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The Economics of **RACISM**



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The race problem in the United States was not created by monopoly capitalism. It was inherited from the slave system of the Old South. However, the nature of the problem has undergone a transformation during the monopoly capitalist period; and in a world in which the colored races are shaking off the bonds of oppression, it is apparent to everyone that the future of the United States will be deeply, and perhaps decisively, influenced by the further development of relations between the races inside the country.

The most elaborate and widely praised study of the United States race problem is undoubtedly Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, and for this reason it provides an appropriate starting point for our analysis.¹

The dynamics of race relations in the United States, according to Myrdal, are to be sought in the tension between white prejudice and what he calls the American Creed. Prejudice results in discrimination, segregation, and a generally inferior socio-economic status for Negroes. The Creed expresses the devotion of the whole people to the ideals of freedom and equality. Prejudice, discrimination, and inferiority interact: the more prejudice, the more discrimination; the more discrimination, the more inferiority; the more inferiority, the more prejudice; and so on in a vicious spiral. But it works the other way too. Any measures taken to promote the realization of the Creed will lessen inferiority, diminish prejudice, and counter-

¹ First edition, two volumes, New York, 1942; twentieth anniversary edition, one volume, New York and Evanston, 1962.

act discrimination; and this too will be a cumulative process. While self-perpetuating movements in either direction are theoretically possible, Myrdal believed that in practice and in the long run the Creed would dominate, and from this belief he deduced the existence of an underlying meliorative trend. In addition, Myrdal argued that for a variety of reasons wars have a favorable effect on the status of Negroes. Hence, writing in the early phase of the Second World War, Myrdal found a double reason for optimism. In the Author's Preface to the first edition, he wrote—and himself italicized the statement—that “*not since Reconstruction has there been more reason to anticipate fundamental changes in American race relations, changes which will involve a development toward the American ideals.*”

Twenty years later, writing an additional Preface for the twentieth anniversary edition, Myrdal quoted this statement and added: “A student who has often been wrong in his forecasts will be excused for pointing to a case when he was right.” His close collaborator on the study, Arnold Rose, contributing a Postscript to the anniversary edition, takes a similarly favorable view of the study's prognosis and foresees an acceleration of the meliorative trend in the future. According to Rose:

There could be no doubt that the races were moving rapidly toward equality and desegregation by 1962. In retrospect, the change of the preceding twenty years appeared as one of the most rapid in the history of human relations. . . . The change had been so rapid and caste and racism so debilitated, that I venture to predict the end of all formal segregation and discrimination within a decade, and the decline of informal segregation and discrimination so that it would be a mere shadow in two decades . . . the dynamic social forces creating inequality will, I predict, be practically eliminated in three decades.

Myrdal and Rose thus believe that the race problem in the United States is well on the way to complete solution within the framework of the present social order. But is it? Are the increasing militancy of the Negro liberation movement, the continuing violence of the Southern racists, the uprisings of

ghetto dwellers in Northern and Western cities, the growing preoccupation of the whole country with this "dilemma"—are these merely symptoms of progress, as Myrdal and Rose would presumably contend? Or are they the ominous rumblings of a conflict which is growing in scope and bitterness precisely because there is no progress?

Any serious attempt to answer these questions, we believe, must depart from the historical idealism of Myrdal and seek to relate the problem of race relations in the United States to the basic monopoly capitalist structure of American society.

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Race prejudice as it exists in the world today is almost exclusively an attitude of whites and had its origins in the need of European conquerors from the sixteenth century on to rationalize and justify the robbery, enslavement, and continued exploitation of their colored victims all over the globe.² When the slave system was introduced into the American South, race prejudice naturally came with it, and the ideological justification of the system was perhaps elaborated with greater diligence and subtlety there than anywhere else in the world. From colonial times, Americans both North and South have been systematically and continuously subjected to a barrage of propaganda fostering the ideas of white superiority and Negro inferiority.

It was, of course, always easy to adduce evidence purporting to "prove" the white-superiority/Negro-inferiority thesis. Having been enslaved and deprived of all opportunity to share in the benefits of civilized living, Negroes were visibly and undeniably inferior in all respects by which civilized societies judge superiority and inferiority. The argument that this *de facto* inferiority was due to inborn racial characteristics was convincing to those who wanted to believe it. And it was not

² For excellent treatments of this subject, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill, 1944, Chapter 1; and Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race*, New York, 1948, Chapter 16.

only whites who accepted it; many Negroes were successfully brainwashed into believing in the reality of their own inherent inferiority, and this self-depreciation acted as one of the most important bulwarks of the racial system.³ It should be noted that the slave system, while assiduously fostering the idea of Negro inferiority, does not necessarily imply hatred by whites of Negroes as such. As long as the Negro knew and kept his "place," he was tolerated and even liked by whites. What whites hated was the Negro who believed in and acted on the principle that all men are created equal.

The Civil War was not fought by the Northern ruling class to free the slaves, as many mistakenly believe. It was fought to check the ambitions of the Southern slave-owning oligarchy which wanted to escape from what was essentially a colonial relation to Northern capital. The abolition of slavery was a by-product of the struggle, not its purpose, and Northern capitalism had no intention, despite the interlude of Reconstruction, of liberating the Negro in any meaningful sense. Having subdued the Southern planters, it was glad to have them resume their role of exploiters of black labor whom it could in turn exploit. The notorious compromise of the 1870's was a tacit recognition that the renewed colonial status of the South had been accepted by both sides, with the Southern oligarchy exploiting the Negro and in turn paying tribute to Northern capital for the privilege of doing so.

Under these circumstances, new methods of control over Negro labor were needed to replace slavery, and they were found in various forms of wage labor, sharecropping, and peonage. When Negroes tried to take advantage of their legal

³ This subject is illuminatingly treated by Harold R. Isaacs who convincingly shows that "the systematic debasement and self-debasement of the Negro . . . has begun with or been underpinned by the image the Negro child has gotten of the naked, uncivilized African." (*The New World of Negro Americans*, New York, 1963, p. 161.) This goes far to explain the enormous psychological significance to American Negroes of the emergence of independent African nations and leaders, and their full acceptance into the comity of nations.

freedom to organize along with poor whites in the Populist movement, the planters answered with violence and the Jim Crow system of legalized segregation. By the turn of the century, the oppression and exploitation of Negroes was probably as bad as it had ever been under slavery, and racist propaganda was at least as virulent—and even more successful in the North because racism no longer had to bear the moral stigma of out-and-out slavery.⁴

Prior to the First World War, Negroes in the United States were overwhelmingly a Southern peasantry. They did begin to move out of the Old South in substantial numbers around 1880, but as late as 1910 the census showed that some 80 percent of the Negro population was still in the former Confederate states and that 90 percent of them lived in rural areas. On the whole Negroes played only a minor role in the Northern economy before 1914.

There, in the course of the nineteenth century, a unique system of supplying the huge demand for labor generated by a rapidly expanding and industrializing economy had taken shape. The lowest rungs of the economic ladder were occupied by successive waves of immigrants, mostly from Europe but also from Asia, Mexico, and Canada. As newcomers arrived to take their place at the bottom, the children and grandchildren of “older” immigrants moved up the ladder to meet the need for semi-skilled, skilled, and white collar workers, with the system of public education playing a key role in preparing them for these higher-paying and higher-status jobs. It is relevant to note that the inferiority-prejudice-discrimination pattern, so much emphasized by Myrdal, operated also in the case of the new immigrants. The reaction of the natives was almost always hostile and sometimes vicious in the extreme. Anne Braden, a

⁴ See Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought, the Nadir, 1877-1901*, New York, 1954. These last two decades of the nineteenth century were, in Harold Isaacs's words, “the peak years of Western white supremacy all over the world.” *The New World of Negro Americans*, p. 119.

gallant fighter for Negro rights in our time, has described what came to be known as "Bloody Monday" in her home city:

In Louisville, Kentucky, on Monday, August 6, 1855, mobs of men entered the sections of town occupied by German and Irish immigrants, set fire to stores and houses and, when their occupants tried to escape, opened up with gunfire and killed them. Even women with babies in their arms were shot as they fled from burning houses. The mobs were urged on by the shouting of staid housewives and their daughters, wishing that "every German, every Irishman and all their descendants were killed."⁵

Prejudice and hostility against the immigrants, bursting out from time to time in full-scale pogroms, undoubtedly greatly retarded the upward mobility of the foreign nationality groups. That these attitudes could not destroy upward mobility altogether was due to two causes, one economic and the other socio-psychological. On the one hand, there was the rapidly growing demand for qualified labor, which could be met only by upgrading. On the other hand, the continuous arrival of new immigrant groups to occupy the ghettos which the older groups were vacating enabled the natives (and the older immigrants as they became assimilated) to continue to vent their feelings of superiority, hostility, and aggression. Irish and German targets were replaced by Italian and Polish: essential attitudes and behavior patterns remained unchanged.

The First World War marked the effective end of this system of provisioning the United States labor market. European immigration was suddenly reduced to a mere trickle, and soon afterwards the demand for labor of all kinds shot up. Part of the problem was solved through putting the unemployed to work. As we have already noted, unemployment at 9.7 percent of the labor force was extremely high in 1915. The figure was reduced to 1.4 percent by 1918.⁶ But this was not enough; it was also necessary to tap on a large scale the reservoir of surplus manpower which had been building up for some time in the rural areas, especially in the South.

⁵ Anne Braden, *The Wall Between*, New York, 1958, p. ix.

⁶ See above, p. 232.

Migrations are nearly always motivated by pushes as well as pulls, and the great migration from rural to urban areas which took place during the First World War was no exception. The push was provided by increasing productivity in agriculture owing to mechanization, more intensive methods of cultivation, and so on. As a consequence, demand for farm labor lagged behind increasing agricultural output and finally reached a census-year peak in 1910, declining thereafter not only relatively to output but absolutely as well.⁷ Faced with declining demand for farm labor, the numerous sons and daughters of farmers naturally looked cityward for an opportunity to earn a livelihood. The heavy unemployment which prevailed during the years after 1907 doubtless deterred many from making the move, though a substantial migration was already well under way by that time. The tremendous increase in wartime demand for labor in the cities not only removed this deterrent but substituted for it a powerful magnet. All the conditions for a massive migration were now fulfilled. The United States, having always relied on immigration from abroad, now discovered, quite suddenly as such things go, that it could get along by tapping its own surplus rural manpower just as Europe had been doing since the beginnings of the industrial revolution.

After the war there was no need to return to the old system. The agricultural revolution quickened and high rates of population growth obtained in the rural areas, making available a steady stream of unskilled labor for the cities. In these circumstances, legal restrictions on immigration were a natural sequel. Opposition to immigration began to be voiced as early as the 1880's, but before the war it had never prevailed against the interest of powerful capitalists in having an ample supply

⁷ The numbers of gainful workers in agriculture in census years from 1870 to 1930 were as follows (in thousands):

1870	6,850	1910	11,592
1880	8,585	1920	11,449
1890	9,938	1930	10,472
1900	10,912		

of cheap labor. Now, with that supply assured from domestic sources, the capitalists themselves joined the opposition, chiefly out of fear that working-class immigrants would infect the United States with the revolutionary virus that had already brought down the capitalist system in Russia and seemed to be threatening the rest of Europe. Immigration was not cut off altogether, but the quota system adopted in 1924 did virtually halt the inflow from the countries of eastern and southern Europe which had been the chief recent sources of unskilled labor. From that time on, most immigrants were persons in higher-status occupations who could be counted upon to become strong defenders of the status quo in their new homeland. Ironically, one important effect of this radical change in the character of the immigrant stream was to reduce the need for upgrading from the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled. After 1924, it was tougher for the domestic migrant to the cities to move up the economic ladder than it had been for his counterpart from Europe in the prewar period.

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From our present point of view, the essential thing is that the shift from external to internal supplying of the demand for unskilled labor meant the urbanization of the Negro. Table 15 shows the net intercensal emigration of Negroes from the Old South during the post-Civil War period.⁸

Negro emigration from the South started before the end of the nineteenth century but took on really mass proportions only during the war decade. There was a decline in the rate of flow during the 1930's, but even the heavy unemployment of that

⁸ The source of these figures through the 1940's is *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*, pp. 46-47. They are, as explained at p. 39, refinements of census data, and a strictly comparable figure is not available for the decade of the 1950's. We have arrived at an estimate by reducing the census data for the 1950's (*Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1962*, p. 40) by the same percentage that the compilers of *Historical Statistics* used for reducing the census data for the 1940's.

Table 15

Emigration of Negroes from the Eleven Former
Confederate States, 1870-1960
(In thousands)

1870's	47
1880's	59
1890's	242
1900's	216
1910's	480
1920's	769
1930's	381
1940's	1,260
1950's	1,170

period failed to check the northward movement. The biggest wave of emigration came with the Second World War and has continued with but little change ever since.

Almost all of the emigrants from the South settled in the cities of the North and West. But this was not the only movement of Negroes. Within the South itself, there has been steady migration from countryside to city. The upshot is that in the half century between 1910 and 1960, Negroes have been transformed from a regional peasantry into a substantial segment of the urban working class. The 3-to-1 rural-urban ratio of 1910 has been almost exactly reversed: today three quarters of the Negro population are city dwellers.

It was of course inevitable that Negroes should enter the urban economy at the very bottom. They were the poorest, most illiterate, least skilled on arrival. They were doubly burdened by historic race prejudice and discrimination and by the prejudice and discrimination that have greeted every group of impoverished newcomers. The questions we have to ask are: How have they made out since moving to the cities? Have they been able to follow in the footsteps of earlier immigrant groups, climbing the economic ladder and escaping from their original ghettos?

In answering these questions, we must be careful not to mix up the effects of moving from country to city, a process which has been continuous for more than half a century, with what has happened after arrival in the city. The move from countryside to city has on the average unquestionably meant a higher standard of living for Negroes: if it had not, the migration would have ceased long ago. In other words, the bottom of the urban-industrial ladder is higher than the bottom of the Southern agricultural ladder, and when Negroes stepped from the one to the other it was a step up. This is not what primarily interests us, however. It was similarly a step up for impoverished European peasants to leave their homelands and move to the United States: again the proof is that the flow continued until it was cut off by war and legislation. The point is that after they got here, they soon started to climb the new ladder, and fresh immigrant groups took their place at the bottom. What we want to know is whether Negroes have followed the same course, climbing the new ladder after moving to the cities.

A few have, of course, and we shall discuss the role and significance of this minority when we come to the subject of tokenism. But for the great mass of Negroes the answer is, emphatically and unambiguously, no. The widespread opinion to the contrary, to the extent that it has any factual basis, rests on confusing the step from one ladder to the other with a step up the new ladder. This important point was explained to the Clark Committee by Herman P. Miller, Special Assistant to the Director of the Bureau of the Census and one of the country's leading authorities on income distribution:

We heard this morning from Professor Ginzberg that the Negro made a breakthrough in the 1950's. Senator Javits, in his excellent book, *Discrimination, U.S.A.*, also speaks about the improvement of the economic status of the Negro. Even the Department of Labor refers to the occupational gains that have been made by the Negro in the past 20 years. This is all very true, but I think it can be shown, on the basis of census statistics, that most of the improvement in

occupational status that the Negro has made since 1940 has been through his movement out of sharecropping and agricultural labor in the South and into your Northern industrial areas.

When we look at the figures for the Northern and Central states we find that the occupational status of the Negro relative to the white has not improved appreciably since 1940.⁹

With respect to income, the situation is somewhat more complicated, but no more favorable to the theory that Negroes are moving up the ladder. Miller explained it in his statement prepared for the Clark Committee:

Although the relative occupational status of nonwhites has not changed appreciably in most states since 1940, the income gap between whites and nonwhites did narrow during the Second World War. During the past decade, however, there has been no change in income differentials between the two groups. . . . In 1947, the median wage or salary income for nonwhite workers was 54 percent of that received by the whites. In 1962, the ratio was almost identical (55 percent). . . . In view of the stability of the earnings gap during the postwar period . . . the reduction during the war years cannot be viewed as part of a continuing process, but rather as a phenomenon closely related to war-induced shortages of unskilled labor and government regulations such as those of the War Labor Board designed generally to raise the incomes of lower paid workers, and to an economy operating at full tilt.¹⁰

It is important to understand that the position of Negroes derives not only from the undoubted facts that on the average they have less education and are concentrated in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. Even when they have the same amount of schooling as whites, their occupational status is

⁹ *Equal Employment Opportunity*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Employment and Manpower of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., on S. 773, S. 1210, S. 1211, and S. 1937; July 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, August 2 and 20, 1963, p. 375. Senator Joseph S. Clark of Pennsylvania is Chairman of this Subcommittee.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 323. Government statistics customarily distinguish between whites and non-whites rather than between whites and Negroes. Since Negroes constitute more than 90 percent of non-whites, it is legitimate for most purposes to use the two terms interchangeably, as Miller does in his testimony before the Clark Committee.

lower. Even when they do the same work, they are paid less. And in both respects, the relative disadvantage of the Negro is greater the higher you go in the occupation and income scales.

A nonwhite man who has not gone beyond the eighth grade has very little chance of being anything more than a laborer, a porter, or a factory hand. Nearly 8 out of every 10 nonwhite men with eight grades of schooling worked as laborers, service workers, or operatives at the time of the last census. Among whites with the same amount of education, only 5 out of 10 worked at these low-paid jobs.

The nonwhite high school graduate stands a somewhat better chance of getting a well-paid job; but even his chances are not very good. About 6 out of every 10 nonwhite high school graduates were laborers, service workers, or operatives as compared with only 3 out of 10 whites with the same amount of schooling.

Nonwhite college graduates seem to be able to find professional employment in relatively large numbers. About three out of every four were professional or managerial workers—nearly the same proportion as white college graduates. But, there is one big difference. Nonwhites are concentrated in the lower-paid professions. . . .

Nonwhite men earn less than whites with the same number of years of schooling for at least two reasons: (a) they are employed in lower paid jobs; and (b) they are paid less even when they do the same kind of work. The combined impact of these two factors is shown in . . . figures on the lifetime earnings of white and nonwhite men by years of school completed. This table shows that the relative earnings gap between whites and nonwhites increases with educational attainment. The lifetime earnings of nonwhite elementary school graduates is about 64 percent of the white total. Among college graduates nonwhites have only 47 percent of the white total. The fact of the matter is that the average nonwhite with 4 years of college can expect to earn less over a lifetime than the white who did not go beyond the eighth grade.¹¹

Negroes have thus not improved their occupational status relative to whites since 1940, nor their income status since the end of the war. Moreover, in certain other key respects their position has been clearly deteriorating. We refer especially to unemployment and the degree of ghettoization.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

Table 16 presents unemployment rates for whites and non-whites at intervals from 1940 to 1962. Here we see a dramatic worsening of the Negro situation. A breakdown of the global unemployment figures reveals certain characteristic disabilities

Table 16

White and Non-white Unemployment, 1940-1962
(Percent of labor force)

	Total	White	Non-white	Non-white as percent of white
1940	13.3	13.0	14.5	112
1950	4.6	4.1	7.9	176
1960	5.4	4.9	8.5	157
1962	5.6	4.9	11.0	225

Source: For 1940, 1950, and 1960, *U.S. Census of Population, 1960. United States Summary: General Social and Economic Characteristics*, Washington, n.d. For 1962, *Manpower Report of the President*, Washington, 1963, p. 43.

to which Negroes are subject. Some of these were outlined in a statement prepared for the Clark Committee by Under Secretary of Labor John F. Henning:

The unemployment rate for nonwhites as a whole is today over twice as high as for whites—in May [1963], 10.3 percent compared with 5.0 percent. Among married men with family responsibilities, the difference is even wider, 8 percent compared with 3 percent.

The Negro's disadvantage is especially severe when it comes to the better paying, more desirable types of jobs. . . . [A]mong laborers the nonwhite unemployment rate is about one third greater, and in the skilled occupations it is over twice as great.

Today's unemployment strikes hardest at younger workers. In May this year . . . the rate for nonwhite teen-age boys was nearly 25 percent, but 17 percent for white boys. For girls the difference was even wider—33 percent compared with 18 percent.

The nonwhite minorities suffer a disproportionate amount of the hard-core or long-term unemployment. Although they constitute only 11 percent of the work force, they make up 25 percent of all workers unemployed for 6 months or more.¹²

¹² *Nation's Manpower Revolution*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Employment and Manpower of the Committee on Labor and

As to the increasing ghettoization of Negroes in cities all over the country, the evidence is conclusive. After exhaustive investigation, the Commission on Race and Housing reported: "Segregation barriers in most cities were tighter in 1950 than ten years earlier. . . . The evidence indicates, on the whole, an increasing separation of racial groups as nonwhites accumulate in the central city areas abandoned by whites and the latter continually move to new suburban subdivisions from which minorities are barred."¹³ And a statistical study based on the Censuses of 1940, 1950, and 1960 by Karl E. and Alma F. Taeuber showed, in the words of a *New York Times* report, that "with some notable exceptions, racial segregation, far from disappearing, is on the increase in the United States."¹⁴

Nor is this only a recent trend. Lieberman has shown, on the basis of intensive statistical processing of census data for ten major cities, that ever since 1910, when the large-scale migration of Negroes to the cities was just getting under way, the extent of their residential segregation has been steadily increasing while that of foreign immigrant groups has been declining.

In summarizing the findings about Negro-European immigrant housing patterns [from 1910 to 1950], we may observe that although at one time certain specific immigrant groups in a city have been somewhat less segregated from Negroes than from native whites, the general summary figures indicate that Negroes and immigrant groups have moved in opposite directions, i.e., declining segregation for immigrants and increasing segregation for Negroes. In terms of sheer magnitude, the Negroes are far more highly segregated than are the immigrant groups. The old-new distinction [between "old" and "new" immigrant groups] which has been so meaningful in earlier analyses is not particularly significant with respect to segregation from Negroes. That is, the old and new immigrants

Public Welfare, United States Senate, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., Relating to the Training and Utilization of the Manpower Resources of the Nation, Part 2, June 4-7, 1963, p. 403.

¹³ *Where Shall We Live?* Report of the Commission on Race and Housing, Berkeley, 1958, p. 3.

¹⁴ M. S. Handler, "Segregation Rise in U.S. Reported," *New York Times*, November 26, 1964.

are on the average similar in being highly segregated from Negroes.¹⁵

On the basis of the data presented, which could of course be made much more comprehensive and detailed, the conclusion seems inescapable that since moving to the cities, Negroes have been prevented from improving their socio-economic position: they have not been able to follow earlier immigrant groups up the occupational ladder and out of the ghetto.

4

As always happens in social science, answering one question leads to another. What social forces and institutional mechanisms have forced Negroes to play the part of permanent immigrants, entering the urban economy at the bottom and remaining there decade after decade?¹⁶

There are, it seems to us, three major sets of factors involved in the answer to this crucially important question. First, a formidable array of private interests benefit, in the most direct and immediate sense, from the continued existence of a segregated subproletariat. Second, the socio-psychological pressures generated by monopoly capitalist society intensify rather than alleviate existing racial prejudices, hence also discrimination and segregation. And third, as monopoly capitalism develops, the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labor declines both relatively and absolutely, a trend which affects Negroes more than any other group and accentuates their economic and social inferiority. All of these factors mutually interact, tending to push Negroes ever further down in the social structure and locking them into the ghetto.

Consider first the private interests which benefit from the existence of a Negro subproletariat. (a) Employers benefit

¹⁵ Stanley Lieberson, *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities*, New York, 1963, p. 132.

¹⁶ "The Negro population," says the Commission on Race and Housing, "in spite of its centuries of residence in America, has at present some of the characteristics of an incompletely assimilated immigrant group." *Where Shall We Live?* pp. 8-9.

from divisions in the labor force which enable them to play one group off against another, thus weakening all. Historically, for example, no small amount of Negro migration was in direct response to the recruiting of strikebreakers. (b) Owners of ghetto real estate are able to overcrowd and overcharge. (c) Middle and upper income groups benefit from having at their disposal a large supply of cheap domestic labor. (d) Many small marginal businesses, especially in the service trades, can operate profitably only if cheap labor is available to them. (e) White workers benefit by being protected from Negro competition for the more desirable and higher paying jobs. Hence the customary distinction, especially in the South, between "white" and "Negro" jobs, the exclusion of Negroes from apprentice programs, the refusal of many unions to admit Negroes, and so on.¹⁷ In all these groups—and taken together they constitute a vast majority of the white population—what Marx called "the most violent, mean, and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest," are summoned into action to keep the Negro "in his place."

With regard to race prejudice, it has already been pointed out that this characteristic white attitude was deliberately created and cultivated as a rationalization and justification for the enslavement and exploitation of colored labor.¹⁸ But in time,

¹⁷ "There has grown up a system of Negro jobs and white jobs. And this is the toughest problem facing the Negro southerner in employment." Leslie W. Dunbar, Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, in testimony before the Clark Committee. *Equal Employment Opportunity*, p. 457.

¹⁸ Among colored peoples, race prejudice, to the extent that it exists at all, is a defensive reaction to white aggression and therefore has an entirely different significance. It may serve to unify and spur on colored peoples in their struggles for freedom and equality, but once these goals have been achieved it rapidly loses its *raison d'être*. As Oliver Cox has pointed out: "Today communication is so far advanced that no people of color, however ingenious, could hope to put a cultural distance between them and whites comparable to that which the Europeans of the commercial and industrial revolution attained in practical isolation over the colored peoples of the world. And such a relationship is crucial for the development of that complex belief in biological superiority and conse-

race prejudice and the discriminatory behavior patterns which go with it came to serve other purposes as well. As capitalism developed, particularly in its monopoly phase, the social structure became more complex and differentiated. Within the basic class framework, which remained in essentials unchanged, there took place a proliferation of social strata and status groups, largely determined by occupation and income. These groupings, as the terms "stratum" and "status" imply, relate to each other as higher or lower, with the whole constituting an irregular and unstable hierarchy. In such a social structure, individuals tend to see and define themselves in terms of the "status hierarchy" and to be motivated by ambitions to move up and fears of moving down.¹⁹ These ambitions and fears are of course exaggerated, intensified, played upon by the corporate sales apparatus which finds in them the principal means of manipulating the "utility functions" of the consuming public.

The net result of all this is that each status group has a deep-rooted psychological need to compensate for feelings of inferiority and envy toward those above by feelings of superiority and contempt for those below. It thus happens that a special pariah group at the bottom acts as a kind of lightning rod for the frustrations and hostilities of all the higher groups, the

quent color prejudice which Europeans have been able to attain. Therefore, we must conclude that race prejudice is not only a cultural trait developed among Europeans, but also that no other race could hope to duplicate the phenomenon. Like the discovery of the world, it seems evident that this racial achievement could occur only once." *Caste, Class, and Race*, pp. 348-349. The other side of this coin is, since the colored races obviously can and will attain cultural and technological equality with whites, that the race prejudice of modern whites is not only a unique but also a transitory historical phenomenon. It needs to be added, however, that completely eliminating it from the consciousness of whites, even in a predominantly non-exploitative (that is, socialist) world, may take decades rather than months or years.

¹⁹ The crucial importance of the status hierarchy in the shaping of the individual's consciousness goes far to explain the illusion, so widespread in the United States, that there are no classes in this country, or, as the same idea is often expressed, that everyone is a member of the middle class.

more so the nearer they are to the bottom. It may even be said that the very existence of the pariah group is a kind of harmonizer and stabilizer of the social structure—so long as the pariahs play their role passively and resignedly. Such a society becomes in time so thoroughly saturated with race prejudice that it sinks below the level of consciousness and becomes a part of the “human nature” of its members.²⁰ The gratification which whites derive from their socio-economic superiority to Negroes has its counterpart in alarm, anger, and even panic at the prospect of Negroes’ attaining equality. Status being a relative matter, whites inevitably interpret upward movement by Negroes as downward movement for themselves. This complex of attitudes, product of stratification and status consciousness in monopoly capitalist society, provides an important part of the explanation why whites not only refuse to help Negroes to rise but bitterly resist their efforts to do so. (When we speak of whites and their prejudices and attitudes in this unqualified way, we naturally do not mean all whites. Ever since John Brown, and indeed long before John Brown, there have been whites who have freed themselves of the disease of racial prejudice, have fought along with Negro militants for an end to the rotten system of exploitation and inequality, and have looked forward to the creation of a society in which relations of solidarity and brotherhood will take the place of relations of superiority and inferiority. Moreover, we are confident that the number of such whites will steadily increase in the years ahead. But their number is not great today, and in a survey which aims only at depicting the broadest contours of the current social scene it would be wholly misleading to assign them a decisive role.)

The third set of factors adversely affecting the relative posi-

²⁰ At this level of development, race prejudice is far from being reachable by public opinion polls and similar devices of “sociometrics” which remain close to the surface of individual and social phenomena. Incidentally, we have here another reason for believing that the eradication of race prejudice from whites will be, even in a rational society, a difficult and protracted process.

tion of Negroes is connected with technological trends and their impact on the demand for different kinds and grades of labor. Appearing before a Congressional committee in 1955, the then Secretary of Labor, James P. Mitchell, testified that unskilled workers as a proportion of the labor force had declined from 36 percent in 1910 to 20 percent in 1950.²¹ A later Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, told the Clark Committee in 1963 that the percentage of unskilled was down to 5 percent by 1962.²² Translated into absolute figures, this means that the number of unskilled workers declined slightly, from somewhat over to somewhat under 13 million between 1910 and 1950, and then plummeted to fewer than 4 million only twelve years later. These figures throw a sharp light on the rapid deterioration of the Negro employment situation since the Second World War. What happened is that until roughly a decade and a half ago, with the number of unskilled jobs remaining stable, Negroes were able to hold their own in the total employment picture by replacing white workers who were moving up the occupational ladder. This explains why, as Table 16 shows, the Negro unemployment rate was only a little higher than the white rate at the end of the Great Depression. Since 1950, on the other hand, with unskilled jobs disappearing at a fantastic rate, Negroes not qualified for other kinds of work found themselves increasingly excluded from employment altogether. Hence the rise of the Negro unemployment rate to more than double the white rate by the early 1960's. Negroes, in other words, being the least qualified workers are disproportionately hard hit as unskilled jobs (and, to an increasing extent, semi-skilled jobs) are eliminated by mechanization, automation, and cybernation. Since this technological revolution has not yet run its course—indeed many authorities think that it is still in its

²¹ *Automation and Technological Change*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., pursuant to Sec. 5(a) of P. L. 304, 79th Cong., Oct. 14, 15, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, 1955, p. 264.

²² *Nation's Manpower Revolution*, Part 1, May 20, 21, 22, and 25, 1963, p. 57.

early stages—the job situation of Negroes is likely to go on deteriorating. To be sure, technological trends are not, as many believe, the *cause* of unemployment: that role, as we have tried to show in earlier chapters, is played by the specific mechanisms of monopoly capitalism.²³ But within the framework of this society technological trends, because of their differential impact on job opportunities, can rightly be considered a cause, and undoubtedly the most important cause, of the relative growth of Negro unemployment.

5

All the forces we have been discussing—vested economic interests, socio-psychological needs, technological trends—are deeply rooted in monopoly capitalism and together are strong enough to account for the fact that Negroes have been unable to rise out of the lower depths of American society. Indeed so pervasive and powerful are these forces that the wonder is only that the position of Negroes has not drastically worsened. That it has not, that in absolute terms their real income and consuming power have risen more or less in step with the rest of the population's, can only be explained by the existence of counteracting forces.

One of these counteracting forces we have already commented upon: the shift out of Southern agriculture and into the urban economy. Some schooling was better than none; even a rat-infested tenement provided more shelter than a broken-down shack on Tobacco Road; being on the relief rolls of a big city meant more income, both money and real, than subsistence farming. And as the nation's per capita income rose, so also did that of the lowest income group, even that of unemployables on permanent relief. As we have seen, it has been this shift from countryside to city which has caused so many

²³ Under socialism there is no reason why technological progress, no matter how rapid or of what kind, should be associated with unemployment. In a socialist society technological progress may make possible a continuous reduction in the number of years, weeks, and hours worked, but it is inconceivable that this reduction should take the completely irrational form of capitalist unemployment.

observers to believe in the reality of a large-scale Negro breakthrough in the last two decades. Actually, it was an aspect of a structural change in the economy rather than a change in the position of Negroes within the economy.

But in one particular area, that of government employment, Negroes have indeed scored a breakthrough, and this has unquestionably been the decisive factor in preventing a catastrophic decline in their relative position in the economy as a whole. Table 17 gives the essential data (all levels of government are included).

Table 17

Non-white Employment in Government, 1940-1962
(Figures are for April, in thousands)

	1940	1956	1960	1961	1962
Government employees, total	3,845	6,919	8,014	8,150	8,647
Non-white government employees	214	670	855	932	1,046
Non-white as percent of total	5.6	9.7	10.7	11.4	12.1

Source: United States Department of Labor, *The Economic Situation of Negroes in the United States*, Bulletin S-3, Revised 1962, p. 8.

Between 1940 and 1962, total government employment somewhat more than doubled, while non-white (as already noted, more than 90 percent Negro) employment in government expanded nearly five times. As a result non-white employment grew from 5.6 percent of the total to 12.1 percent. Since non-whites constituted 11.5 percent of the labor force at mid-1961, it is a safe inference that Negroes are now more than proportionately represented in government employment.²⁴

Two closely interrelated forces have been responsible for this relative improvement of the position of Negroes in government employment. The first, and beyond doubt the most important, has been the increasing scope and militancy of the

²⁴ If the data were available to compare income received from government employment by whites and non-whites, the picture would of course be much less favorable for Negroes since they are heavily concentrated in the lower-paying categories. But here too there has been im-

Negro liberation movement itself. The second has been the need of the American oligarchy, bent on consolidating a global empire including people of all colors, to avoid as much as possible the stigma of racism. If American Negroes had passively accepted the continuation of their degraded position, history teaches us that the oligarchy would have made no concessions. But once seriously challenged by militant Negro struggle, it was forced by the logic of its domestic and international situation to make concessions, with the twin objectives of pacifying Negroes at home and projecting abroad an image of the United States as a liberal society seeking to overcome an evil inheritance from the past.

The oligarchy, acting through the federal government and in the North and West through state and local governments, has also made other concessions to the Negro struggle. The armed forces have been desegregated, and a large body of civil rights legislation forbidding discrimination in public accommodations, housing, education, and employment, has been enacted. Apart from the desegregation of the armed forces, however, these concessions have had little effect. Critics often attribute this failure to bad faith: there was never any intention, it is said, to concede to Negroes any of the real substance of their demand for equality. This is a serious misreading of the situation. No doubt there are many white legislators and administrators to whom such strictures apply with full force, but this is not true of the top economic and political leadership of the oligarchy—the managers of the giant corporations and their partners at the highest governmental levels. These men are governed in their political attitudes and behavior not by personal prejudices but by their conception of class interests. And while they may at times be confused by their own ideology or mistake short-run for long-run interests, it seems clear that with respect

provement. A study made by the Civil Service Commission showed that between June 1962 and June 1963 Negro employment in the federal government increased by 3 percent and that "the major percentage gains had been in the better-paying jobs." *New York Times*, March 4, 1964.

to the race problem in the United States they have come, perhaps belatedly but none the less surely, to understand that the very existence of their system is at stake. Either a solution will be found which insures the loyalty, or at least the neutrality, of the Negro people, or else the world revolution will sooner or later acquire a ready-made and potentially powerful Trojan horse within the ramparts of monopoly capitalism's mightiest fortress. When men like Kennedy and Johnson and Warren champion such measures as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is clearly superficial to accuse them of perpetrating a cheap political maneuver. They know that they are in trouble, and they are looking for a way out.

Why then such meager results? The answer is simply that the oligarchy does not have the power to shape and control race relations any more than it has the power to plan the development of the economy. In matters which are within the administrative jurisdiction of government, policies can be effectively implemented. Thus it was possible to desegregate the armed forces and greatly to increase the number of Negroes in government employment. But when it comes to housing, education, and private employment, all the deeply rooted economic and socio-psychological forces analyzed above come into play. It was capitalism, with its enthronement of greed and privilege, which created the race problem and made of it the ugly thing it is today. It is the very same system which resists and thwarts every effort at a solution.

6

The fact that despite all political efforts, the relative economic and social position of Negroes has changed but little in recent years, and in some respects has deteriorated, makes it a matter of great urgency for the oligarchy to devise strategies which will divide and weaken the Negro protest movement and thus prevent it from developing its full revolutionary potential. These strategies can all be appropriately grouped under the heading of "tokenism."

If we are to understand the real nature of tokenism, it is necessary to keep in mind certain developments within the Negro community since the great migration from the Southern countryside got under way. As Negroes moved out of a largely subsistence economy into a money economy and as their average levels of income and education rose, their expenditures for goods and services naturally increased correspondingly. Goods were for the most part supplied by established white business; but segregation, *de jure* in the South and *de facto* in the North, gave rise to a rapidly expanding demand for certain kinds of services which whites would not or could not provide or which Negroes could provide better. Chief among these were the services of teachers, ministers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, barbers and beauty parlors, undertakers, certain kinds of insurance, and a press catering to the special needs of the segregated Negro community. Professionals and owners of enterprises supplying these services form the core of what Franklin Frazier called the black bourgeoisie.²⁵ Their ranks have been augmented by the growth of Negro employment in the middle and higher levels of the civil service and by the rapid expansion of the number of Negroes in the sports and entertainment worlds. The growth of the black bourgeoisie has been particularly marked since the Second World War. Between 1950 and 1960 the proportion of non-white families with incomes over \$10,000 (1959 dollars) increased from 1 percent to 4.7 percent, a rate of growth close to three times that among whites. During the same years, the total distribution of income among Negro families became more unequal, while the change among white families was in the opposite direction.²⁶

The theory behind tokenism, not often expressed but clearly deducible from the practice, is that the black bourgeoisie is the

²⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States*, Glencoe, Illinois, 1957.

²⁶ All data from Herman P. Miller, *Trends in the Income of Families and Persons in the United States: 1947 to 1960*, Bureau of the Census Technical Paper No. 8, Washington, 1963, Table 9, pp. 168-189. The measure of inequality used by Miller is the so-called Gini coefficient

decisive element in the Negro community. It contains the intellectual and political elite, the people with education and leadership ability and experience. It already has a material stake in the existing social order, but its loyalty is doubtful because of the special disabilities imposed upon it solely because of its color. If this loyalty can be made secure, the potential revolutionizing of the Negro protest movement can be forestalled and the world can be given palpable evidence—through the placing of loyal Negroes in prominent positions—that the United States does not pursue a South African-type policy of *apartheid* but on the contrary fights against it and strives for equal opportunity for its Negro citizens. The problem is thus how to secure the loyalty of the black bourgeoisie.

To this end the political drive to assure legal equality for Negroes must be continued. We know that legal equality does not guarantee real equality: the right to patronize the best hotels and restaurants, for example, means little to the Negro masses. But it is of great importance to the well-to-do Negro, and the continuation of any kind of disability based solely on color is hateful to all Negroes. The loyalty of the black bourgeoisie can never be guaranteed as long as vestiges of the Jim Crow system persist. For this reason we can confidently predict that, however long and bloody the struggle may be, the South will eventually be made over in the image of the North.

Second, the black bourgeoisie must be provided with greater access to the dominant institutions of the society: corporations, the policy-making levels of government, the universities, the

which increased for non-white families from .402 in 1950 to .414 in 1960, while for white families it was declining from .372 to .357.

Apart from the direction of change, the greater degree of income inequality for non-whites which these figures indicate should not be interpreted to mean that there is really a greater degree of equality of material circumstances among whites than among Negroes. In the upper reaches of the social structure, income is less significant than property; and while we know of no data on Negro property ownership, it seems beyond doubt that the disparity between Negroes and whites in this regard is immeasurably greater than in incomes.

suburbs. Here the oligarchy is showing itself to be alert and adaptable. A *New York Times* survey found that:

Business and industry here, in the face of the civil rights revolution, have been reassessing their employment policies and hiring Negroes for office and other salaried posts that they rarely held before.

Many national concerns with headquarters in New York City have announced new nondiscrimination policies or reaffirmed old ones. Personnel officers are taking a new look at their recruiting methods and seeking advice from Negro leaders on how to find and attract the best qualified Negroes.

On a nationwide basis, about 80 of the country's largest companies enrolled under Plans for Progress of the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity have reported substantial increases in the hiring of Negroes for salaried positions. . . .

The latest figures for the 80 companies that filed reports in the last year . . . showed that non-whites got 2,241 of the 31,698 salaried jobs that opened up. This represented an increase of 8.9 percent in the number of jobs held by nonwhites in those companies.²⁷

The same thing has been happening in government, as already noted; and in addition to being hired in larger numbers in the better-paying grades, Negroes are increasingly being placed in executive jobs at or near the cabinet level, in federal judgeships, and the like. And as Negroes are brought into the economic and political power structure, they also become more acceptable in the middle- and upper-class suburbs—provided of course that their incomes and standard of living are comparable to their neighbors'.

Not many Negroes are affected by these easings of the barriers separating the races at the upper economic and social levels—in fact, it is of the essence of tokenism that not many should be. But this does not deprive the phenomenon of its importance. The mere existence of the possibility of moving up and out can have a profound psychological impact.

Third, the strategy of tokenism requires not only that Negro leadership should come from the black bourgeoisie but that it

²⁷ *New York Times*, November 12, 1963.

should be kept dependent on favors and financial support from the white oligarchy. The established civil rights organizations—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality—were all founded on a bi-racial basis and get most of their funds from white sources; they therefore present no potential threat. But it is always necessary to pay attention to the emergence of new and potentially independent leaders. Where this occurs, there are two standard tactics for dealing with the newcomers. The first is to co-opt them into the service of the oligarchy by flattery, jobs, or other material favors. Noel Day, a young Boston Negro leader who ran for Congress in the 1964 election, comments on this tactic:

Although the system is rotten it is nevertheless marvellously complex in the same way as the chambered Nautilus, beautiful in its complexity. The co-opting begins at birth; the potential for co-optation is built into the system. It is part of what we are taught is good. We have been taught to feel that the couple of thousand dollars a year more is what is desirable. The Negro and most other minority groups have been taught to desire entrance into the mainstream, they have not been taught to look to themselves and develop any sense of pride or prestige within their group, they have been taught to aspire to become mainstream Americans. In the case of the Negro, to aspire to become white. . . . One way of becoming white is by having a higher salary, or a title or a prestige position. This is not a very simple thing, but it is one of the evil beauties of the system. It has so many built-in checks and controls that come into operation—some of these are vitiating the energy of the freedom movement already. The official rhetoric has changed—in response to the dislocations and pressures we are witnessing an attempt at mass co-optation similar to the mass co-optation of the labor movement. The reaction of American business, for instance, is fantastic. The integration programs of some of the major companies are quick and adept—the fact that the First National Bank of Boston two months ago had about fifty Negro employees and now has over a thousand. Under pressure by CORE, they gave in to CORE's demands within *two weeks*. *Two months later* one of their top personnel men came into my office and said—now we are really concerned about developing a program for dropouts. What he was saying is that they are

so adaptable, so flexible, in maintaining the balance of American business, in substituting reform as an antidote to revolution, that they will even go beyond the demands of the civil rights movement.²⁸

If co-optation fails, the standard tactic is to attempt to destroy the potentially independent leader by branding him a Communist, a subversive, a trouble-maker, and by subjecting him to economic and legal harassments.

The reference in Noel Day's statement to developing a program for dropouts points to a fourth aspect of tokenism: to open up greater opportunities for Negro youths of all classes who because of luck, hard work, or special aptitudes are able to overcome the handicap of their background and start moving up the educational ladder. For a "qualified" Negro in the United States today, there is seemingly no limit to what he may aspire to. A report in the *New York Times* states:

Dr. Robert F. Goheen, president of Princeton University, said yesterday that the competition among colleges and universities for able Negro students was "much more intense" than the traditional competition for football players. . . . Dr. Goheen said: "It certainly is very clear that the number of able colored who have also had adequate educational opportunities is very small. And we find we are all extending our hands to the same relatively few young men and women."²⁹

Here we can see as under a magnifying glass the mechanics of tokenism. With the country's leading institutions of higher learning falling over themselves to recruit qualified Negro students—and with giant corporations and the federal government both eager to snap them up after graduation—the prospects opened up to the lucky ones are indeed dazzling. But as President Goheen stresses, their number is very small, and it can only remain very small as long as the vast majority of Negroes stay anchored at the bottom of the economic ladder.

²⁸ "Symposium: New Politics," *Studies on the Left*, Summer 1964, pp. 44-45.

²⁹ *New York Times*, October 21, 1963.

The fact that the great mass of Negroes derive no benefits from tokenism does not mean that they are unaffected by it. One of its purposes, and to the extent that it succeeds one of its consequences, is to detach the ablest young men and women from their own people and thus to deprive the liberation movement of its best leadership material. And even those who have no stake in the system and no hope of ever acquiring one may become reconciled to it if they come to believe there is a chance that their children, or perhaps even their children's children, may be able to rise out of their own degraded condition.

7

It would be a great mistake to underestimate the skill and tenacity of the United States oligarchy when faced with what it regards—and in the case of race relations, rightly regards—as a threat to its existence. And it would be just as serious a mistake to underestimate the effectiveness, actual and potential, of the strategy of tokenism. Yet we believe that in the long run the real condition of the Negro masses will be the decisive factor. If some improvement, however modest and slow, can be registered in the years ahead, a well conceived policy of tokenism may be enough to keep Negroes from developing into monopoly capitalism's "enemy within the gates." But if the trends of the recent past continue, if advances are canceled out by setbacks, if the paradox of widespread poverty and degradation in the midst of potential abundance becomes ever more glaring, then it will be only a matter of time until American Negroes, propelled by the needs of their own humanity and inspired by the struggles and achievements of their brothers in the underdeveloped countries, will generate their own revolutionary self-consciousness.

If this assessment of the situation is correct, it becomes a matter of great importance to know whether the kinds of reforms which are possible within the framework of the existing system—the kinds advocated by the established civil rights

organizations and their white supporters—are likely to yield any real benefits to the Negro masses.

It seems clear to us that the answer is negative; that the chief beneficiaries of reforms of this type are the black bourgeoisie; and that, regardless of the intentions of their sponsors, their objective effect is merely to supplement the policy of tokenism.

This might be thought not to be the case with prohibitions against discrimination in the hiring of labor, which unquestionably helped open up many new jobs to Negroes during the war. In a period of heavy and growing unemployment, however, no such effect can be expected. Even if color is not the reason, Negroes will be discriminated against because of their inferior qualifications. Only those with special talents or training will benefit, and they are already set apart from the ghettoized masses.

Nor can the ghetto dwellers hope to gain from anti-discrimination measures in the field of housing. The only kind of housing that would benefit them would result from construction on a large scale of low-rent units for those who most need it where they need it. Under existing conditions, there is no chance that such housing could be integrated. Attempts to build low-rent housing in marginal neighborhoods and to keep it occupied on a bi-racial basis necessitate the enforcement of so-called "benevolent quotas"—in other words require that Negro occupancy be kept low and hence that few Negroes benefit. As to the prevention of discrimination in the sale of private housing, either by law or by judicial nullification of restrictive covenants, this certainly helps well-to-do Negroes to move into previously all-white neighborhoods. As far as low-income Negroes are concerned, however, the most that can be said is that it facilitates expansion of the ghetto itself through what has been called the "invasion-succession sequence." In this strictly limited sense, anti-discrimination measures do help low-income Negroes: after all, they have to live somewhere. But it does nothing to raise their status or to promote racial integration in the lower reaches of the social structure.

With appropriate modifications, the story is not different in the case of school integration. Where neighborhoods are racially mixed, school integration follows naturally and is unquestionably good for all concerned. But this affects few Negroes, mostly of the higher-income group. The real problem is the ghetto schools. Some upgrading of schools attended by ghetto dwellers may be achieved by placing them on the margins of the ghetto and drawing school districts so as to include both black and white areas. But this does not touch the problem of the ghetto schools themselves, and here all the forces of tradition, inertia, prejudice, and privilege come into play to block or abort attempts at reform. Programs of driving a certain number of Negro children by bus from ghetto areas to white schools elsewhere merely evade the problem, and there is considerable evidence that they increase the insecurity and self-distrust of the children involved.³⁰

There is really no mystery about why reforms which remain within the confines of the system hold out no prospect of meaningful improvement to the Negro masses. The system has two poles: wealth, privilege, power at one; poverty, deprivation, powerlessness at the other. It has always been that way, but in earlier times whole groups could rise because expansion made room above and there were others ready to take their place at the bottom. Today, Negroes are at the bottom, and there is neither room above nor anyone ready to take their place. Thus only individuals can move up, not the group as such: reforms help the few, not the many. For the many nothing short of a complete change in the system—the abolition of both poles and the substitution of a society in which wealth and power are shared by all—can transform their condition.

Some will say that even if this is true, it does not mean that the Negro masses will necessarily become aware of the causes of their degradation, still less that they will achieve a revolu-

³⁰ See A. James Gregor, "Black Nationalism: A Preliminary Analysis of Negro Radicalism," *Science & Society*, Fall 1963, pp. 427-431. Gregor also presents valuable evidence on the negligible importance to the Negro masses of anti-discrimination programs in housing.

tionary self-consciousness. May they not be blinded by the mystifications of bourgeois ideology and paralyzed by a leadership drawn from the tokenized elite? After all, there have always been oppressed classes and races, but the achievement of revolutionary self-consciousness is a rare historical event. Why should we expect American Negroes to do what so few have done before them?

There are, we believe, two reasons, equally compelling.

First, American Negroes live in a society which has mastered technology and advanced the productivity of labor beyond anything dreamed of even a few years ago. True, this has been done in search of profits and more perfect means of destruction, but the potential for human abundance and freedom is there and cannot be hidden. Poverty and oppression are no longer necessary, and a system which perpetuates them cannot but appear to its victims ever more clearly as a barbarous anachronism.

Second, the tide of world revolution against imperialist exploitation, which in our time is simply the international face of monopoly capitalism, is flowing strong, much too strong to be turned back or halted. Already, the rise of independent African nations has helped to transform the American Negro's image of himself. As Africans—and Asians and Latin Americans—carry their revolutions forward from national independence to socialist egalitarianism, the American Negro's consciousness will be transformed again and again—by his own knowledge and experience and by the example of those all over the world who are struggling against, and increasingly winning victories over, the same inhuman system of capitalist-imperialist oppression.

The Negro masses cannot hope for integration into American society as it is now constituted. But they can hope to be one of the historical agents which will overthrow it and put in its place another society in which they will share, not civil rights which is at best a narrow bourgeois concept, but full human rights.

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