all American families. To be sure, this component of the larger initiative would be introduced mainly in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, including those that represent the new urban poverty, but the neighborhoods would not be restricted to those in the inner city and would not have to be targeted on the basis of race.

The national opinion poll results suggest the possibility of new alignments in support of a comprehensive program of social rights. If a serious attempt is made to forge such an alignment perhaps it ought to begin with a new public rhetoric that does two things: focuses on problems that afflict not only the poor, but the working and middle classes as well; and emphasizes integrative programs that promote the social and economic improvement of all groups in society, not just the truly disadvantaged segments of the population.

I think that it would be important for President Clinton to develop such a public rhetoric and in the process provide the moral leadership to unite the country and move America forward. Such leadership was clearly missing in the previous two administrations, whose rhetoric on poverty and race did more to divide than to unite the country. The president of the United States has the unique capacity to command nationwide attention from the media and the general public and to get them to consider seriously his vision of racial unity and of where we are and where we should go.

I am talking about a vision that promotes values of racial and intergroup harmony and unity; rejects the commonly held view that race is so divisive in this country that whites, blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups cannot work together in a common cause; recognizes that racial minorities draw back, if a message from a political leader is tailored to a white audience, just as whites draw back when a message is tailored to racial minority audiences; realizes that, if the message emphasizes issues and programs that concern the families of all racial and ethnic groups, individuals of these various groups will see their mutual interests and join in a multiracial coalition to move America forward; promotes the idea that Americans across racial and class boundaries have common interests, including concerns about unemployment and job security, declining real wages, escalating medical and housing costs, child care programs, the sharp decline in the quality of public education, and crime and drug trafficking in neighborhoods; sees the application of programs to combat these problems as beneficial to all Americans, not just the truly disadvantaged among us; recognizes that, since demographic shifts have decreased the urban white population and sharply increased the proportion of minorities in the cities, the divide between the suburbs and the central city is, in many respects, a racial divide and that it is vitally important, therefore, to emphasize city-suburban cooperation not separation; and, finally, pushes the idea that all groups, including those in the throes of the new urban poverty, should be able to achieve full

membership in society because the problems of economic and social marginality are associated with inequities in the larger society, not with group deficiencies.

If the president were to promote this vision vigorously, efforts designed to address the problems of urban inequality and the causes and symptoms of racial tensions in cities across America would have a greater chance for success. Thank you.

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