

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

JOBS FOR THE INNER CITY

By Hugh B. Price

Helping poor people to become economically self-sufficient is a major, unmet challenge that demands urgent national attention.

Urban economies have undergone profound changes that undermine the ability of marginally skilled and low skilled workers of all races to adequately support their families.

Just a generation ago, these blue collar workers were the backbone of the American economy. Now, the market economy that works for most Americans has all but collapsed for inner-city folk.

There are fewer and fewer jobs for low skilled workers. And the wages for those that exist are just plain lousy, all too often at or below the poverty line.

The result: the rapid deterioration of urban neighborhoods, the rise of crime and anti-social value systems among young people who see

no viable future for themselves, and the break-up of families whose fathers can no longer be proud providers.

To break that cycle, we must attack the source of the problem — the growing inability of inner-city adults to find legitimate jobs that enable them to adequately support their families.

In my view, many politicians and economists are in denial about the depth of this problem.

Some blame it's victims, saying they don't want to work anyway, despite convincing evidence to the contrary. Others say high unemployment and low wages for low skilled workers are natural in a modern market economy. Still others optimistically argue that there will be a happy ending when technology eventually replaces the lost jobs with more highly skilled and highly paid new ones.

The trouble is that none of these scenarios helps inner-city people trapped in poverty today.

It's unrealistic to expect all of them to upgrade themselves overnight from laborers and welfare recipients to office workers and critical thinkers.

Both the private sector and government must do more to encourage economic self-sufficiency.

Employers should make every effort to cut poor people in on the local job action, so that everyone has a shared stake in their community's quality of life.

One way would be for employers to reserve training slots and real jobs for residents of neighborhoods or census tracts with high unemployment rates.

This would not be a politically contentious race-based approach. It's a more palatable alternative which recognizes that poor people of all races need decent jobs.

Since such local measures are unlikely to employ everyone, there simply may be no

alternative to government action if legitimate work is to be reintroduced as the prevailing way of life in poor neighborhoods.

Most people agree that it's the private sector's responsibility to create jobs. But where the private market fails, as it has today in the inner city, then government must step in.

Government should create a new labor-intensive public enterprise to perform services valued by taxpayers.

For instance, there's plenty of infrastructure work to do. Schools are crumbling. Subway and bus stations are strewn with graffiti and railroad rights-of-way are littered with trash. Many public parks in cities and suburbs alike are poorly maintained.

There's a strong case for a labor-intensive public enterprise employing thousands of marginally skilled worker to help produce goods and services the public values.

It won't be cheap, but

investing in schools, parks and people will enhance the quality of life for all and reduce crime and anti-social activity. It will be more effective than the billions more we now spend much less productively on public assistance, police, and prisons.



HUGH B. PRICE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

After listening to so many private citizens discuss the crime bill and other related police matters, I am truly amazed that no one has come to the conclusion that the problem is an intentionally created one. The plain and simple truth is that crime in our society is a necessity. Poverty in our society is a necessity.

In so many cases, crime and poverty have become synonymous. And even though any right thinking individual would understand that being poor is not a prerequisite for being a criminal; it still seems that the stereotype prevails. Just listen to the candidates running for public offices. Almost to a man (or woman) they promise to stimulate economic growth in disadvantaged areas and thus relieve public tensions and cut down on criminal activities. What this is (cleverly disguised) is a way of saying that poor people are most definitely the criminals in this society but they are criminals because they have no jobs and no means of economic growth. We are named criminal and also given an excuse for being such all in singular motion that is designed to appear as a helping hand.

The truth of the matter is that

by having a disadvantaged area or areas the city can justify budgets for various programs none of which are designed for massive success. In fact, these programs are designed for only marginal success, just enough to justify the next year's budget. By being poor we are actually the basis of the city, county, and state's economy.

Think of all the programs aimed at disadvantaged and (at risk) kids. What constitutes (at risk) at risk of what? Look at all the jobs provided for people who work in various fields in support of (at risk) programs. Special teachers, special administrators, special funding, and special locations, all for an undefined group of (at risk) kids.

Think of all the extra added police officers on the streets to handle the ever-growing gang problem. Think of the multi-cultural training and all the multi-cultural training specialists added to the city's payroll. Think of all the people involve in social services. Think of all the seminars in exotic places designed to study nationwide gang problems. Remember Costa Rica. Think of all the budgets of all the programs designed to help all the poor disadvantaged people. We are (See Letters to Editor, Page 4)

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

AN AMERICAN DILEMMA

By Dr. Manning Marable

This past summer, the Morehouse Research Institute of Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, sponsored a major conference on the state of American race relations. This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of the most influential study on racial inequality — Gunnar Myrdal's famous An American Dilemma. Scholars and researchers came to Atlanta to explore the importance of this work, and the history of sociological studies on the black community.

The burden of "race" has always been at the heart of America's greatest dilemma — whether this nation can create avenues of opportunity, representation, mobility and empowerment for its multicultural, non-European population. Part of the difficulty resides in the ever-changing definition of what "race" is, whether it is biologically-derived or historically-constructed, and whether it is a permanent feature in the social interaction of human societies. Can "race" be overcome, and if so, how?

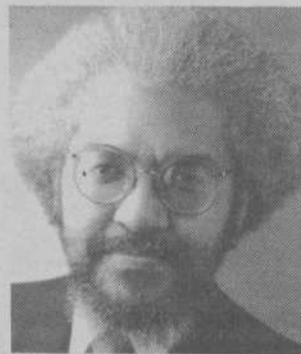
In the early 1900's, many social scientists argued that African Americans were genetically or biologically inferior to whites. Research selectively taken from African cultures was used to "prove" that blacks as a group were retarded and primitive. In Europe, Hitler's Institute of Racial Biology provided pseudo-scientific "evidence" that Jews and Africans were backward and subhuman. Studies of head sizes and the weight of human brains were used to illustrate the lack of blacks' mental capacity. Years later, IQ tests would be used by social scientists in a similar manner, seeking to prove beyond doubt that blacks were racially inferior to whites.

Against this tradition of racist research, first and foremost, was W.E.B. DuBois, the major black scholar of the early twentieth century. With the publication of The Philadelphia Negro in 1899, DuBois established the field of black sociology. His Atlanta University research conferences in the early 1900's produced important studies on the black experience in America. Other scholars continued this tradition

on anti-racist research, such as Fisk University sociologist Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier, author of many important studies on the black church, the black family and the African-American middle class.

Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal utilized the research of black scholars during World War II to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the state of U.S. race relations. Myrdal believed that racism in the U.S. was essentially a matter of second-class education, the lack of democratic voting rights, inferior health care, and higher rates of unemployment. For Myrdal, the American caste system, was rigid and static.

One of the principal factors Myrdal cited for perpetuating this system was social psychology — the belief among the majority of whites in their inherent superiority over black people. Part of the fear of whites was translated into distinctly sexual terms. For example, Myrdal's researchers asked Southern whites the question, "What is the motive for racial segregation?" Whites responded to the question in this order of priorities:



DR. MANNING MARABLE

first, segregation was essential to halt interracial sex; second, to stop social equality between the races; third, to maintain segregation in schools and colleges; fourth, to halt black political power and voting rights; fifth, to maintain legal discrimination in the courts and legal system; and sixth, to halt blacks' economic progress — land, credit, capital and jobs. However, when blacks were asked the question, "What do you want?", they gave the identical list of priorities, but in the reverse order. For African Americans, freedom first and foremost meant economic equality, jobs, legal and political rights — not interracial sex. (See Along Color Line, Pg 25)

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