Race Relations and the Nineties: Where Are the Dreams of the Sixties?*

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Abstract

The sixties were marked by optimistic dreams — of a color-blind society, of black power, of reparations for oppression. Movements pursuing these goals fell short of full success but had a significant impact on society. While the right of every citizen to equality without regard to race was reaffirmed, a new principle of rights based on ethnicity emerged. Assimilation lost its luster as a goal but significant black power was not achieved. The latest report on blacks in American society shows stagnation and even decline in their economic situation.

While white Americans accept the principle of racial equality, they resist efforts to implement it. There is no prospect for the radical economic reforms needed to reduce the inequalities of class and race.

One of the most inspiring events of the 1960s occurred on August 28, 1963, when Martin Luther King, Jr., stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and declared, "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!" (1986:219). This was an era of brave, optimistic dreams. Those dreams began to take shape ten years before King's memorable speech, as the school desegregation decision of 1954 gave rise to brave hopes in the hearts of segregated, downtrodden blacks. The concept "a revolution of rising expectations" well described their situation. Victories over white southern resistance in Montgomery, Tallahassee, Little Rock, and New Orleans provided black Americans and their white allies with a sense of empowerment. The sit-ins of the early sixties, still nonviolent, still interracial, showed that the Movement could not be suppressed. As King said in his address, "Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual" (1986:219). Yet as we stand on the brink of the nineties the dreams have dimmed and the nation has indeed returned to business as usual. In his last presidential address

Presidential address to the Southern Sociological Society, Louisville, Kentucky, March 1990. I am grateful to Professors Dallas Blanchard and Mary Rogers, Department of Sociology, University of West Florida, for their criticisms and suggestions. ***Direct correspondence to Professor Lewis M. Killian, 8820 Burning Tree Road, Pensacola, FL 32514.***

to SCLC, in 1972, King urged again, "Let us be dissatisfied until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character and not on the basis of the color of their skin" (1986:251). How sorely pained he would be were he to witness the state of ethnic relations today!

A Succession of Dreams

The Civil Rights vision formulated by King and his lieutenants was the first of a series of dreams. It was symbolized by its famous slogan, "black and white together."

Before the tragic end of his career King did place greater and greater emphasis on economic equality, particularly as he saw segregation diminishing while black unemployment and poverty persisted. He called for full employment, a guaranteed annual income, redistribution of wealth, and skepticism toward the capitalistic economy. "A true revolution of values," he declared, "will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth" (1986:241).

During the height of the Civil Rights Movement the courage of the workers and the vicious violence of the white southern resistance engendered a national orgy of guilt and fear that provided the catalyst for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act the next year. The basic economic changes required if laws mandating desegregation and equal opportunity were to have more than a minimal effect had not come about, however. Moreover, the urban insurrections, brought to the forefront of the news by the Watts riot of 1965, awakened the nation to the fact that blacks were still far from content. King's dream of a revolution fueled by love and fought with nonviolence faded in the smoke of ghetto fires. The competing dream of Black Power dominated the last half of the decade.

The Black Power Dream

The vision of black power as the way out of inequality and stigmatization had deep roots in black history in the United States. Even as King was emerging as a national black hero the nationalistic message preached so eloquently by Malcolm X resonated in the consciousness of hundreds of impatient, angry black people who saw no chance of entering white middle-class society. As far back as the middle of the nineteenth century Black Nationalism had been a strong ideological undercurrent in the United States, surfacing, as William J. Wilson has argued, when intense frustration and disillusionment follow a span of heightened expectations (1973:50).

As limited as its human and financial resources may have been, the Black Power Movement was, with the aid of a titillated white press, able to drown out the voices of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. "Power," not "love"; "defensive violence" and "any means necessary," not nonviolence; and "soul" or "blood," not "black and white together," were the cries resounding in the ghettos and repeated on the nation's television screens.

Even more so than do most social movements, the Black Power Movement failed to achieve its stated objectives. Blacks did not win even veto power in the politics of the nation, the states, or the cities. The sort of power they gained in predominantly black cities and congressional districts resulted from demographic changes, not from concessions to the demands of the movement. Neither the extravagant dream of a black republic in the South nor the moderate one of viable all-black municipalities, such as Soul City, North Carolina, was realized. Real advances in self-chosen separatism, going beyond the historically black churches and fraternal organizations, primarily took the form of black studies departments, black cultural centers, and a few all-black dormitories in predominantly white universities.

Despite its near failure, the significance of the short-lived black power movement has been greatly underestimated. First of all, its very demise dramatized the lengths that the white power structure, at all levels, would go to suppress blacks who did not remain meek and mild. Of even greater importance was the change in the terms of the ongoing debate between whites and blacks and within each community about the future of blacks in U.S. society. King's shining grail of integration had lost its luster, at least for the time being. Assimilation had long been the dominant theme among both black Americans and white liberals, but now both its feasibility and desirability were being questioned. Various forms of pluralism gained legitimacy. At best, assimilation was a dream to be deferred until after a period of benign race consciousness.

The theme of black consciousness underscored the pervasive persistence of ethnic diversity in the society. It was accompanied by a novel concept, that of ethnic group rights. The idea of civil rights, individual rights based on citizenship, was now supplemented by the idea of rights based on membership in an ethnic group with a collective claim to being or having been an oppressed minority.

This seed fell on fertile soil, for other ethnic groups, not only Latinos and Native Americans, but also what Michael Novak called the "unmeltable white ethnics," began to advance their claims (1972). A system of competitive pluralism coupled with what Barbara Lal has called "compulsory ethnicity" arose along with "the institutionalization of ethnic identification as a basis for the assertion of collective claims concerning the distribution of scarce resources" (1983:167). In this connection we should note that since 1980 citizens filling out the schedule of the decennial census have been called on to specify the ancestral group with which they identify — application of the rule of descent has received bureaucratic sanction at the federal level. Yet those are probably the most inaccurate data to be found in the census volumes. Careful research has shown about one-third of respondents are likely to change their ethnic responses from year to year. And, ironically, Stanley Lieberson suggests that a new ethnic group is now growing in the United States — unhyphenated whites. He identifies them for statistical purposes as that one sixth of the population who, in 1980, identified themselves simply as "American" or refused to report any ancestry (1982).

One of the last demands addressed to United States society in the spirit of black power was the call for reparations. The Black Manifesto read by James

Forman on the steps of New York's Riverside Church on May 4, 1969, was not an angry, quixotic whim of Forman and the few associates who accompanied him. It was a document drawn up by the National Black Economic Development Conference at a meeting set up by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. The latter was created by most of the mainline protestant denominations in the nation.

In the Manifesto Forman and others charged that the white Christian churches and the Jewish synagogues were part and parcel of the capitalistic system which had exploited the resources, the minds, the bodies, and the labor of blacks for centuries. The NBEDC was demanding $500 million in reparations. The melodramatic rhetoric of the Manifesto proclaimed that this came to "$15 per nigger," but the demand was not for the distribution of such a pittance to 30 million black individuals. Instead it called for the establishment of a southern land bank to enable displaced black farmers to establish farm cooperatives; black-controlled publishing houses and audio-visual networks; skills training centers; and other such collective enterprises. Whether such projects would have succeeded is beside the point. What is important is that the demand for reparations called for compensation to a group in the name of ethnic group rights; it was not a plea for the funding of "black capitalism."

The Dreams Fade

The principal outcome of the Manifesto was an outpouring of resolutions by churches. As Arnold Schucter observed, the "great orgy of American guilt" seemed to have subsided by that time, as had the urban insurrections (1970:28). CointelPro was decimating the ranks of the Black Power Movement, and agents provocateurs were giving it a terrorist image. Even whites who had finally begun sympathizing with the goals of the Civil Rights Movement were asking, "Haven't we done enough for the blacks?"

Already the trend toward white acceptance of the principle of racial equality, particularly as applied to education and equal job opportunity, was discernible in public opinion polls. It was widely agreed that "white racism" was a terrible evil — but what did this mean?

The term "racism," usually meaning "white racism," became a catchword after the Kerner Commission declared in the summary of its Report to the President on the causes of civil disorders, "White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II" (1968:203). But who are the white racists — particularly in the eyes of the majority of whites who now claim to accept the principle of racial equality? It is not they themselves but those Klansmen and American Nazis and Skinheads. They themselves are innocent, for they have accepted the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. They don't object to sharing public accommodations with blacks and they will let their children go to school with them as long as there aren't too many. They believe that blacks should have equal job opportunities and if a lot of them remain poor it must be because they don't take advantage of the changes open to them. Schuchter was all too accurate when he wrote in 1970, "We are faced with a society in which racism

has become institutionalized even though the majority of Americans vehemently protest their innocence" (1970:28).

The Fruits of the Dreams

By the beginning of the 1970s both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement were comparatively dormant. As pointed out earlier the Black Power Movement had consequences of greater significance than is generally recognized. These consequences are seen primarily in the world view of blacks in the U.S., symbolized by the fact that the vast majority now call themselves "Black," not "Negro," and some even prefer "African American." Concretely, black power is seen only in the political realm and then only dimly. There is an important but still very small black congressional caucus, but there has been no black senator since the defeat of Edward Brook in 1972. Numerous blacks have been elected to city, county, and state offices, but not until 25 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act did a state elect a black governor. Black political power remains dependent upon a high degree of black residential concentration and the drawing of electoral boundaries to reflect that concentration.

The Civil Rights Movement, despite its apparent triumph with the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, still won only intermediate objectives. *De jure* segregation was struck down. *De facto* segregation in public places was greatly reduced, but the illusion of equality created in the forum was not reflected at the hearth; American homes, neighborhoods, and private clubs remained highly segregated. King's dream of a society where people would not be judged on the basis of their color remained woefully unfulfilled. Even Latinos, a newer minority in many areas, find it easier to escape from the barrio than do blacks from the ghetto.

But what were the objectives unattained by either movement? Let us look again for a moment at the response of the white churches to the Black Manifesto. They placed new emphasis on preaching and teaching against "racism" and on welcoming blacks into the pews of white churches; they raised money — not a great deal — to put into the ghettos to aid the poor, the disenfranchised, and the uneducated. But the lesson of the failed dreams of the 1960s is that it is not sensitivity training, nor token integration, nor welfare that is needed to eradicate the destructive consequences of ethnic discrimination. It is drastic economic reform and that revolution of values that Martin Luther King said would "look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth." What the dreams did not produce was a society where black and white children would not only sit beside each other in school but also achieve equal gains in learning; a society where blacks would not only have equal rights to jobs but also have jobs; a society where poverty not only would ignore ethnic boundaries but also would actually diminish. How much closer are we to that sort of society than we were in 1970?

A Glass Half Empty

Many times after the publication of *The Impossible Revolution?* I heard myself characterized as a chronic pessimist who would always see a glass as half empty, never as half full (Killian 1968). The analogy itself is flawed, of course — in life good or bad is never stable but is always rising or falling.

Today when I look about me, particularly in the South, and see whites and blacks eating, shopping, studying, working, and playing in each other's presence in places where once they were cruelly segregated, I think, "How great and wonderful the progress since 1954!" But when I look at the little clumps of black people sitting, talking, huddling together even in supposedly integrated settings, I wonder if we have not progressed only to that condition which Cayton and Drake called "the equality of anonymity" (1945:102). When I drive through a still segregated and often very poor black residential area, and when I look at the economic indicators, I am even more pessimistic. Indeed, I am convinced that the glass is surely half empty, for the level of black well-being is falling.

Reports and Reports

Testifying before the Kerner Commission in 1968 Kenneth B. Clark said, "I read that report . . . of the 1919 riot in Chicago, and it is as if I were reading the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '35, the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of '43, the report of the McCone Commission on the Watts riot. I must again in candor say to you members of this committee it is a kind of Alice in Wonderland — with the same moving picture shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction" (1977:ix).

Now we have the latest of the massive, comprehensive studies of how blacks are faring, *Blacks in American Society*, put together by a team of distinguished social scientists (Jaynes et al. 1989). It comes 70 years after the Chicago research, 45 years after *An American Dilemma*, and 20 years after the Kerner report. This volume starts out with refreshing honesty. While acknowledging many improvements, the authors declare, "We also describe the continuance of conditions of poverty, segregation, discrimination, and social fragmentation of the most serious proportions" (1989:ix).

The analysis of trends since the great migration of blacks out of southern agriculture beginning in 1939 leads to the conclusion that the place of blacks in the American economy has been, and remains, that of a reserve army of labor. They have enjoyed some progress during periods of prosperity and high employment, usually war-induced. "But," says the study, "after initial reports of rising relative black economic status, black gains have stagnated on many measures of economic position since the early 1970s" (1989:274). Two examples of this stagnation are given. Poverty rates for blacks increased from 29.7% in 1974 to 31% in 1985. Blacks' real per capita income in 1984 was one-third higher than in 1968 but still stood in the same relationship to white income as in 1971 — 57%. Yet it is important to note that poverty had increased among whites

also, from 7.3% in 1974 to 11% in 1985.

There is no need to repeat the much cited evidence of the accentuated differences in status among blacks, with some segments gaining drastically relative to whites and others losing ground. The major source of inequality within the black community, the authors note, is the increased fraction of black men with no earnings at all. The major reasons for black economic inequality are (1) the concentration of black workers, particularly men, in low-paying jobs and (2) the relatively high proportion of unemployed blacks, many of them not even in the labor force. In fact, while between 1973 and 1986 black men with jobs continued to approach whites in position on the occupational ladder and in hourly wage rates, the gains were offset by employment losses. The optimistic reports about employment rates released almost every month from Washington rarely note that black unemployment still continues at a rate twice that of whites and that the rates are based on persons in the labor force, not including the bitter, discouraged dropouts.

Jaynes and his coauthors reject the explanation that it is transfer payments — the much-maligned "welfare" — causing people to drop out of the labor force. They offer instead a structural explanation: "The shifting industrial base of the U.S. economy from blue-collar manufacturing to service industries, the slowdown in economic growth, and the consequent decline in real wages could be expected to produce a period of economic and social distress. For displaced and educationally or spatially misplaced workers, the rise in unemployment and increased competition for moderate-to-high-paying jobs might well lead to a rise in the number of discouraged workers" (1989:310).

The most ominous of the statistics drawn together by this committee pertain to poverty rates. We have seen a dramatic decline from the unbelievably high rates, in 1939, of 93% and 65% for black and white people, respectively. By 1974 the rates were 30% for blacks and 9% for whites, but by 1986 rates for both groups were higher, 31% and 11%. Even more alarming is the prevalence of poverty among black children — 44% in 1985, compared with 16% among white children.

The pessimistic conclusion of the chapter "Blacks in the Economy" reads, "The economic fortunes of blacks are strongly tied (more so than those of whites) to a strong economy and vigorously enforced policies against discrimination. Without these conditions, the black middle class may persist, but it is doubtful it can grow or thrive. And the position of lower status blacks cannot be expected to improve" (1989:324).

To add my own pessimistic coda, a "strong economy" must achieve more than merely providing low-paying jobs in the service sector to replace those lost in the industrial sector through automation or export. Yet this seems to be what many secure people accept as a measure of solving the problem of unemployment. Moreover, with the insecurity felt by many whites it cannot be expected that they will willingly share with blacks the risk of falling into poverty.

Hence the crescendo of rhetoric decrying growing white racism and calling for more affirmative action programs is simplistic, avoiding the main problems facing both blacks and the society. In addition to focusing on the economic nature of these problems, we must also consider the changes in the nature of what is now called "racism."

How Much and What Kind of "Racism"?

Although there is no doubt that "racism" subsumes a multitude of sins, the term itself is very imprecise. Scholars defining it usually list a number of varieties. Since the 1960s it seems to have replaced the older concepts "prejudice" and "discrimination" to denote those negative attitudes and behaviors that result in the subordination and oppression of some groups which are socially defined as "races."

Focusing on the attitudinal components of racism, Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo found a paradox in the attitudes of white Americans in public opinion surveys from 1942 through 1983 (1985). On the one hand, they found strong positive trends toward acceptance of the principle of racial equality and the rejection of absolute segregation. On the other hand, questions concerning governmental implementation of these abstract principles got relatively low levels of support, and there are few signs showing that such support has increased over time. In 1989 the authors of *Blacks in American Society*, who found no reason to disagree with this observation, added their own finding that measures of black alienation from white society suggest an increase from the late 1960s to the 1980s (1989:131).

Many theoretical explanations have been advanced for the paradox disclosed by Schuman and his associates. One theory focuses on the level of abstract principles, seeing agreement with them as evidence of a strong progressive trend. It underplays the contradictory aspect of the findings as well as the absence of proportional structural changes in society, such as the persistence of massive residential segregation.

A sharply contrasting explanation holds that underlying "racist" attitudes have not changed. Agreement with abstract principles of racial equality constitutes only lip service conforming to a new cultural norm rendering crude, overt expression of racial prejudice less than respectable. Racial prejudice is now expressed symbolically. Opposition to school busing, open housing laws, and affirmative action, as well as failure to vote for a black candidate for public office, is to be explained primarily in terms of symbolic, covert racism. The more complex explanation of competing values such as objections to governmental intrusion, individualism, and genuine concern about what happens to one's children is rejected out of hand.

In *Racial Formation in the United States* Michael Omi and Howard Winant similarly give little credence to attitudinal expressions of support for abstract principles unless they are paralleled by support for implementation (1986). Unlike other sociologists they offer a theory of how the persistence of covert racism has affected racial politics in what they define as still being a "racial state."

They concede that a great transformation in ideas about race took place in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. This had two major consequences. One was new, self-conscious racial identities which persisted even after the movements through which they were forged disintegrated. The second they call the "rearticulation of racial ideology" in reaction to the partial victories of the Civil Rights Movement and, I would add, of the Women's Liberation Movement. The conservative, right-wing trend in U.S. politics rests on racism, they

suggest. "As the right sees it," they say, "racial problems today center on the new forms of racial injustice which originated in the great transformation. This new injustice confers group rights on racial minority groups, thus granting a new form of privilege — that of preferential treatment" (1986:114). Further developing this theme Omi and Winant assert, "In this scenario, the victims of racial discrimination have dramatically shifted from racial minorities to whites, particularly white males" (1986:114). They make a persuasive case that even though they were alluded to by code words racial issues were central to support for President Reagan in his two elections and for President George Bush. Who can question that the Republican Party's "southern strategy" has included a strong component of this rearticulated racial ideology, one appealing not only to voters such as those who elected David Duke to the Louisiana legislature, but also to numerous white voters outside the South?

This pessimistic view of the United States as basically a racial state in which racism changes its face but does not disappear is frightening to anyone who hopes for movement toward greater equality in the 1990s. An even more ominous view of a majority of the electorate is offered by Edna Bonacich, who attaches more importance to class as a factor than do Omi and Winant. She asserts, "The United States is an immensely unequal society in terms of distribution of material wealth, and consequently in the distribution of all the benefits and privileges that accrue to wealth. . . . This inequality is vast irrespective of race." Granting that people of color suffer disproportionately, she goes on to say, "I believe that racial inequality is inextricably tied to overall inequality and to an ideology that endorses vast inequality as justified and desirable." She concludes, "And even if some kind of racial parity at the level of averages could be achieved, the amount of suffering at the bottom would remain undiminished, hence unconscionable" (1989:80).

Bonacich cites dramatic statistics demonstrating the vastness of inequality and its frightening growth. In 1987, for example, 6.7 million American workers living on the minimum wage had incomes of $9,968 a year, while Lee Iacocca was paid over $20 million, or $9,615 an hour. In 1986 there were 26 billionaires in the country; in 1987, 49. "The Culture of Inequality" which Michael Lewis identified in 1978 is more entrenched than ever (1978).

In the 1960s James Baldwin asked, "Who wants to be integrated into a burning house?" The house is still burning, being slowly consumed by the heat of greed and fear. Speculators gamble with the nation's wealth but pass the bill to the government when the dice roll against them. The CEO's of corporations have learned to live comfortably with affirmative action at the middle levels of the occupational scale but are equally comfortable with reductions in the total size of their work force. Often unnoted in optimistic studies of affirmative action is that increases in minority shares of employment are usually accompanied by contraction in the number of all persons employed. The size of the piece of the pie is not as critical in these times as is the shrinking of the fraction of the pie left for the have-nots in a class-polarized society.

The ideology of inequality Bonacich addresses is sustained also by the insecurities of people who have left the work force and are living on fixed incomes, either from interest and dividends or from those transfer payments now known as "entitlements." They do not see as their enemies the 0.5% of the

families who in 1983 held 35% of the net wealth of the nation. Instead they fear the faceless people at the bottom of the heap. Have they not been told in campaign after campaign that it is the demands of the poor for welfare, social services, and higher wages that might cause higher taxes and increased prices? Polarization does not start near the top of the income distribution but near the bottom. One of Jonathan Rieder's subjects in *Canarsie* put it exactly, "We never join the have-a-littles with the have-nots to fight the haves. We make sure the have-a-littles fight the have-nots" (1985:119).

Now, ironically, as the crisis of capitalism in America intensifies the attention of American voters is distracted by the failures of socialist polities and economies abroad, as if that made their own plight less perilous and their own future more secure. The prospects for a radical rejection of the culture of inequality, with its concomitant acceptance of racial inequality, seem dim. To me, some pessimistic warnings from the past seem more appropriate today than do optimistic predictions for the 1990s.

Voices from the Past

When I look at the retreat of the federal government from vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws, I am reminded of the warning of Frederick Douglass, issued as he witnessed a similar retreat. He wrote, "No man can be truly free whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and actions of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty" (1962:539).

During the Civil Rights and Black Power movements black Americans were catalysts in producing a national orgy of guilt, but they did not attain the sort of power Douglass described. After laws promising equal opportunity were passed, blacks lacked the political clout to get succeeding congresses to pass laws to implement these promises. They were forced to depend, instead, on sympathetic bureaucrats in the executive branch and a narrow majority in a relatively friendly Supreme Court to promote implementation in the absence of majority popular support. Now we see the administrative and judicial support fading because of the growing strength of a political party that does not depend on minority voters for victory and often appears downright hostile to their interests. As inadequate as were the responses of the liberal Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter administrations, they were magnificent when compared to those of elected officials who use "liberal" as a code word signifying softness on crime, welfare fraud, pauperism, reverse discrimination, and the spread of communism in the Third World.

Yet the black middle class still prospers relative to its past condition as the gap between the haves and have-nots grows in the black community, just as in the white. Here I am reminded of Stokely Carmichael's quip in the 1960s, "To most whites Black Power seems to mean that the Mau Mau are coming to the suburbs at night" (1966:5). Today we might say that, to most whites, actually accepting blacks as residents of their neighborhoods seems to mean that drug-ridden welfare recipients from the ghetto will be on their doorstep tomorrow. Julius Lester wrote at about the same time, "The black middle class is aware of

its precarious position between the ghetto blacks and white society; and its members know that because they are black, they are dispensable" (1968:34). Even the qualified black person who seems to have achieved equality is regarded as the "exceptional" black and even then is often suspected of reaching that level because of affirmative action. Until the plight of the underclass is alleviated its shadow will continue to blight the lives and fortunes of those blacks who have partially escaped the bonds of past discrimination.

Lester said that the black middle class knew that it was dispensable. Sidney Willhelm asked, "Who needs the Negro?" (1970). Although asked in 1970, his question is still horrendously relevant today. Writing before the export of semi-skilled jobs to Third World countries became another threat to workers in the United States, he warned about automation: "The Negro becomes a victim of neglect as he becomes useless to an emerging economy of automation. With the onset of automation the Negro moves out of his historical state of oppression into one of uselessness. Increasingly, he is not so much economically exploited as he is irrelevant" (1970:162).

Although he and Willhelm have been highly critical of each other's work, William J. Wilson pointed to the same problem in *The Declining Significance of Race*. He observed, "Representing the very center of the New American economy, corporate industries are characterized by vertically integrated production processes and technologically progressive systems of production and distribution. The growth of production depends more on technical progress and increases in physical capital per worker than on the growth of employment." He added, "In short, an increasing number of corporate sector workers have become redundant because the demand for labor is decreased in the short run by the gap between productivity and the demand for goods" (1978:96-97). Perhaps we must ask today, "Who needs people, except as consumers?" Willhelm characterized our situation as one in which "the new standard of living entails both production and distribution of goods without, however, involving either a producer or distributor through large-scale employment" (1978:203). Hence this oft-disparaged but frighteningly accurate prophet among sociologists advanced a truly radical proposition: "It will be incumbent for a society relying upon automation and dedicated to the well being of human beings to accept a new economic gauge, namely: *services are to be rendered and goods produced, distributed and consumed in keeping with a designated standard of living*" (1978:203). This is the sort of change in perspective of which Wilson said, in 1987, "It will require a radicalism that neither Democrat nor Republican parties have as yet been realistic enough to propose" (1987:139). Instead what we continue to see is platforms that imply that if profits are kept high and taxes low so that investment is encouraged, plenty of jobs will be created. Then, if blacks will get an education and develop the right attitudes toward work and the family, they can enjoy that portion of the prosperity that trickles down to them. This, unfortunately, is the dream of many white voters today. It is not, however, an accurate vision of things to come but a rose-tinted stereotype of an industrial era which is gone forever and was never good for minority workers.

Dreams or Nightmares for the 1990s?

During those years after 1940 during which I studied, taught, and lived race relations in the South, I had my own dream. It was that my fellow white southerners, most of whom I knew as good, kind people, would have peeled from their eyes the veil which kept them from knowing what they were doing to black people. Someday they would see, I hoped, how segregation and discrimination, no matter how paternalistic, left cruel injuries which would handicap both current and future generations.

During the decade after 1954 I thought I was beginning to see that veil thinning under the assault of the Civil Rights Movement. I did witness heartening changes, but then I saw new complacency, with white America asking, "How much more are we supposed to do for them?" Now I see a new veil blinding people whom I still believe to be good-spirited. They are blind to institutional discrimination and to the poverty increasing in our nation even more rapidly than 20 years ago. Ironically, the behavior of most white people, particularly in the South, has changed more than have their attitudes. Now they mix with their black fellow citizens, yet blacks still remain largely invisible to them. They admit selected, acceptable blacks to their company as individuals but ignore the tragedy of the masses who yearly become more separated and alienated from what appears to those on top as an affluent society. Poverty, black and white, is concealed in a way different from when the rich and the poor lived closer to each other. It is known to many Americans only by flitting images in the mass media. In the meantime defense of what security and prosperity one does enjoy, rather than concern for the social problems threatening the nation, anchors successful political appeals with the dominant theme, "no new taxes."

In 1961 James E. Conant wrote in *Slums and Suburbs*, "We are allowing social dynamite to accumulate in our large cities" (p. 2). In the 1960s there were explosions of that dynamite, but its potential for destruction was far from exhausted. Now, in 1990, more dynamite is accumulating and in more cities.

Yet at this very time there appears to be a new basis for optimism. Many Americans are celebrating the end of the Cold War and looking forward to a "peace dividend." The case for deferring spending on domestic programs because of the demands for military defense loses its cogency. Journalists and novelists ask, "Who will be the enemy now that the Soviet Union is no longer the evil empire?"

There has been another cold war, however — a war of heartless neglect of the burgeoning needs of the truly disadvantaged in our own affluent society. A bright new dream would feature the end of this cold war and the beginning of a new war on poverty. We can expect increasingly urgent demands for a concerted attack on underemployment, undereducation, crime which preys on the poor, and the hopelessness that causes young people to drop out not only from school but also from the labor force. But these problems cannot be adequately addressed with the meager surplus left after the requirements for deficit reduction and new foreign aid are met. New taxes and a more equitable distribution of wealth will be required. But what if the response of the "haves" and the "have-littles" to this summons for self-sacrifice is a new wave of

blaming the victim? If this is the case, the new enemy will be our own underclass.

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