

Please File

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February 12, 1996

Dayna Cunningham
The Rockefeller Foundation
420 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10018-2702

Dear Dayna:

I'm sorry that last minute events made it impossible for me to attend your conference today and tomorrow. I'm certainly interested in the topic and would like to receive any conference notes or summaries that may be produced.

Enclosed please find unused shuttle tickets.

Sincerely,

Margaret A. Williams
Chief of Staff
to the First Lady

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

420 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10018-2702

WCS

Fax No.'s (212) 764-3468 & 398-1858 • Telephone (212) 869-8500 • Telex 224862ROCKFEL(RCA)

If you have not received all of this transmission or have encountered difficulties with it, please contact the sender.

DATE: February 4, 1996

TO FAX NUMBER: As dialed

202-456-6244

CITY AND COUNTRY: USA

NUMBER OF PAGES, including cover sheet: 1

TO:

Deborah Bork for Maggie Williams

FROM: Michael Damian, Assistant to Dayna Cunningham

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (212) 852-8353

SUBJECT: Your travel plans -- A Reminder

MESSAGE:

We have yet to hear from you regarding your travel plans for the Feb 12-13th conference at Pocantico Conference Center, Tarrytown, New York.

Please contact RUSSELL CLARK at (212) 852-8250 to arrange your air or rail tickets by Wednesday, February 7th, to assure your place on flights and trains.

Please contact me, MICHAEL DAMIAN at (212) 852-8353 so I can arrange ground transportation and additional lodging, if necessary. I can also be reached by fax at (212) 852-8203. Please get in touch with me by Thursday, February 8th, so I can make the necessary arrangements.

Thanks for your cooperation. We are looking forward to seeing you.

Deborah, I can get shuttle tks to you, but need to know my arrival time and which airport (or arrival time if the Metro/Iner is chosen), so I can arrange ground transport.

Thanks,

Michael

SW - TNS 4:00

7:00 PM
BARK
will arrive before
at 8:00 PM

Paula
Maggie
Liz

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

December 29, 1995

Ms. Maggie Williams
Chief of Staff to the First Lady
Office of the First Lady
Old Executive Office Building
Room 100
Washington, D.C. 20500

Via Fax: (202) 456-6244

Dear Ms. Williams:

We are at an historical turning point not unlike the post-civil war period, the New Deal, or the civil rights movement. Profound economic and social destabilization, political volatility, renegotiation of major portions of the social contract — common characteristics of each of these periods — are dominant trends today as well. At these historical turning points, leadership was the decisive factor in responsibly facing questions that determined the nation's course for several generations. What about today?

For African Americans, these are particularly momentous times. The issues are well-known, chronic and entrenched: deepening African American poverty despite gains among the black middle class; stagnation of gains within the black middle class; criminalization of African American youth on a scale that destroys whole communities and that is unparalleled worldwide; profound African American disenchantment with the ineffectiveness of traditional means of participation and redress; Congress's new social compact intensifying the assault on black communities; the federal courts dismantling remaining protections against racial discrimination; rising dislocation and despair among white Americans making them more susceptible to scapegoating tactics; growing intellectual legitimacy for crass racial stereotypes and sharply increasing racial polarization of public discourse, popular opinion, and even daily personal interactions. At the same time, one million men from around the country joined a march to the Capital — despite disagreements with the convener — demonstrating that there is a deep, untapped reserve of energy and purpose among African Americans.

During the height of the civil rights movement, African Americans built a broad array of vehicles to carry on the struggle. Many of those have ceased to exist or no longer are effective in facing the challenges of this period. There is a critical leadership void for African Americans: few sustained discussions of policy occur at either the local or national level and African American perspectives are lacking in public discourse. There are no major African American communications networks or organs comparable to those of the Right. African Americans have suffered strategic political losses with the defeat of black mayors in several major cities and the threatened loss of seats in Congress. How

450 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York
10018-2702

Telephone: 212.869.8300
Facsimile: 212.764.3468
Facsimile: 212.398.7858

Cable: ROCKFOUND NEW YORK
Telex: 224862 ROCKFEL (RCA)

7th into NYC
Bocantico Conf. CTR
Cherry Town, NY

Personal
note

Maggie

Debby
Draft something
that says I'm
very interested
that issues beyond
my control have
come up.
Having to do
with work
so I could

not
get to
the
conference
Please -
Keep
me posted
Maggie

do we assess and respond to the problems and opportunities of this period? What are the leadership tasks?

On January 8th and 9th, The Rockefeller Foundation is hosting a small and varied group of activists, analysts, academics and others for an in-depth, two-day discussion to explore these issues. It will be a working two days in which we seek to examine the current public discourse about race in this country and explore the processes and organizational structures needed to strengthen African American leadership for this period.

We ask you to roll up your sleeves and join us. Please call me at (212) 852-8490 to let me know whether you will be able to attend.

We hope to see you on January 8th and 9th.

Sincerely,


Dayna L. Cunningham

DLC:md

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

420 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10018-2702

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NUMBER OF PAGES, including cover sheet: .

TO:

Maggie Williams-Deborah Botu

Participant, Pocantico Conference, February 12-13

FROM: Michael Damian for Dayna Cunningham

Michael

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 212-852-8353

SUBJECT: Itineraries, Tickets (if applicable)

MESSAGE: Following is a copy of your itinerary and agenda for the Rockefeller Conference being held on February 12-13 at the Pocantico Conference Center in Tarrytown, New York.

⊗ If you have arranged with us for an airline ticket, your ticket is being FedEx'ed to you today, Thursday, February 8, 1996 for tomorrow morning earliest delivery.

If you have not arranged your travel with Russell Clark at the Foundation travel desk, please do so at once. He can be reached directly at (212) 852-8250.

⊗ Please note at the bottom of your itinerary the contact numbers in case of a change of plans or inclement weather.

I am here to help you until 6pm EST this evening, Thursday, and tomorrow, Friday.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Safe journey, see you at the conference!

February 12-13, 1996 Rockefeller Foundation conference
Pocantico Conference Center

Travel Itinerary for: Ms. Maggie Williams

Fax to: 202-456-6244

Conference location: Pocantico Conference Center
200 Lake Road
Tarrytown, NY 10591
Tel: 914-524-6500
Fax: 914-524-6550

Monday, February 12, 1996:

7:00 am Leave National Airport; USAIR Shuttle
8:00 am Arrival at LaGuardia
Pickup: Car to Conference Center provided by *County Limousine Service* -- 800-777-2689 if you have last minute changes. Driver will meet you in the United baggage claim area, holding a sign reading either "Rockefeller Foundation" or with your name on it.
9:30 am Registration at Pocantico Conference Center
10:00 a.m. Start of Conference (please check in at front desk before start of conference)
Meals provided: a.m. coffee and snack; lunch; dinner

Lodging provided at conference center.

Tuesday, February 13, 1996:

8:30 a.m. Start of Day Two of conference.
Meals provided: breakfast; lunch; dinner
4:00 p.m. End of conference
4:30 pm Pickup by County Limousine Service from conference center, going to LaGuardia Airport, USAIR shuttle to Washington DC

Please note: All travel times assume fair weather conditions. In the case of inclement weather, as much as possible, adjustments will be made in pick-up times for the car services, and you will be notified; however, we ask that you keep an eye on your own schedule and make sure your flight times, etc., will be met. Thank you.

For Monday night's lodging: Guest rooms are split between the Coach House at the Pocantico Conference Center and Kykuit. If you are staying at Kykuit, you will be brought there to check in prior to the start of the conference, and you will be shuttled there at the end of the day on Monday; on Tuesday morning, we ask that you check out and bring your luggage with you prior to the start of Tuesday morning's discussion.

County Limousine Service 800-777-2689 • Matt McCarthy Taxi (local) 914-631-0031
Russell Clark (RF travel agent) 212-852-8250 • Direct Travel after hours #: 800-366-2100

Rockefeller Foundation Conference
February 12-13, 1996 – Pocantico Conference Center

Proposed Agenda and Questions for Discussion

Monday, February 12

9:15 a.m. Arrival and check-in (coffee)

10:00 a.m. Introductions and opening

Morning discussion:

- *What has made African Americans so vulnerable in this period?*

12:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 p.m. **Afternoon discussion:**

- *Having analyzed the vulnerability, what has to change overall to strengthen the position of the African American community?*
- *In particular, what strategies are necessary to strengthen the African American community as a player in the larger social movement?*

3:30 p.m. Break (refreshments)

6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:30 p.m. Cocktails, informal discussion

Tuesday, February 13:

8:30 a.m. Breakfast

9:15 a.m. **Morning discussion:**

- *What are the "levers" to pull to initiate the process of change right now?*

noon Lunch

1:00 p.m. **Afternoon discussion:**

- *Continue discussion from the morning*
- *Critique meeting.*

4:00 p.m. Close of meeting
Refreshments available

5:00 p.m. Dinner for those participants who are able to stay

**February 12-13, 1996 Rockefeller Foundation conference
Pocantico Conference Center**

Travel Itinerary for: Ms. Maggie Williams

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The Atlantic

THE STATE OF AMERICAN POETRY JOHN PETERSON ON FORD MADDOX FORD

*When the official subject
is presidential politics,
taxes, welfare, crime,
rights, or values...
the real subject is*



by
Thomas Byrne Edsall
with Mary D. Edsall



*When the official subject
is presidential politics, taxes, welfare,
crime, rights, or values . . .
the real subject is*



BY
THOMAS BYRNE EDSALL WITH MARY D. EDSALL

RACE IS NO LONGER A STRAIGHTFORWARD, morally unambiguous force in American politics; instead, considerations of race are now deeply imbedded in the strategy and tactics of politics, in competing concepts of the function and responsibility of government, and in each voter's conceptual structure of moral and partisan identity. Race helps define liberal and conservative ideologies, shapes the presidential coalitions of the Democratic and Republican parties, provides a harsh new dimension to concern over taxes and crime, drives a wedge through alliances of the working classes and the poor, and gives both momentum and vitality to the drive to establish a national majority inclined by income and demography to support policies benefiting the affluent and the upper-middle class. In terms of policy, race has played a critical role in the creation of a political system that has tolerated, if not supported, the growth of the disparity

between rich and poor over the past fifteen years. Race-coded images and language changed the course of the 1980, 1984, and 1988 presidential elections and the 1990 elections for the governorships of California and Alabama, the U.S. Senate in North Carolina, and the post of Texas secretary of agriculture. The political role of race is subtle and complex, requiring listening to those whose views are deeply repellent to some and deeply resonant for others. The debate over racial policy has been skewed and distorted by a profound failure to listen.

"You could classify me as a working-class Democrat, a card-carrying union member," says Dan Donahue, a Chicago carpenter who became active in the campaign of a Republican state senator in 1988. "I'm not a card-carrying Republican—yet. We have four or five generations of welfare mothers. And they [Democrats] say the answer to that is we need more programs. Come on. It's well and good we should have compassion for these people, but

your compassion goes only so far. I don't mind helping, but somebody has got to help themselves, you've got to pull. When you try to pick somebody up, they have to help. Unfortunately, most of the people who need help in this situation are black and most of the people who are doing the helping are white. We [white Cook County voters] are tired of paying for the Chicago Housing Authority, and for public housing and public transportation that we don't use. They [taxpayers] hate it [the school-board tax] because they are paying for black schools that aren't even educating kids, and the money is just going into the Board of Education and the teachers' union."

Moderate-income voters like Donahue pose a central dilemma for the Democratic Party. They are essential if the party is to have an economically coherent base, and if the party is legitimately to claim to represent not only the poor but also the average working man and woman. These voters have, however, been caught up in an explosive chain reaction of race, rights, values, and taxes which has propelled significant percentages of them out of the Democratic Party in presidential elections and into the "unreliable" column in state and local contests. Rac-

ism and racial prejudice fail to explain such voter defection adequately, and Democratic liberals' reliance on charges of racism guarantees political defeat and, more important, guarantees continued ignorance of the dynamics at the core of presidential politics.

of specific groups; and, finally, whites against blacks. Public policies backed by liberals have driven these new alignments. In particular, busing, affirmative action, and much of the rights revolution in behalf of criminal defendants, prisoners, homosexuals, welfare recipients, and a host of other previously marginalized groups have, for many voters, converted the government from ally to adversary. The simultaneous increase, over the past two and a half decades, in crime, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, and educational failure have established in the minds of many voters a numbing array of "costs"—perceived and real—of liberalism.

Major elements of the Republican Party have exploited and inflated the costs of liberal policies. Republican strategists and ideologues have furthermore capitalized on these costs to establish a new and evolving ideology: conservative egalitarianism, opposed to special preferences whether for blacks, unions, or any other liberal interest. Liberal Democratic support for preferential hiring on the shop floor and in the schoolroom—to make up for past discrimination—has enabled a conservative Republican Party to lay claim to the cause of equal opportunity,

The new polarization drives a wedge right through the heart of the old Democratic presidential coalition, and threatens to undermine genuine advances in racial equality.

The Costs of Liberalism

THE PAST TWO DECADES HAVE SEEN A SIGNIFICANT enlargement of the ideological and value-based underpinnings of political conservatism and, to a large extent, of the Republican Party. Race, rights, and taxes have become key forces behind this enlargement, helping to bring about a new polarization of the electorate, a polarization that has effectively replaced the New Deal coalition structure of presidential contests.

This polarization is built on mutually reinforcing divisions of the electorate: taxpayers against tax recipients; those who emphasize responsibility against those who emphasize rights; proponents of deregulation and an unfettered free market against supporters of the regulatory state and of policies protecting or advancing the interests

once the rallying cry of the civil-rights movement. In the wake of sustained group and individual conflicts over rights, preferences, and government benefits, an egalitarian populism of the right has emerged, one so strong that it was not only accessible to George C. Wallace in 1968 but remained available twenty years later to a scion of the old guard of the Northeast, George Herbert Walker Bush. Conservative populism has permitted the Republican Party to replace in the minds of many voters the idea of an "establishment" ruled by business interests with a hated new liberal establishment, adversarial to the common man: an elite—of judges, bureaucrats, newspaper editors, ACLU lawyers, academics, Democratic politicians, civil-rights and feminist leaders—determined to enact racially and socially redistributive policies demanding the largest sacrifices from the white working and lower-middle classes.

This new polarization drives a wedge right through the heart of the old Democratic presidential coalition, and threatens to undermine the genuine advances in racial equality which have occurred in the years since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Race relations in America are, in fact, moving on two tracks. On one there has

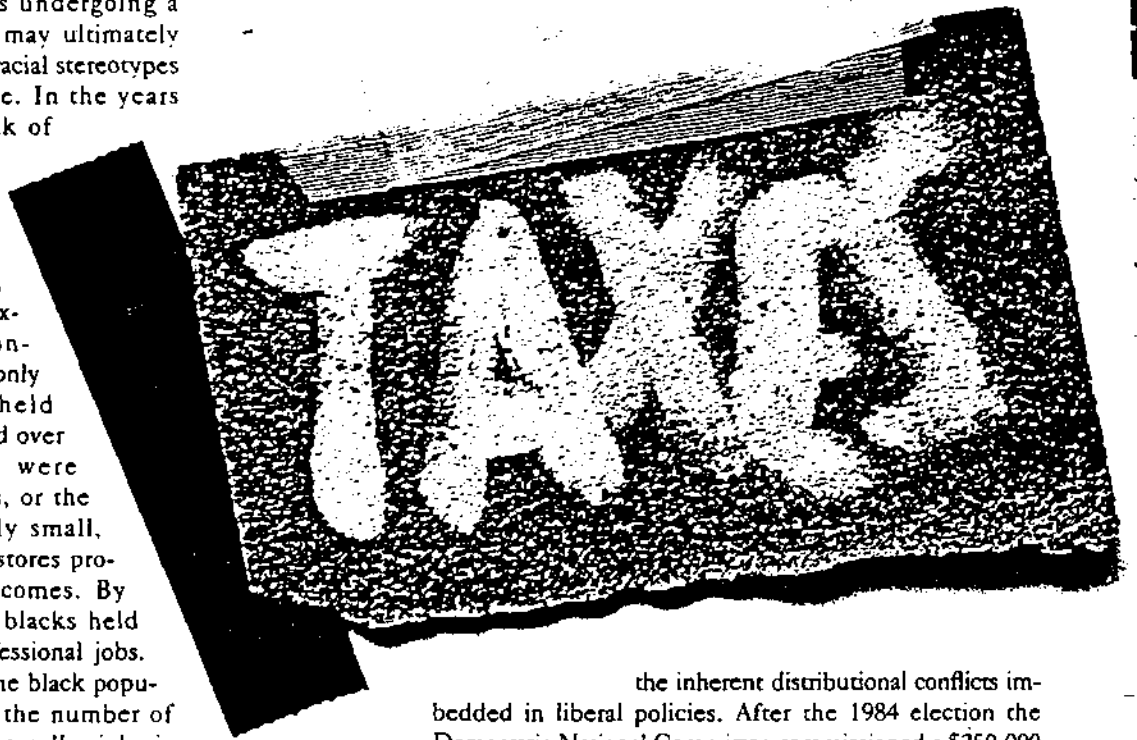
been an extraordinary integration of the races, a striking expansion of the black middle class, and a powerful contribution from blacks to the mainstream culture.

American society is undergoing a transformation that may ultimately destroy many of the racial stereotypes that drive prejudice. In the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, 73 percent of all black college graduates became ministers or teachers, almost all serving exclusively black constituencies. In 1940 only 187,520 blacks held white-collar jobs, and over 100,000 of them were clergymen, teachers, or the owners of generally small, ghetto-based retail stores producing marginal incomes. By 1990, 1.91 million blacks held managerial and professional jobs. From 1950 to 1990 the black population doubled but the number of blacks holding white-collar jobs increased by 920 percent.

On the second track, racial progress has run into major roadblocks: crime, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, drug abuse, and a generation—disproportionately black—of young men and women unwilling either to stay in school or to take on menial labor, a group that has collided with a restructuring of the American economy and a dramatic loss of well-paid entry-level jobs. The worsening of the symptoms of social dysfunction over the past three decades has become a driving force in politics, for the symptoms are perceived as an unacceptable cost of liberalism not only in the neighborhoods of southwest Chicago but also, increasingly, in the more affluent sections of suburbia and in the business cores of cities.

A New Lease on Prejudice

LIBERAL ELITES HAVE HAD MAJOR DIFFICULTY recognizing the costs both of racial conflict and of the broader rights revolution in behalf of groups as diverse as women, the mentally disabled, prison inmates, and immigrants from developing countries. Liberal elites have in addition disregarded the effects of burdensome taxes on working-class and middle-class voters, who may see themselves as being forced to finance a revolution challenging their own values and often undermining their hard-won security. Democratic liberalism has shown a consistent reluctance to confront



the inherent distributional conflicts imbedded in liberal policies. After the 1984 election the Democratic National Committee commissioned a \$250,000 voter study by CRG Communications, only to quash its release because it made explicit controversial sources of dissent from liberal orthodoxy. The study, drawn from a poll of 5,000 voters and thirty-three focus groups, found that Democratic defectors among white urban ethnics and white southern moderates believed that

the Democratic Party has not stood with them as they moved from the working to the middle class. They have a whole set of middle-class economic problems today, and their party is not helping them. Instead it is helping the blacks, Hispanics and the poor. They feel betrayed. . . . [These voters] view gays and feminists as outside the orbit of acceptable social life. These groups represent, in their view, a social underclass. . . . [White urban ethnics] feel threatened by an economic underclass that absorbs their taxes and even locks them out of the job, in the case of affirmative action. They also fear a social underclass that threatens to violate or corrupt their children. It is these underclasses that signify their present image of the Democratic Party. . . . The Democrats are the giveaway party. Giveaway means too much middle-class money going to blacks and the poor.

In some communities, such as the white working-class suburbs of Detroit, positive assessments of the Democratic Party have been washed out altogether by anger and discontent that are open, unabashed, and extremely harsh. Voters from such communities have been crucial to the outcome of presidential elections for the past two

decades—they are the silent majority of the 1970s and the Reagan Democrats of the 1980s. Their votes expanded the Republican coalition to produce election-year majorities, and their abandonment of the Democratic Party in presidential elections undermined the coalition of the have-nots and affirmed the ascendancy of a coalition of the haves, as disaffected moderate-income white voters joined forces with traditional Republicans. The views of working-class defectors from the Democratic Party were examined in a 1985 study of suburban Detroit by Stanley Greenberg, the president of the Analysis Group, a Democratic polling firm. The study found that

these white Democratic defectors express a profound distaste for blacks; a sentiment that pervades almost everything they think about government and politics. Blacks constitute the explanation for their [white defectors'] vulnerability and for almost everything that has gone wrong in their lives; not being black is what constitutes being middle class; not living with blacks is what makes a neighborhood a decent place to live. . . . These sentiments have important implications for Democrats, as virtually all progressive symbols and themes have been redefined in racial and pejorative terms. . . .

The special status of blacks is perceived by almost all of these individuals as a serious obstacle to their personal advancement. Indeed, discrimination against whites has become a well-assimilated and ready explanation for their status, vulnerability and failures.

The bitterness and anger of the white Detroit voters is one consequence of a central tragedy of the past twenty-five years: the drive to achieve racial equality and the striking advances of the black middle class have coincided with a significant worsening of social dysfunction in the bottom third of the black community. Social dysfunction—crime, welfare dependency, joblessness, and illegitimacy—wreaks havoc, crushing recognition of the achievements of liberalism. When it is disproportionately associated with one group or race, social dysfunction assaults efforts to eliminate prejudice. Gordon W. Allport wrote in *The Nature of Prejudice*,

Prejudice . . . may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports . . . and provided it is of the sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.

The contact between whites and the black underclass has routinely violated every standard necessary for the breakdown of racial stereotypes. Most white contact with the underclass is through personal experience of crime and urban squalor, through such experience related by friends and family, or through the daily reports about crime, drugs, and violence which appear on television and in newspapers. The news includes, as well, periodic reports on out-of-wedlock births, welfare fraud, drug-

related AIDs, crack babies, and inner-city joblessness.

"The stereotype is not a stereotype anymore," says Kenneth S. Tollett, a black professor of education at Howard University. "The behavior pattern in the underclass is not stereotypical in the pejorative sense, but it is a statement of fact. A stereotype is an overgeneralization. 'This is the way people are,' and then we say all are like that. The behavior of black males in the underclass is now beginning to look like the black stereotype. The statements we have called stereotypes in the past have become true."

Social dysfunction, and crime in particular, have tragically served over the past two and a half decades to reinforce racial prejudice. Statistics suggest the widespread problems among the black underclass.

In a nation that is 12 percent black and 84 percent white, there were in 1986, according to the Department of Justice, more black prison inmates than white or Hispanic. There were in 1988, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, more black welfare recipients than white. By the late 1980s, according to the Bureau of the Census, a majority of black families were headed by single or separated women. At the same time, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 60 percent of all black children were born out of wedlock. Among black male high school dropouts aged twenty to twenty-four, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the proportion who had not worked at all during the previous year rose from 15.1 percent in 1974 to a staggering 39.7 percent in 1986. The comparable figures for young white dropouts were 9.1 percent in 1974 and 11.8 percent in 1986, and for young Hispanic dropouts 8.8 percent and 9.6 percent. According to figures compiled by the Department of Justice in criminal-victimization surveys from 1979 to 1986—the surveys considered by law-enforcement professionals to contain the most reliable data on race—an annual average of 44.3 out of every 1,000 blacks were victims of a violent crime, with much higher rates in very poor areas, as compared with 34.5 out of every 1,000 whites. At the same time, however, a far higher percentage of the crimes committed by blacks than of the crimes committed by whites were interracial. In 1986 and 1987 whites committing crimes of violence—robbery, rape, and assault—chose white victims 97.5 percent of the time and black victims 2.5 percent of the time in those incidents in which the victim could identify the race of the offender. Blacks committing violent crimes chose white victims 51.2 percent of the time and black victims 48.8 percent of the time. For the specific crime of robbery the figures are similarly striking. In 1986–1987, of those robberies in which the race of the offender was identified by the victim, 95.1 percent of robberies committed by whites had white victims and 4.9 percent had black victims; 57.4 percent of robberies committed by blacks had white victims and 42.6 percent had black victims.

The Races Polarize Over What's Gone Wrong

VIOLENCE, JOBLESSNESS, DRUG ABUSE, AND FAMILY disintegration have not only functioned to reinforce racial prejudice; they have also led to widely differing interpretations of what has gone wrong. Significant numbers of blacks, both middle-class and poor, see malevolent white power behind the disruption and dislocation in black neighborhoods. Take drug abuse. "It's almost an accepted fact," says Andrew Cooper, the publisher of the *City Sun*, a black weekly Brooklyn newspaper, echoing ideas often heard on black radio talk shows and in other all-black forums. "It's a deep-seated suspicion. I believe it. I can't open my desk drawer and say, 'Here it [the evidence] is.' But there is just too much money in narcotics. People really believe they are being victimized by The Man. If the government wanted to stop it, it could stop it." Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, brought an entire auditorium of black politicians, intellectuals, and organizers—men and women on the left of the political spectrum, but by no means on the outer fringes—to their feet during a 1989 speech in New Orleans which clearly captured elements of a black world view. He said,

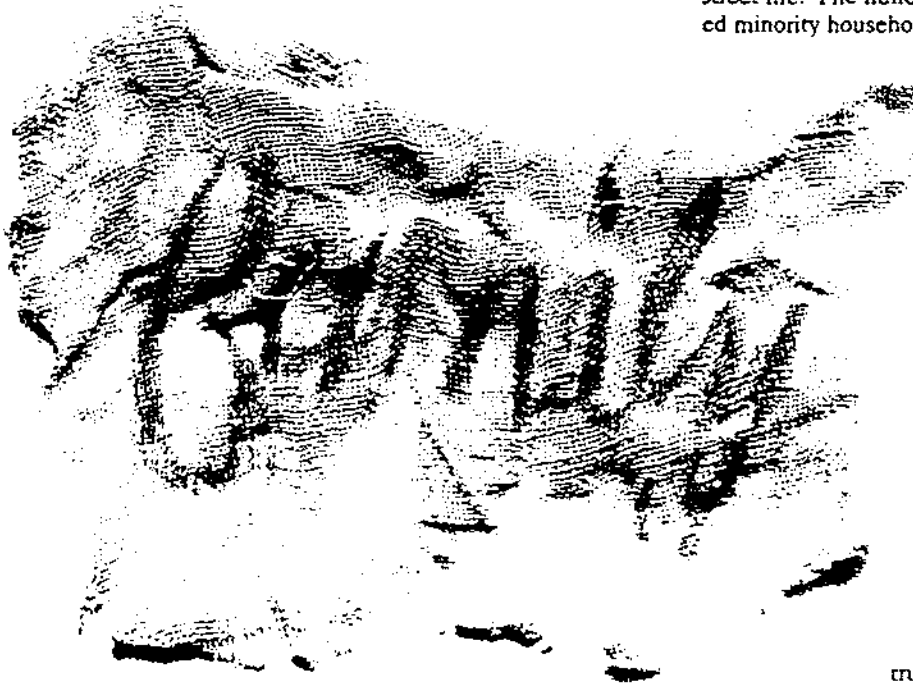
The black man and woman in America is of no further use to the children of our former slavemasters and when a thing loses its use or utility, it loses its value. If your shoes wear out, you don't keep them around; if an old dress becomes old, you don't keep it around. Once it loses utility, you move to

get rid of it. . . . We cannot accept the fact that they think black people have become a permanent underclass. . . . If we have become useless in a racist society, then you must know that not public policy but a covert policy is being already formulated to get rid of that which is useless, since the economy is going down and the world is going down. Follow me, brothers and sisters. According to demographers, if the plummeting birth rate of white people in America continues, in a few years it will reach zero population growth. As for blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, if their present birth rate continues, by the year 2080, demographers say, blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans will conceivably be 50 percent or more of the United States population. . . . If things continue just birthwise, we could control the Congress, we could control the Supreme Court, we could control state legislatures, and then 'Run, Jesse, run,' or 'Run, Jesse Junior, run,' or 'Run, Jesse the Third, run.'"

The emergence of predominantly black underclass neighborhoods rife with the worst symptoms of social pathology has proved to be one of the most disturbing developments in the United States, both for city residents and for residents of surrounding areas. In his book *Canarsie*, the Yale sociologist Jonathan Rieder described the climate of opinion he found in the late seventies in one of Brooklyn's white urban ethnic enclaves:

Canarsie's image of ghetto culture crystalized out of all the visual gleanings, fleeting encounters, and racist presumptions. Lower-class blacks lacked industry, lived for momentary erotic pleasure, and, in their mystique of soul, glorified the fashions of a high-stepping street life. The hundreds of thousands of female-headed minority households in New York City, and the spiraling rate of illegitimate births, reinforced the impression that ghetto women were immoral. . . .

When provincial Jews and Italians recoiled from the riven families of the ghetto, they were prisoners of ancient notions of right as well as vituperative passion. "The blacks have ten kids to a family," the Italian wife of a city worker observed. . . . "Bring up a few, give them love and education." . . . It is hard to exaggerate the bewilderment Canarsians felt when they considered the family patterns of the ghetto. To be without a family in southern Italy "was to be truly a non-being, *un saczu vacante* (an empty sack) as Sicilians say, *un nuddu miscatu cu nenti* (a nobody mixed with nothing)."



The Values Barrier

THE INTENSITY OF PUBLIC REACTION TO THE world of the underclass has coincided with a larger conflict in America over values. This conflict has evolved, in complex ways, from one of the major struggles of the twentieth century: the struggle between so-called traditional values and a competing set of insurgent values. Traditional values generally have been seen to revolve around commitments to the larger community—to the family, to parental responsibility, to country, to the work ethic, to sexual restraint, to self-control, to rules, duty, authority, and a stable social order. The competing set of insurgent values, the focus of rights-oriented political ideologies, of the rights revolution, and of the civil-rights movement, has been largely concerned with the rights of the individual—with freedom from oppression, from confinement, from hierarchy, from authority, from stricture, from repression, from rigid rule-making, and from the status quo.

On a level essentially ignored by liberal elites—but a level, nonetheless, of stark reality to key voters—the val-

charged matters—ranging from crime to sexual responsibility to welfare dependency to drug abuse to standards of social obligation—has for more than two decades created a *values barrier* between Democratic liberals and much of the electorate. Insofar as many voters feel that their cherished policies and practices have been routed, the values barrier has been a major factor in fracturing a once deeply felt loyalty to a liberal economic agenda.

When rank-and-file white voters characterize the value structure of the underclass as aberrant, white liberals are not alone in their angry response. In segments of the black community the response is often a wounded outrage so extreme that it precludes all debate.

Bernard Boxill, a black scholar at the University of North Carolina, has, for example, argued that the growing problems of the underclass may be used by the white community as “an excuse to undo the legal, social and economic advances made by the black middle class, plunge the country into a race war, and worst of all, be a pretext for genocide.”

Dr. Frances Weising, a black psychiatrist, was loudly applauded at a predominantly black “town meeting” or-

*Stigmatization as “racist” or as
“in bad faith” of open discussion of values-charged
matters has created a values barrier between
liberals and much of the electorate.*

ues debate has become conflated with racial politics. Among Democrats and liberals the stigmatization of racism in the 1960s had the unintended and paradoxical consequence of stigmatizing the allegiance of many voters to a whole range of fundamental moral values. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the raising of the “traditional values” banner over such issues as law and order, the family, sexual conduct, joblessness, welfare fraud, and patriotism was seen by liberals and blacks—with some accuracy—as an appeal to racist, narrow-minded, repressive, or xenophobic instincts, designed to marshal support for reactionary social policies. The conflation by the political right of values with attempts to resist racial integration, to exclude women from public life, and to discredit the extension of constitutional rights to minorities fueled an often bitter resistance by the left and by blacks to the whole values package.

The result was that liberal Democrats often barred from consideration what are in fact legitimate issues for political discourse, issues of fundamental social and moral concern which must be forthrightly addressed by any national candidate or party. This stigmatization as “racist” or as “in bad faith” of open discussion of values-

ganized and televised in 1989 by ABC-TV and Ted Koppel when she argued that whites bear responsibility for whatever disorders there may be in black ghettos:

Racism is a behavior system that is organized because white people are a minority on the planet. . . . If we understand the white fear of genetic annihilation, which is why Willie Horton [the Massachusetts prisoner who committed rape and assault while on furlough] could be used as a very profound symbol by the Republican Party to win this election, then we will understand what is happening to the black male in this society. The black male is a threat to white genetic annihilation. And so he is profoundly attacked in this society.

The Roots of Our Race-Charged Politics

IN THE GULF BETWEEN FRANCES WEISING AND DAN Donahue one can see evidence of a political struggle that goes back to the 1960s. When one looks at recent political history through the prism of our current race-charged politics, familiar events take on a new significance. From the perspective of 1991, for example,

the presidential election of 1964 stands out as a turning point in the politics of race in the United States. That election forced race, already a volatile national issue, into the partisan competition between the Democratic and Republican parties. The 1964 contest pitted the Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the leading supporter of the recently passed Civil Rights Act (which granted full U.S. citizenship rights to blacks for the first time in history), against the Republican Barry Goldwater, an ideological conservative and a strong opponent of the bill. By Election Day, 1964, an exceptional 75 percent of the electorate knew that Congress had that year passed the bill, with a striking 96 percent of those voters aware that Johnson had backed the measure and 84 percent aware that Goldwater had opposed it.

The Democratic and Republican nominees' polarized positions on civil rights immediately transformed public perceptions of the two parties. Two years before the 1964 election, polls conducted by National Election Studies showed virtually no difference in the public assessment of whether the Democratic or the Republican Party would be "more likely to see to it that Negroes get fair treatment in jobs and housing." Of those polled in the 1962 survey, 22.7 percent identified the Democrats as more likely to protect black interests, 21.3 percent identified the Republicans, and the remaining 56 percent said either that there was no difference between the parties or that they had no opinion. By 1964, however, fully 60 percent identified the Democratic Party as more likely to help blacks get fair treatment in seeking jobs, and only seven percent identified the Republican Party—the party of Abraham Lincoln.

By 1964 the Democrats had become the party of racial liberalism and the Republicans had become the party of racial conservatism. It was the first and last presidential election in which racial liberalism was politically advantageous.

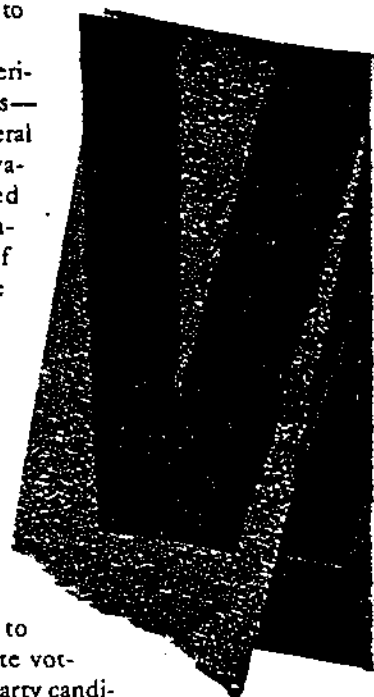
The event most strikingly associated with the decline in political support for Democratic liberalism was the riot that broke out on August 11, 1965, in the Watts section of Los Angeles. Blacks throwing rocks and bottles at policemen shouted, "Burn, baby, burn!" as television cameras rolled. By August 16, after the National Guard had been called in and order slowly restored, there were thirty-four dead, more than 1,000 injured, over 800 buildings damaged or destroyed, and nearly 4,000 arrests. Even Martin Luther King, Jr., the leader of black protests since the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, was unprepared for Watts. Stunned by the scope of anger among rioters, and by their perception that the civil-rights movement had been largely irrelevant to improving conditions in the ghetto, King "was absolutely undone" after visiting Watts, his close associate Bayard Rustin recalled.

A succession of other violent eruptions followed over the next three years. According to the Kerner Commission, appointed to investigate the causes of rioting, in

1967 there were 164 "disorders," eight of them ranked as "major" on the grounds that they involved "many fires, intensive looting, and reports of sniping; violence lasting more than two days; sizeable crowds; and use of National Guard or federal forces as well as other control forces." More than eighty people were killed, nearly 90 percent of them black civilians and 10 percent policemen, firemen, and other public officials. More than three quarters of the deaths were in two cities, Detroit (forty-three) and Newark (twenty-three). During the five-year period 1964–1968, according to one estimate, 329 significant outbreaks of violence took place in 257 cities. Seventy-two percent of rioters in Newark surveyed by the Kerner Commission said they agreed with the statement "Sometimes I hate white people"—a finding painful to white liberals.

The sea change in American presidential politics—the replacement of a liberal majority with a conservative majority—involved the conversion of a relatively small proportion of voters: the roughly five to ten percent of the electorate, made up primarily of white working-class voters, empowered to give majority status to either political party. Alabama Governor George C. Wallace was the politician who showed the Republicans how to seize lower-income white voters. Running as a third-party candidate in 1968, Wallace capitalized on the huge defection of white Democrats, particularly in the South, as the Democratic Party formally repudiated segregation. He won just under 14 percent of the vote. Wallace and Nixon together that year won 57 percent of the vote, however, establishing what would become the conservative presidential majority. This majority carried every presidential election but one over the next twenty years—the exception being Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter's victory in the wake of Watergate, the worst Republican scandal in history.

The strength of Wallace's appeal in 1968 went beyond white backlash. Wallace defined a new right-wing populism, capitalizing on voter reaction to the emergence of racial, cultural, and moral liberalism. Wallace demonized an elite Democratic establishment, providing a desperately sought-after moral justification to those whites who saw themselves as victimized and displaced by the black



struggle for civil rights and by broader social change. For these voters, Wallace portrayed the civil-rights movement not as the struggle of blacks to achieve equality—a goal impossible to challenge on moral grounds—but as the imposition of intrusive “social engineering” on working men and women by a coercive federal government in the hands of a liberal cabal: lawyers, judges, editorial writers, government bureaucrats, and intellectuals. “They have looked down their noses at the average man on the street too long,” Wallace told disaffected voters. “They’ve looked down at the bus driver, the truck driver, the beautician, the fireman, the policeman, and the steelworker, the plumber, and the communications worker, and the oil worker, and the little businessman, and they say, ‘We’ve gotta write a guideline. We’ve gotta tell you when to get up in the morning. We’ve gotta tell you when to go to bed at night.’” Wallace laid the groundwork for the Republican assault

on the poor and the rich. Wallace effectively portrayed this Democratic establishment as bent on imposing a liberal, authoritarian, statist agenda on an unwilling electorate.

To voters resentful of the heavy hand of the new liberal establishment, Wallace said, “You are one man and one woman, and your thoughts are just as good as theirs.”

Richard Nixon set out to win the Wallace vote. Nixon was among the first Republicans to understand how the changing civil-rights agenda could be manipulated to construct a new conservative majority. His strategy effectively straddled the conflict between increasing public support for the abstract principle of racial equality and intensified public opposition to government-driven enforcement mechanisms. Nixon found a message that encompassed the position of the growing majority of white Americans who had come to believe that the denial of basic citizenship rights to blacks was wrong, but who were at the same time opposed to the prospect of forced residential and educational integration, directed by the courts and the federal regulatory bureaucracy.

When, in October of 1969, the Supreme Court rejected an Administration attempt to postpone the desegregation of Mississippi’s schools, Nixon declared, “We will carry out the law,” but he stressed that he did “not feel obligated to do any more than the minimum the law required.” The Court ruling, Nixon warned, should not be viewed by “the many young liberal lawyers [in the Justice Department] . . . as a carte blanche for them to run wild through the South enforcing compliance with extreme or punitive requirements they had formulated in Washington.” On the campaign trail in 1972 Nixon declared,

There is no reason to feel guilty about wanting to enjoy what you get and get what you earn, about wanting your children in good schools close to home, or about wanting to be judged fairly on your ability. Those are not values to be ashamed of; those are values to be proud of. Those are values that I shall always stand up for when they come under attack.

The Republican Racial Strategy

A CENTRAL IRONY OF THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION was that the development of a Republican alternative—“black capitalism”—to the traditional civil-rights agenda created a critical vulnerability for Democrats in the 1980s. Under black capitalism the federal government began actively to promote three racial-preference programs that would soon become con-

on “reverse discrimination.” “You know who the biggest bigots in the world are—they’re the ones who call others bigots,” he declared at a Milwaukee rally, as he struggled to be heard over the shouts of protesters. In another campaign speech he said, “It’s a sad day in the country when you can’t talk about law and order unless they want to call you a racist. I tell you that’s not true.”

Perhaps most important for long-range Republican strategy, Wallace brought into mainstream presidential politics a new political symbol, a vilified Democratic establishment that replaced as an enemy of lower-income voters the Republican establishment of corporate Amer-

troverial: a minority contracting program known as "8-a," which set aside fixed percentages of federal contracts for minority-owned businesses; the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, established within the Department of Commerce to assist minority business in securing government contracts; and, most important, the so-called Philadelphia Plan, designed to increase black access to high-paying union jobs.

The Philadelphia Plan established the authority of the federal government to require companies doing business with the government to set up "goals and timetables" for the hiring and promotion of minority members. The plan set specific percentage "ranges" for blacks and other minority groups for craft-union jobs. For example, plumbers and pipefitters, of whom only twelve out of 2,335 in Philadelphia were black (0.5 percent), were given a hiring goal of five to eight percent in 1970, a range that would rise to 22 to 26 percent by 1973. The goals-and-timetables mechanism was incorporated in 1970 into the regulations governing all federal procurement and contracting—affecting a universe of corporations that employed more than a third of the nation's work force.

Nixon in 1969 did not anticipate that the affirmative-action provisions of his Philadelphia Plan would become, in the course of the next twenty years, essential to a Republican strategy of polarizing the electorate along lines of race—and thus be vital to constructing a presidential partisan realignment. It did not take him long to learn, however: by the 1972 election Nixon was campaigning against the quota policies that his own Administration had largely engendered.

It was Nixon's re-election campaign that developed a relatively comprehensive Republican racial strategy stressing whenever possible the costs of remedies for discrimination, especially in the cases of busing and affirmative action. On March 17, 1972, Nixon escalated his assault on busing. The school bus, "once a symbol of hope," had become a "symbol of social engineering on the basis of abstractions," he said. Seeking to reap political rewards from the growing stockpile of blue-collar resentment, Nixon turned against his own Philadelphia Plan: "When young people apply for jobs . . . and find the door closed because they don't fit into some numerical quota, despite their ability, and they object, I do not think it is right to condemn those young people as insensitive or even racist."

The Democrats Become a White-Collar Party

IN DEVISING A POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR CAPTURING white working-class and southern voters, the Nixon Administration in 1972 would have had difficulty designing a scenario more advantageous to the Republicans, and more damaging to the Democratic Party, than the one the Democrats devised for themselves.

This scenario grew out of a seemingly minor development at the 1968 Democratic convention. As a token gesture of appeasement to the forces of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, Democratic Party regulars allowed the creation of a special Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, to ensure that "all feasible efforts have been made to assure that delegates are selected through party primary, convention, or committee procedures open to public participation within the calendar year of the National Convention."

No one, neither Democratic Party regulars nor the press, had any notion of the scope of what had been set in motion. "There was not much attention to the Rules Committee reports," Max Kampelman, one of Hubert Humphrey's major strategists, recalled later. "Our objective was to get a nominee. . . . We said to ourselves, if you are going to study it, you can control it. If you get the nomination, you'll have control of the DNC [Democratic National Committee]. If you have the DNC, then you'll control any study. A study commission could be a way of harmonizing the issue." Few political judgments have proved more incorrect.

The liberal-reform wing of the Democratic Party—in part made up of veterans of the civil-rights and student anti-war movements—dominated the party-structure commission and achieved a radical alteration of the presidential-delegate selection process. The new rules shifted the power to nominate presidential candidates from the loose alliance of state and local party structures, which had in the past been empowered to use their control of the party to pick delegates, to the universe of activists, often rights-oriented liberal reformers, who were now granted direct access to the machinery of delegate selection. "Before reform," Byron Shafer wrote in his book describing the party rules changes, *Quiet Revolution*,

there was an American party system in which one party, the Republicans, was primarily responsive to white-collar constituencies and in which another, the Democrats, was primarily responsive to blue-collar constituencies. After reform, there were two parties each responsive to quite different white-collar coalitions, while the old blue-collar majority within the Democratic Party was forced to try to squeeze back into the party once identified predominantly with its needs.

In other words, those who unquestionably lost power in the Democratic presidential-nomination process were the white working- and lower-middle-class voters who were already leaving the party in droves because they felt the heaviest burdens of the civil-rights revolution had been placed on their shoulders.

Party reforms produced a substantive ideological upheaval. Before 1972, Democratic presidential delegates were only slightly more liberal than the public at large, according to delegate surveys, while Republican delegates were considerably more conservative than the electorate. Delegates to the 1972 Democratic convention,

however, were significantly further to the political left of the electorate at large than the Republican delegates that year were to the right.

No development better summarizes the shift in intraparty power than the decision by the McGovern forces at the 1972 convention to oust the fifty-nine-member Cook County delegation under the control of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. Since 1932 the Chicago organization had been more important to the success or failure of Democratic presidential candidates than any other city machine. Without Daley in 1960, for example, John F. Kennedy would not have carried Illinois by an 8,858-vote margin.

The Cook County delegation, elected in a March 21 Illinois primary, was vulnerable to challenge because Daley's machine had slated candidates in closed meetings, and because the composition of the Chicago delegation did not include the required proportions of women and blacks.

Pro-McGovern reformers successfully voted out the Daley delegates and replaced them with a slate "chosen no one knew quite how," according to Theodore H. White. White wrote,

In the 1st Congressional District of Chicago, for example, a group of people had met at the home of one James Clement and decided that only ten of those present might vote for an alternate to Mayor Daley's slate; those ten had chosen 7 delegates, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson. This rival hand-picked alternate slate offered the exact proportion of women, blacks and youth required by the McGovern reform rules. Yet the elected slate in the 1st Congressional had been voted in by the people of Chicago, and these had not.

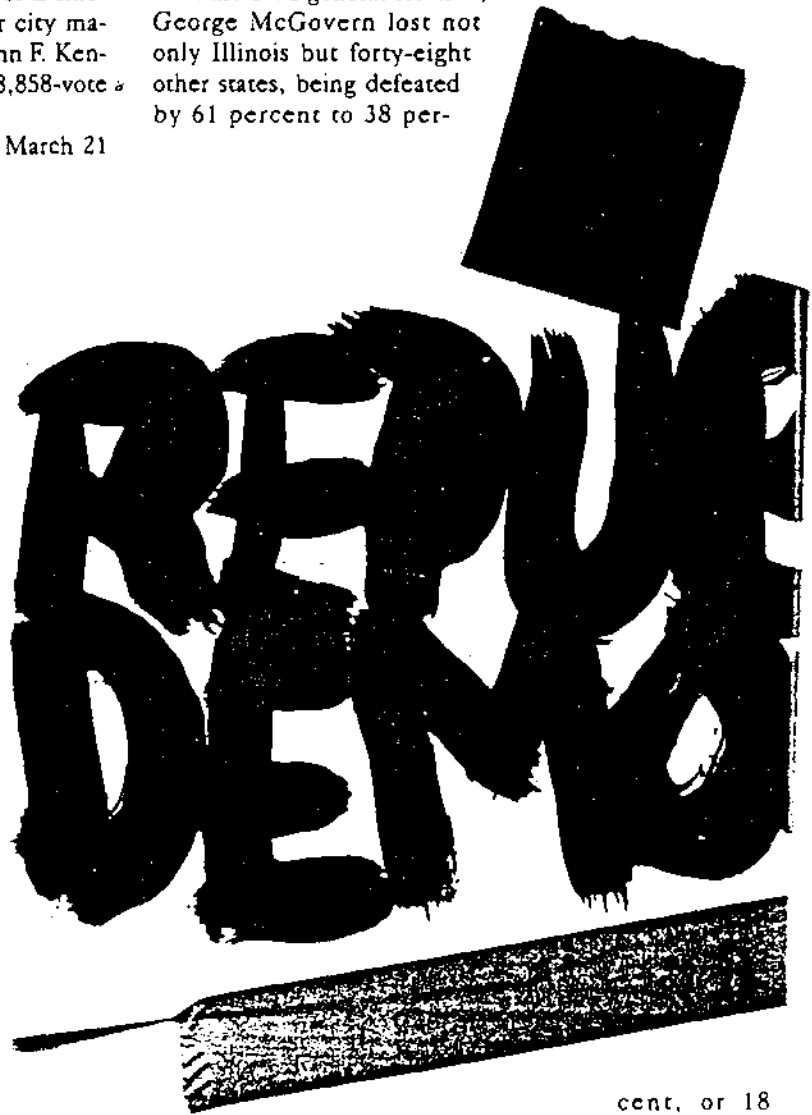
In an open letter to Alderman William Singer, the leader of the Chicago reformers, the *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mike Royko wrote,

I just don't see where your delegation is representative of Chicago's Democrats. . . . About half of your delegates are women. About a third of your delegates are black. Many of them are young people. You even have a few Latin Americans. But as I looked over the names of your delegates, I saw something peculiar. . . . There's only one Italian there. Are you saying that only one out of every 59 Democratic votes cast in a Chicago election is cast by an Italian? And only three of your 59 have Polish names. . . . Your reforms have disenfranchised Chicago's white ethnic Democrats, which is a strange re-

form. . . . Anybody who would reform Chicago's Democratic Party by dropping the white ethnic would probably begin a diet by shooting himself in the stomach.

After the credentials committee voted seventy-one to sixty-one to oust the Daley delegation, Frank Mankiewicz, a spokesman for the McGovern campaign, dryly noted, "I think we may have lost Illinois tonight."

In the 1972 general election, George McGovern lost not only Illinois but forty-eight other states, being defeated by 61 percent to 38 per-



cent, or 18 million votes. For the long-run future of the capacity of the Democratic Party to nominate and elect Presidents, the central issue was not just the magnitude of McGovern's defeat. It was the inability of the Democratic Party to absorb competing factions and to mediate the differences among them. The new rules removed from the presidential-nomination process those white elected and party officials who were closer to the racial and cultural conflicts plaguing the party than the liberal reformers who dominated the proceedings. Among those who did not attend the

1972 convention were 225 of 255 Democratic congressmen, the Democratic mayors of Los Angeles, Detroit, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, Mayor Daley and his Chicago loyalists, and uncounted city councilmen, state legislators, and leaders of Democratic ward organizations.

These leaders represented white voters who were on the front lines of urban housing integration; who were the subjects of busing orders; who were competitors for jobs as policemen and firemen

The Civil Rights Agenda Becomes Redistributive

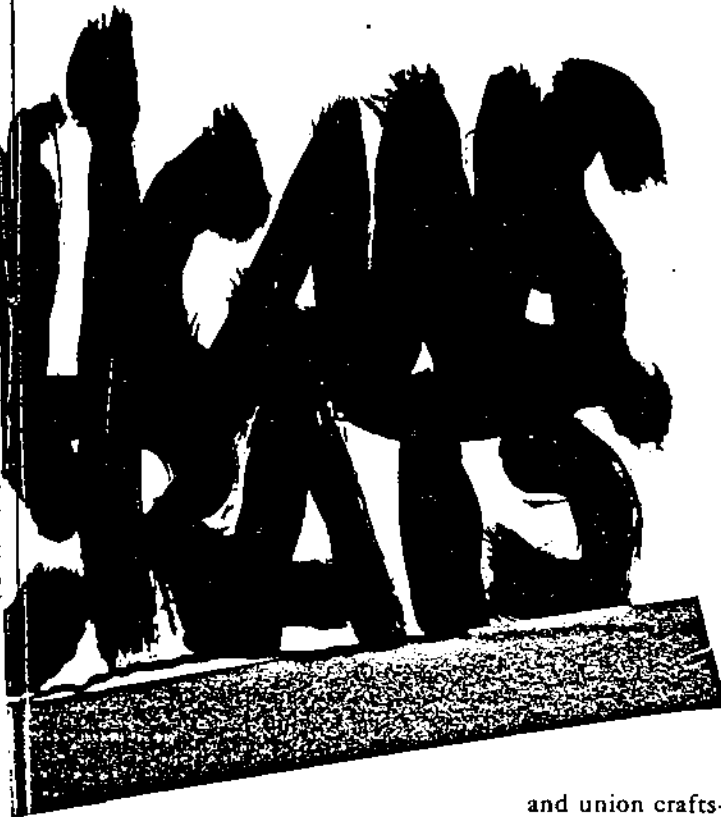
AS THE WHITE WORKING-CLASS VOTERS WHO HAD formed the core of the New Deal coalition began to lose clout within the Democratic Party, the economy began to falter. Steady economic growth, which had made redistributive government policies tolerable to the majority electorate, came to a halt in the mid-1970s. With stagnation the threat to Democratic liberalism intensified. Just as the civil-rights movement reached its height, high-paying union jobs and big-city patronage—which had served to foster upward mobility for each succeeding immigrant generation—began to dry up. Many blacks lost even a toehold on the ladder, while whites slipped down, sometimes just a rung, sometimes all the way to the bottom.

The end of vigorous post-Second World War economic growth came in 1973. Hourly earnings, which had grown every year since 1951 in real, inflation-adjusted dollars, fell by 0.1 percent in 1973, by 2.8 percent in 1974, and by 0.7 percent in 1975. Weekly earnings fell more sharply, by 4.1 percent in 1974 and by 3.1 percent in 1975. Median family income, which had grown from \$20,415 (in 1985 inflation-adjusted dollars) in 1960 to \$29,172 in 1973, began to decline; family income fell to \$28,145 in 1974 and then to \$27,421 in 1975.

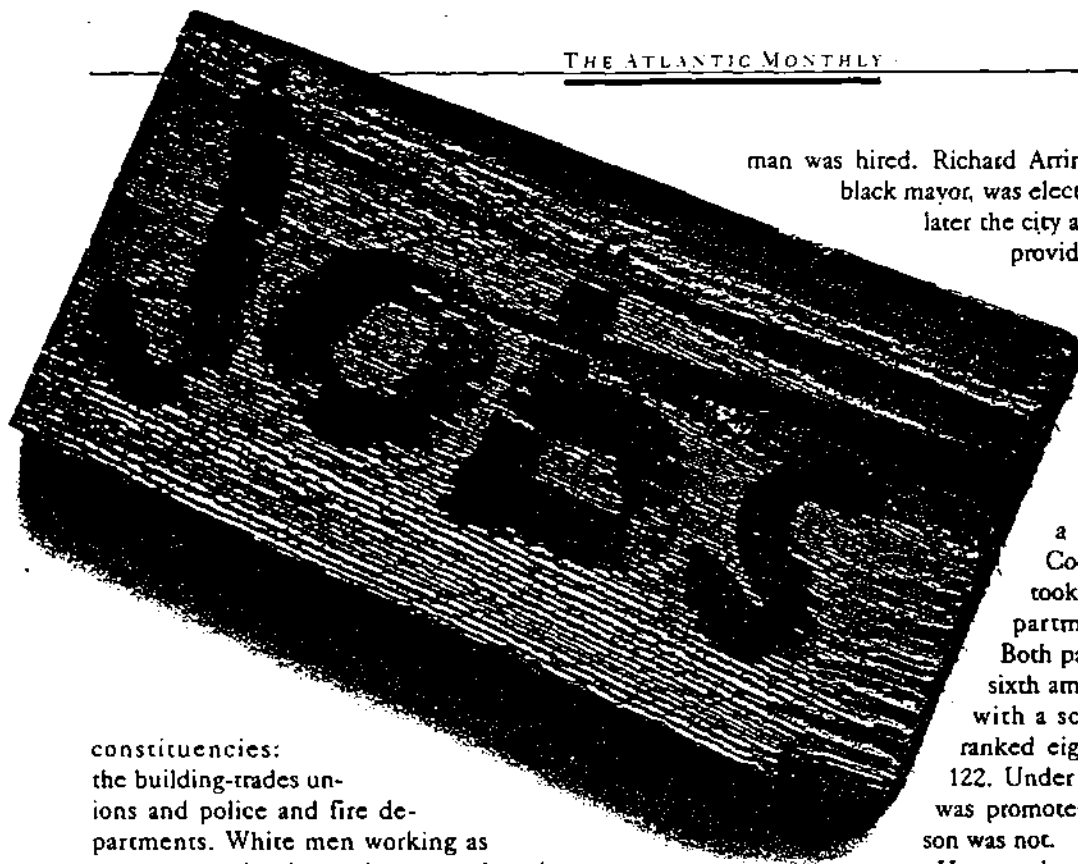
In a whipsaw action the middle-class tax burden rose with inflation while the economy and real income growth slowed. The tax system was losing its progressivity, placing a steadily increasing share of the cost of government on middle- and lower-middle-class voters, vital constituencies for the Democratic Party. In 1953 a family making the median family income was taxed at a rate of 11.8 percent, while a family making four times the median was taxed at 20.2 percent, nearly double. By 1975 the figures had become 22.7 percent for the average family and 29.5 percent for the affluent family. In other words, for the affluent family the tax burden increased by 46 percent from 1953 to 1976, while for the average family it increased by 92.4 percent.

As the job market, income patterns, and growing pressure from many groups for spending on the poor created a competition for government funds in which there were more losers than winners, the civil-rights agenda itself became increasingly redistributive. In order to remedy past and present discrimination in both employment and education, the courts and the federal regulatory structure turned to tough affirmative-action policies. Federal directives and regulations—developed in part by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and endorsed by the Supreme Court in 1971 in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* and in later decisions—sharply restricted hiring and promotion procedures that adversely affected blacks.

The most aggressive efforts to provide jobs for blacks were directed at the most besieged white Democratic



and union craftsmen which were governed by affirmative-action consent decrees; who regarded as incomprehensible many liberal Supreme Court decisions on criminals' rights, abortion, sexual privacy, school prayer, busing, and obscenity. These voters and their political representatives were, and still are, largely relegated to peripheral status in the Democratic presidential-primary process. With the withdrawal of socially conservative white voters from the nomination process, Democratic presidential candidates have negotiated that process in the context of an artificially liberal primary electorate that puts the candidates outside the ideological mainstream and provides them with virtually no training in the kinds of accommodation and bargaining essential to general-election victory.



constituencies: the building-trades unions and police and fire departments. White men working as carpenters, plumbers, sheet-metal workers, iron workers, steamfitters, cops, and firemen became the focus of the anti-discrimination drive waged by the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department.

The dilemma inherent in using racial preference to remedy past discrimination is sharply reflected in Justice William Brennan's 1976 majority opinion upholding the award of retroactive seniority to blacks in *Franks v. Bowman Transportation Co., Inc.*, and in the dissenting opinion of Justice Lewis Powell.

Brennan wrote that retroactive seniority was essential for the victim of discrimination, because without it he will never obtain his rightful place in the hierarchy of seniority according to which these various employment benefits are distributed. He will perpetually remain subordinate to persons who, but for the illegal discrimination, would have been, in respect to entitlement to these benefits, his inferiors.

Powell, on the other hand, contended that the award of retroactive seniority would penalize "the rights and expectations of perfectly innocent employees. The economic benefits awarded discrimination victims would be derived not at the expense of the employer but at the expense of other workers."

The intensity of the conflict over affirmative action can be seen in less abstract terms in Birmingham, Alabama. Not until 1968—103 years after the end of the Civil War—did the Birmingham fire department hire its first black fireman. Throughout all those years blacks were systematically denied the opportunity not only of employment but also of building seniority and learning the promotional ropes. Legal proceedings were initiated against the city in 1974, the year the second black fire-

man was hired. Richard Arrington, Birmingham's first black mayor, was elected in 1979, and two years later the city agreed to a consent decree providing that every white hire or promotion would be matched, one for one, by a black hire or promotion, as long as blacks were available who had fulfilled basic test requirements.

In 1983 James Henson, a white fireman, and Carl Cook, a black fireman, both took the Birmingham Fire Department test for lieutenant. Both passed, but Henson ranked sixth among all who took the test, with a score of 192, while Cook ranked eighty-fifth, with a score of 122. Under the consent decree Cook was promoted to lieutenant and Henson was not.

Henson became part of a group of whites attempting to challenge the consent decree. He argued, "I can understand that blacks had been historically discriminated against. I can also understand why people would want to be punitive in correcting it. Somebody needs to pay for this. But they want me to pay for it, and I didn't have anything to do with it. I was a kid when all this went on."

Cook countered, "Say your father robs a bank, takes the money and buys his daughter a Mercedes, and then buys his son a Porsche and his wife a home in the high-rent district. Then they discover he has embezzled the money. He has to give the cars and house back. And the family starts to cry: 'We didn't do anything.' The same thing applies to what the whites have to say. The fact is, sometimes you have to pay up. If a wrong has been committed, you have to right that wrong."

The Birmingham case represents an extreme: pitting white and black workers against each other in a competition for government-controlled jobs and employment benefits. Over time these racial divisions reverberated in Birmingham's political system. Once, every elected official in this city was a Democrat; now racial conflict has begun to translate into a local partisan realignment. By the end of the 1980s Jefferson County, which encompasses Birmingham, had its eighteen seats in the state House of Representatives split between blacks and whites. In partisan terms there were eight black Democrats, one white Democrat, and nine white Republicans. Among the white Republican state representatives was Billy Gray, a former president of the Firefighters Union. Race had become central to establishing partisan difference.

The same zero-sum element of affirmative action in employment is applicable to higher education. "We are committed to a program of affirmative action, and we want to make the university representative of the population of the state as a whole," James A. Blackburn, the dean of admissions at the University of Virginia, said in 1988. "That means fewer spaces for the traditional mainstream white students who have come here from around the country. . . . If you were looking at the academic credentials, you would say Virginia has it upside down. We take more in the groups with weaker credentials and make it harder for those with stronger credentials."

Reagan and Race

EXPLLOSIVE FORCES—STAGNANT INCOMES, DECLINING numbers of manufacturing jobs, inflation-driven increases in marginal tax rates, sharply accelerating welfare dependency, skyrocketing crime, soaring illegitimacy, and affirmative-action competition for jobs and college placement—began to reach the point of combustion in the mid-to-late 1970s. Demo-

ty—the original clarion call of the civil-rights movement—became the center-right position, the core of the new conservative egalitarian populism. Republican and Democratic differences over what "equal opportunity" meant reflected, in part, differences in the opinions of whites and blacks. By the 1980 election the ideological divergence had extended beyond issues of civil rights to basic questions about the role and responsibilities of the federal government. In 1980 blacks who believed that it was the responsibility of government to provide jobs outnumbered those who contended that "government should just let every person get ahead on his own" by a margin of 70–30, according to National Election Studies poll data. Whites, however, split in the opposite direction, contending by a 62–38 margin that government should just let "everyone get ahead on his own" rather than guaranteeing work.

Responses to this question also revealed the extent to which ideology, voting patterns, and race had become commingled. In addition to polarizing blacks and whites, the question was found to polarize Reagan and Carter voters, with Carter getting 80 percent of those who most

Nixon's re-election campaign developed a relatively comprehensive Republican racial strategy stressing whenever possible the costs of remedies for discrimination.

crats failed to recognize the threat these forces represented; leaders of the party were given false comfort by the belief that Watergate had done irreparable harm to the Republicans.

The importance of race in the chain of events that brought Ronald Reagan to the White House—from the Great Inflation of the 1970s to the California tax revolt—cannot be overestimated. Reagan, echoing Goldwater from sixteen years before, strengthened the image of the Republicans as the party of racial conservatism. Under Reagan in 1980 the percentage of voters who said the Republican Party was "not likely" to help minorities shot up to 66 percent (from 40 percent in 1976), while those who said that the party would help minorities collapsed to 11 percent (from 33 percent). Unlike Goldwater in 1964, however, Reagan in 1980 demonstrated that racial conservatism was no longer a liability—that in fact it was a clear asset—as his party made gains at every level of electoral competition from state legislative seats to the White House.

Under Reagan the Republican Party in 1980 was able to stake out a conservative civil-rights stand that won strong majority support. Advocacy of "equal opportuni-

ty" strongly supported government intervention to provide work, and Reagan winning 79 percent of those most strongly opposed to such intervention.

In a parallel split, Carter received 93 percent of the vote from those citizens, white and black, who most strongly supported government efforts "to improve the social and economic position of blacks," while Reagan got 71 percent of those who felt most adamantly that "the government should not make any special effort to help because they should help themselves."

Race, ideology, and partisanship had become inextricably linked, a linkage that empowered the Republican Party in its new populism. Lee Atwater, who ran southern operations for the 1980 campaign and managed George Bush's 1988 campaign, has argued, "In the 1980 campaign we were able to make the establishment, insofar as it is bad, the government. In other words, big government was the enemy, not big business. If the people are thinking that the problem is that taxes are too high and government interferes too much, then we are doing our job. But if they get to the point where they say the real problem is that rich people aren't paying taxes, that Republicans are protecting the realtors and so forth, then

I think the Democrats are going to be in pretty good shape. The *National Enquirer* readership is the exact voter I'm talking about. There are always some stories in there about some multimillionaire that has five Cadillacs and hasn't paid taxes since 1974, or so-and-so Republican congressman hasn't paid taxes since he got into Congress. And they'll have another set of stories of a guy sitting around in a big den with liquor saying so-and-so fills his den with liquor using food stamps." So what determines whether conservative or liberal egalitarianism is ascendant, Atwater says, is "which one of those establishments the public sees as a bad guy."

Reagan focused on the right-wing populist strategy described by Atwater, playing on the combustible mix of race, big government, and white working-class anger. One of Reagan's favorite anecdotes was the inflated story of a Chicago "welfare queen" with "eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards" whose "tax-free income alone is over \$150,000." The food-stamp program, in turn, was a vehicle to let "some young fellow ahead of you buy T-bone steak" while "you were standing in a checkout line with your package of hamburger."

Such implicitly race-laden images, and the values conflict associated with welfare and food stamps, furthered the Republican Party's efforts to expand beyond its traditional base and establish a sustained policy majority—which supported the first major retrenchment of the liberal government policies of the 1930s and the 1960s, ranging from assaults on labor to a broad attempt to dismantle the civil-rights regulatory structure and to overturn court rulings favoring minorities. In direct contrast to the "bottom-up" coalition of the New Deal Democratic Party, the new Republican presidential majority was—and is—a "top-down" coalition.

What "Fairness"—to Whom?

WHILE THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION REPEATEDLY stressed the costs to white America of civil-rights enforcement, especially affirmative-action remedies, the Democratic Party, deliberately or inadvertently, continued to find itself identified with those costs. Throughout the 1984 campaign Walter Mondale was repeatedly enmeshed in negotiations with Jesse Jackson, with organized labor, with feminist groups, and, most damaging of all, with those seeking to raise taxes to fuel what many voters saw as an intrusive federal government. The vulnerability of the Democratic Party was reflected in the deeply hostile public reaction to Mondale's proposal to raise \$30 billion in new revenues to "promote fairness."

The Democratic "fairness" message in 1984 was viewed by a crucial sector of the white electorate through the prism of race. The Analysis Group, reporting on the views of white Democratic defectors in Macomb County, Michigan, found that

conventional Democratic themes, like opportunity and fairness, are now invested with all the cynicism and racism that has come to characterize these sessions [focus groups]. In effect, the themes and Party symbols have been robbed of any meaning for these Democratic defectors. On hearing the term "fairness," these voters recall, on the one hand, "racial minorities" or "some blacks kicking up a storm," and on the other hand, "only politics" or politicians who are "lying." It never occurred to these voters that the Democrats were referring to the middle class.

Similar views abound among white voters in such communities as Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Chicago, and rural East Texas. These views are particularly devastating to the Democratic Party because fairness has become a central Democratic theme. The 1980 Democratic platform declared, "In all of our economic programs, the one overriding principle *must be fairness*." The platform of four years later asserted, "A nation is only as strong as its commitment to justice and equality. Today, *a corrosive unfairness* eats at the underpinnings of our society." (Emphases added.)

In addition, fairness remains a strong and legitimate issue for the legions of black Democratic voters. "The issues that concern working-class minorities comprise the traditional 'fairness' agenda of jobs, housing, welfare, and education," the voter study by CRG Communications found. "They want more benefits for themselves and their children. [They] strongly assert the validity of the 'fairness' theme. They believe that they are entitled to certain governmental benefits and view the diminishment of those benefits as a betrayal of a trust."

The association in the minds of many white vot-



ers of "fairness" with "fairness to minorities" has made it very difficult for the Democratic Party to capitalize on the striking increase in the disparity of income over the past decade not only between rich and poor but also between the working and lower-middle classes and the rich. During the 1980s the top one percent saw after-tax family income grow by 87 percent, from \$213,675 in 1980 to \$399,697 in 1990 (both figures in 1990 dollars); families just above the median, in the sixth decile, saw their after-tax income grow by only three percent, from \$25,964 in 1980 to \$26,741 in 1990.

In the 1988 election no one knew better than Michael Caccitolo, the Republican committeeman of Chicago's 23rd Ward, the difficulty of the Democratic Party's struggle to revive the issue of fairness among the once-Democratic voters of southwest Chicago. "Every night I sit at home and watch the news," he said. "I see Jesse [Jackson] up there talking about 'black empowerment, our people,' and that's sending a message out there that no Democratic precinct captain can possibly overcome. When the Dan Ryan [Expressway] was being built, the old lady from Operation Push [Rev. Willie Barrow, at that time the president of Jackson's Operation Push] comes out and says, 'We are going to close the Dan Ryan down unless we get more blacks on construction.' The people in the neighborhood remember that. Nobody threatened to close the Dan Ryan down to get Polish people on. And they [city and state officials] backed down and they gave a bunch of black guys entry-level jobs. And look who they threw off

and got sent back to the neighborhood and told, 'Get on unemployment.' All it takes is two or three of them. Would you define them as Republican precinct captains? No. Is it advantageous for the Republicans to watch a guy like that sitting in a tavern drinking his beer and telling the story about how he got bumped? And then all of a sudden it's six o'clock and [on TV] it's Jesse. It's bad and it ain't going to get better."

The Signal of "Crime"

IN 1988 THE BUSH CAMPAIGN ASSEMBLED AND DEPLOYED a range of symbols and images designed to tap into voters' submerged anxieties about race, culture, rights, and values—the anxieties that had helped to fuel the conservative politics of the post-civil-rights era. The symbols of the Bush campaign—Willie Horton, the ACLU, the death penalty, the Pledge of Allegiance, the flag—and rhetoric such as "no new taxes," the "L-word," and "Harvard boutique liberal" conjured up the criminal defendants'- and prisoners'-rights movements, black crime, permissive liberal elites, a revenue-hungry state, eroding traditional values, tattered patriotism, and declining American prestige.

Willie Horton represented, for crucial sectors of the electorate, the consequences of an aggressively expansive liberalism—a liberalism running up against majority public opinion, against traditional values, and, to a certain degree, against common sense. Horton came to stand for liberalism's blurring of legitimate goals, such as helping prisoners judged suitable for rehabilitation (prisoners, for example, without long records of violence), with the illegitimate goal, in the majority view, of "coddling" violent and dangerous criminals whom much of society judges irredeemable.

Republican strategists recognized that the furloughing of Willie Horton epitomized an evolution of the far-reaching rights movement, an evolution resented and disapproved of by significant numbers of voters. These voters saw crime as one of a number of social and moral problems aggravated by liberalism. The evolving rights movement was seen as extending First Amendment privileges to hard-core pornography, as allowing welfare recipients to avoid responsibility for supporting their children, as fostering drug use, illegitimacy, homosexual promiscuity, and an AIDS epidemic. All these led, in turn, to demands on taxpayers to foot skyrocketing social-service and health-care bills.

"Crime" became a shorthand signal, to a crucial group of white voters, for broader issues of social disorder, evoking powerful ideas about authority, status, morality, self-control, and race. "On no other issue is the dividing line so clear, and on no other issue is my opponent's philosophy so completely at odds with mine, and I would say with the common-sense attitudes of the American people, than on the issue of crime," Bush declared in an Oc-

tober 7, 1988, campaign speech to police officers in Xenia, Ohio, adding,

There are some—and I would list my opponent among them—who have wandered far off the clear-cut path of common sense and have become lost in the thickets of liberal sociology. Just as when it comes to foreign policy, they always “Blame America First,” when it comes to crime and criminals, they always seem to “Blame Society First.” . . . [Criminal justice under Dukakis is] a “Twilight Zone” world where prisoners’ “right of privacy” has more weight than the citizen’s right to safety.

The Racial Chasm

THE DIVISIVE POWER OF RACE AND RACE-INFUSED preoccupations with values, class, and social disorder endured throughout the 1980s, reverberating across the electorate. Differences of opinion between blacks and whites intensified over the decade. A 1989 voter study conducted by KRC Research and Consulting for Democrats For the 90’s, a private organization affiliated with the Democratic Party, revealed the extent to which key white Democratic voters “take issue with the Democratic rhetoric of representing the ‘middle class and the poor.’ These [voters] perceive themselves to be neither rich nor poor, and they do not like being referred to in the same breath as ‘the poor.’ They describe themselves as ‘working people.’” Black urban Democratic voters, conversely, “feel that the country and the Democratic Party are increasingly racist and that the party cares little for their needs and interests.”

Divisions between the races have emerged on a host of fronts. On the basic question of whether judges and

courts treat whites and blacks evenhandedly, 56 percent of white New Yorkers in a 1988 WCBS-*New York Times* poll said they believed that the system was fair and 27 percent said the system favored one race over another, with that 27 percent evenly split between those who saw black favoritism and those who saw white favoritism. Among black New Yorkers only 30 percent saw the system as fair, and 49 percent saw it as unfair, with the overwhelming majority of those who perceived unfairness seeing a bias in favor of whites.

Such highly controversial cases as the 1987 allegations of rape by Tawana Brawley and the 1984 shooting by the “subway vigilante” Bernhard Goetz of four black teenagers provoked sharply divergent views from blacks and from whites. After a grand jury determined in 1988 that Brawley had fabricated her story, 73 percent of white New Yorkers polled by WCBS-*New York Times* said she lied, while only 33 percent of blacks were prepared to make that judgment (18 percent said she told the truth, 14 percent said she didn’t know what happened to her, and 35 percent were unwilling to express an opinion). In the case of Goetz, the WCBS-*New York Times* poll found in 1985 that the proportion of whites describing themselves as supportive of the shooting, relative to those who were critical, was 50–37, as compared with 23–59 among blacks. Whites felt that Goetz was innocent of attempted murder by a margin of 47–18 (with the rest undecided), while blacks said that he was guilty by a margin of 42–19. (Hispanics sided more with whites than with blacks, favoring innocence over guilt at 41–23.)

Underlying these differences in public opinion is a profound gulf between blacks and whites over the cause of contemporary differences between the races. In seeking to clarify these differences of opinion, Ron Walters, a black political scientist at Howard University, has argued that the fundamental issue in the contemporary politics of race is “Who is responsible for our condition?” He says, “Once you draw the line on that, you draw the line on a lot of other race-value issues. Whites see blacks as generally responsible for their own situation, which means that whites refuse to take responsibility. Blacks see it differently. They believe there ought to be a continuing assumption of responsibility for their condition by the government, in addition to what they do for themselves. And therein lies a lot of the difference.”

This racially loaded confrontation over the issue of responsibility, both historical and contemporary, is perhaps best illustrated by the views of the political analysts Roger Wilkins and Patrick Buchanan. Wilkins, a black professor of history at George Mason University and a well-known commentator who served as an assistant attorney general in the Johnson Administration and was an editorial writer for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, has written,

The issue isn’t guilt. It’s responsibility. Any fair reading of history will find that since the mid-seventeenth cen-

BONSAI

Old man, precarious
on splayed feet,

leaning over the rim
of the known world,

gnarled, angled
(as we imagine age),

short of breadth,
he speaks of the past,

knowing in his roots
many tall stories.

—Leonard Cochrane

century whites have oppressed some blacks so completely as to disfigure their humanity. Too many whites point to the debased state of black culture and institutions as proof of the inferiority of the blacks they have mangled. . . . [The logical implication] is simple: black people simply need to pull up their socks. That idea is wrong and must be resisted. . . . Like it or not, slavery, the damage from legalized oppression during the century that followed emancipation, and the racism that still infects the entire nation follow a direct line to ghetto life today.

On the other side, Buchanan, an Irish Catholic who was a ranking conservative strategist for the Nixon and Reagan administrations and remains a widely followed political columnist and television commentator of the hard right, has written,

Why did liberalism fail black America? Because it was built on a myth, the myth of the Kerner Commission, that the last great impediment to equality in America was 'white racism.' That myth was rooted in one of the oldest of self-delusions: It is because you are rich that I am poor. My problems are your fault. You owe me!

There was a time when white racism did indeed block black progress in America, but by the time of the Kerner Commission ours was a nation committed to racial justice. . . .

The real root causes of the crisis in the underclass are twofold. First, the old character-forming, conscience-forming institutions—family, church, and school—have collapsed under relentless secular assault; second, as the internal constraints on behavior were lost among the black poor, the external barriers—police, prosecutors, and courts—were systematically undermined. . . .

What the black poor need more than anything today is a dose of the truth. Slums are the products of the people who live there. Dignity and respect are not handed out like food stamps; they are earned and won. . . .

The first step to progress, for any group, lies in the admission that its failures are, by and large, its own fault, that success can come only through its own efforts, that, while the well-intentioned outsider may help, he or she is no substitute for personal sacrifice.

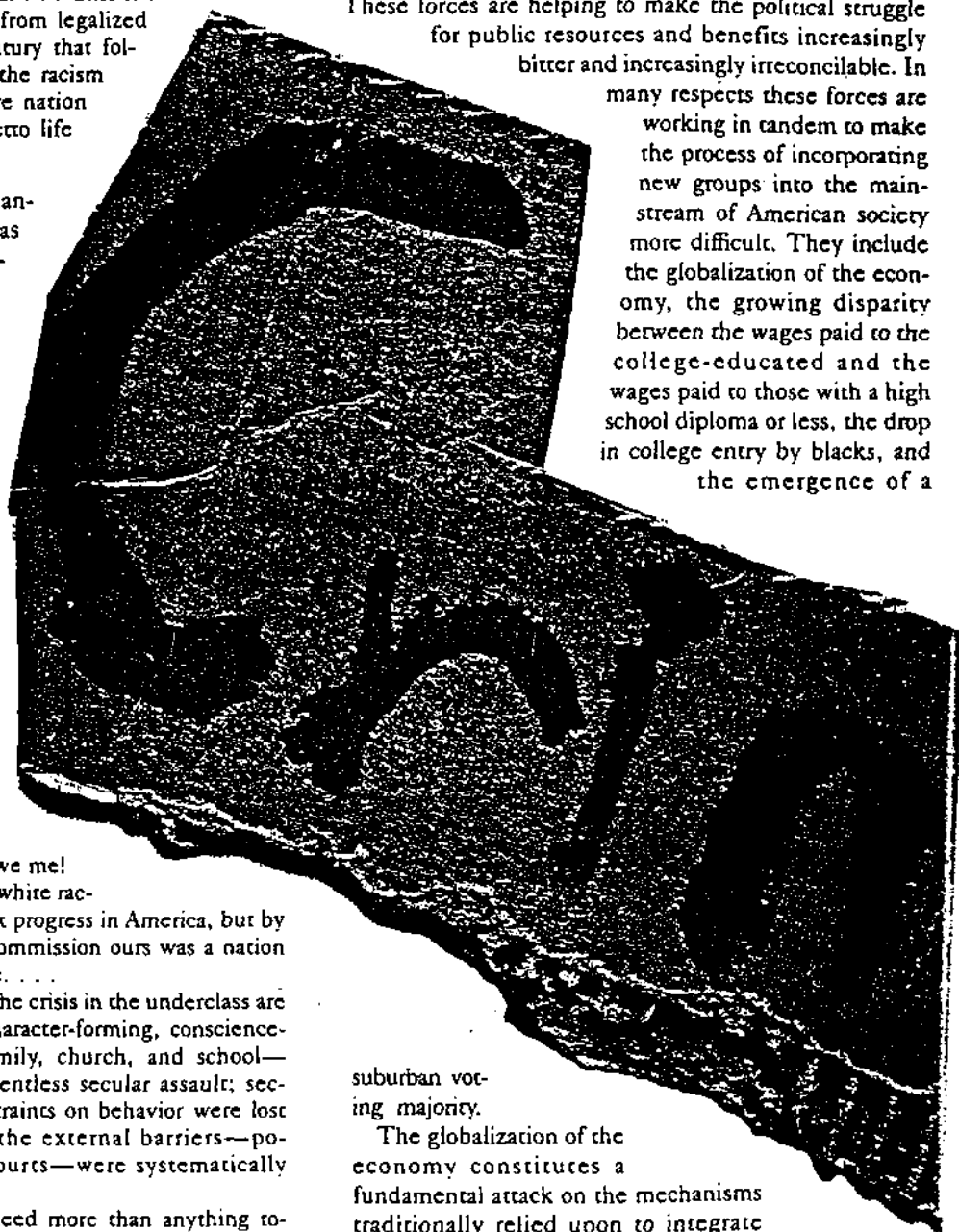
Can America Afford Affirmative Action?

THE CONFLICT REPRESENTED BY WILKINS AND Buchanan is driven not only by a fundamental difference over values and responsibility but also by economic and demographic forces. These forces are helping to make the political struggle for public resources and benefits increasingly bitter and increasingly irreconcilable. In many respects these forces are working in tandem to make the process of incorporating new groups into the mainstream of American society more difficult. They include the globalization of the economy, the growing disparity between the wages paid to the college-educated and the wages paid to those with a high school diploma or less, the drop in college entry by blacks, and the emergence of a

suburban voting majority.

The globalization of the economy constitutes a fundamental attack on the mechanisms traditionally relied upon to integrate new untrained and poorly educated groups into the mainstream of American life. Before the internationalization of manufacturing, policies and practices ranging from widespread political patronage to legislation creating the pro-union National Labor Relations Board forced the incorporation of immigrant groups into the work force.

The threat represented by overseas competition ha-



thrust American companies into a battle for survival in which there is little or no room to accommodate the short-term costs of absorbing blacks and other previously excluded minority groups into the labor force. And while affirmative action performs for blacks and other minorities the same function that patronage performed for waves of immigrants from Ireland and southern Europe, it also imposes costs that place American companies at a disadvantage in international competition.

These costs lie at the core of the debate over the civil-rights bill of 1991. Although the issue of quotas has dominated public discussion of the civil-rights bill, the real battle is over legislating the precise cost to companies that affirmative-action programs will involve. In an attempt to overturn recent conservative rulings by the Supreme Court (now dominated by Republican appointees), the Democratic leadership of Congress has proposed legislation strictly limiting the use of ability tests and other hiring procedures with potentially discriminatory impact, even in the absence of discriminatory intent. If hiring or promotion procedures are found to have "adverse impact" on blacks—that is, if disproportionately more blacks (or other minorities) than whites are rejected—employers must demonstrate that such tests are essential for business operation and meet a stringent "business necessity" standard. The legislation would in effect overturn a 1989 Supreme Court decision, *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*, that allowed companies

to use ability tests and other hiring criteria that adversely affect blacks and Hispanics if such criteria met the far less stringent standard of "business justification."

Wards Cove explicitly declared that "there is no requirement that the challenged practice be 'essential' or 'indispensable' to the employer's business."

Such seemingly arcane and legalistic phrases as "business necessity" and "business justification" can have profound consequences.

If, for example, companies were permitted to use scores on ability tests as a hiring criterion, it would at present be a major setback to the hiring of blacks and Hispanics—unless scores were adjusted for differences among whites, blacks, Hispanics, and other groups (a scoring process

termed "within-group scoring," "within-group adjustment," or "race-norming").

The importance of restricted ability testing for the em-

ployment prospects of blacks and Hispanics has been documented in two book-length studies, *Ability Testing* (1982) and *Fairness in Employment Testing* (1989), by the National Research Council. On almost all ability tests studied, the council found (without engaging the unresolved issue of causes), blacks scored substantially below whites, and Hispanics scored somewhere in between. One study found, for example, that on average, if hiring were done strictly on the basis of ability-test scores, an employer selecting from a pool of 100 whites and 100 blacks would take only three blacks in the first twenty-three applicants chosen, and only six blacks in the first thirty-six. The differences in test-score results are reduced, but remain substantial, for blacks and whites of similar income and education.

The contemporary conflict over affirmative action is rooted in the issue of test scores. Everywhere from college admissions to hiring for jobs, tests have become a primary instrument for determining personal status, income, and security. On one side of the debate it is argued that the unrestricted use of ability tests imposes an extraordinary burden on blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities; on the other that prohibiting ability testing imposes costs on the economy in terms of lost productivity and efficiency.

The New Segregation

WHILE LOW-SKILL, ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS HAVE moved overseas to low-wage countries, the domestic job market has changed in ways that work to enlarge, rather than to lessen, disparities in the incomes of whites and of blacks. The growing demand for college-educated workers and the decline in demand for low-skill manual workers have in recent years substantially changed wage patterns.

From 1975 to 1988 the average earnings of entry-level workers with college or more-advanced degrees rose from about 130 percent to about 180 percent of the earnings of workers with high school diplomas. This shift was inherently damaging to blacks: in 1988, 13.1 percent of blacks between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four had college degrees, as compared with 24.5 percent of whites.

Compounding this disparity is a second development: just as the value of a college education has skyrocketed, the percentage of blacks between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four who go on to college and get a degree has fallen. From 1976 to 1988 the percentage of blacks aged eighteen to twenty-four enrolled in college fell from 22.6 to 21.1, while the percentage of whites rose from 27.1 to 31.3.

The effect of these two trends has been to undermine what was a powerful drive toward economic and educational equality between the races. In the ten years immediately following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the economy pushed the earnings of both blacks and whites who were in the work force steadily upward.

There was a strong convergence of shared prosperity and growing racial equality. From 1963 to 1973 average weekly earnings for everyone grew from \$175.17 to \$198.35, in 1977 inflation-adjusted dollars. As wages rose for whites and blacks, income differentials were sharply reduced: from 1963 to 1977-1978 the difference between black and white wages dropped from the 45 percent range down to the 30 percent range, a drop of about one percentage point a year. For younger, well-educated workers the gap had almost disappeared by the mid-1970s.

Starting in the late 1970s and continuing into the early 1980s, however, the situation began to change radically. While the income of college graduates continued to rise, the income of high school graduates began to fall. At the same time that the so-called "college wage premium" rose, the wage levels for job categories that employ disproportionately more whites (professionals, managers, and sales personnel) grew substantially faster than wage levels for those categories employing disproportionate numbers of blacks (machine operatives and clerical, service, and household workers).

The result has been a striking shift in racial wage pat-

The 1992 election will be the first in which the suburban vote, as determined from U.S. Census data, will be an absolute majority of the total electorate. From 1968 to 1988 the percentage of the presidential vote cast in suburbs grew from 35.6 percent to 48.3 percent, and there will be a gain of at least two percent by 1992 under current trends.

Suburban growth will in all likelihood profoundly change national politics, and will further deepen schisms between the public-policy interests of the two races. Although opinion polls show increasing support for government expenditures on education, health, recreation, and a range of other desired public services, a growing percentage of white voters are discovering that they can become fiscal liberals at the local *suburban* level while remaining conservative about federal spending. These voters can satisfy their need for government services through increased local expenditures, guaranteeing the highest possible return to themselves on their tax dollars, while continuing to demand austerity at the federal level. Suburbanization has permitted whites to satisfy liberal ideals revolving around activist government while keep-

*"Crime" became a shorthand
signal for broader issues of social disorder,
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terms. Starting at the end of the 1970s the convergence between the incomes of working blacks and whites—a convergence that had the potential in the long run to enlarge the economic common ground between the races—came to a halt. In the late 1970s black wages abruptly stopped catching up to white wages, with the differential stagnating at roughly 30 percent.

For a Democratic Party seeking to build a majority coalition aligning the interests of blacks and whites, this was a grave blow. The failure of the trend toward wage equality to continue has encouraged the conflict between black and white world views, in which black gains are seen as a cost to whites, and white advantages are seen as a manifestation of racism.

Race and the Suburbs

JUST AS WAGE AND EDUCATION PATTERNS ARE WORKING to undermine what was a trend toward economic equality between the races, the dominant demographic trend in the nation—suburbanization—is working to intensify the geographic separation of the races, particularly of whites from poor blacks.

ing to a minimum the number of blacks and poor people who share in government largesse.

For example, the residents of Gwinnett County, Georgia, which is one of the fastest-growing suburban jurisdictions in the United States, heavily Republican (76 percent for Bush), affluent, and predominantly white (93.6 percent)—have been willing to tax and spend on their own behalf as liberally as any Democrats. County voters have in recent years approved a special recreation tax; all school, library, and road bond issues; and a one percent local sales tax.

The accelerated growth of the suburbs has made it possible for many Americans to pursue certain civic ideals (involvement in schools, cooperation in community endeavors, a willingness to support and to pay for public services) within a smaller universe, separate and apart from the consuming failure (crime, welfarism, decay) of the older cities.

If a part of the solution to the devastating problems of the underclass involves investment in public services, particularly in the public school systems of the nation's major cities, the growing division between city and suburb lessens white self-interest in making such an invest-

ment. In 1986 fully 27.5 percent of all black schoolchildren, and 30 percent of all Hispanic schoolchildren, were enrolled in the twenty-five largest central-city school districts. Only 3.3 percent of all white students were in these same twenty-five districts. In other words, 96.7 percent of white children are educated outside these decaying school systems.

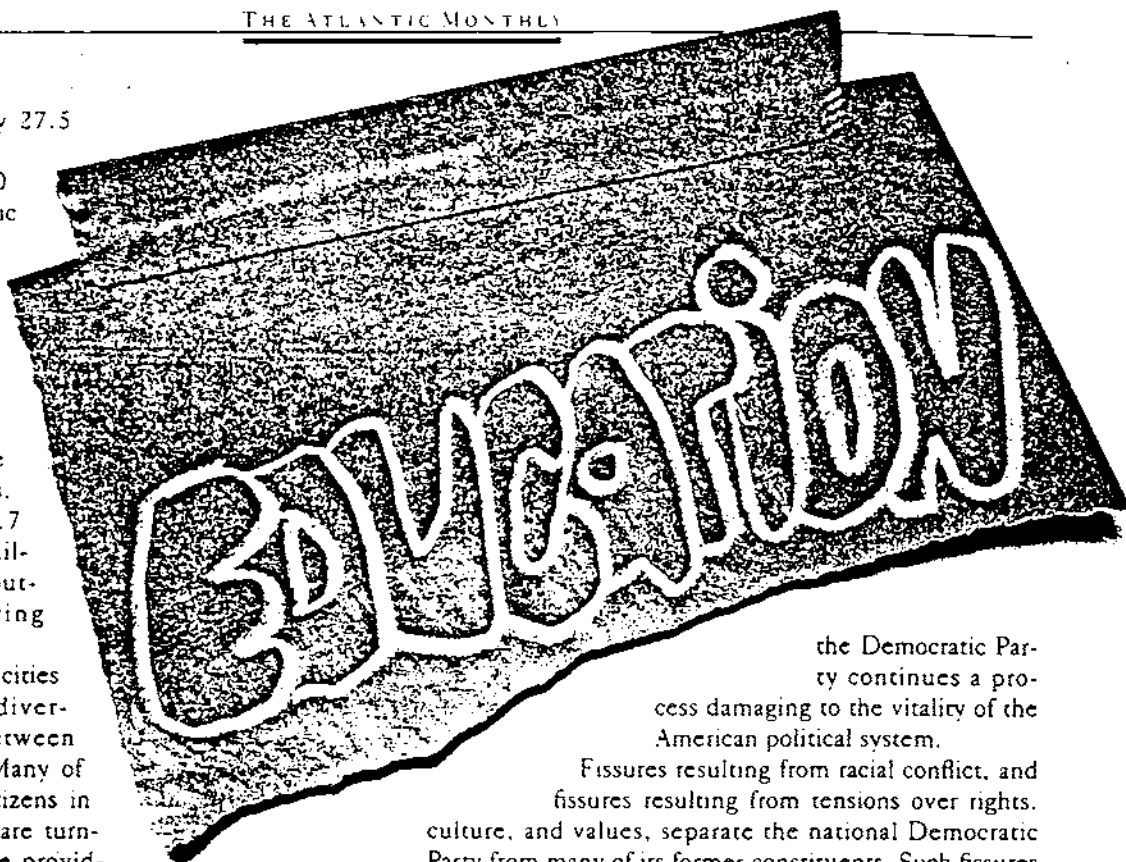
Even within major cities there is a growing divergence of interest between blacks and whites. Many of the more affluent citizens in racially mixed cities are turning to private service providers, including independent and parochial schools, private police and security services, proliferating private recreational clubs, and private transportation companies.

The End of the Democratic Party?

IN POLITICAL TERMS RACE CLEARLY REMAINS A REPUBLICAN trump card, while racial fissures within the Democratic Party leave it weakened and vulnerable.

On a broad strategic scale the Republican Party over the past two years has taken steps to capture the fairness issue and to defuse charges of Republican racism, initiating an aggressive drive to win the support of affluent blacks and even running, on occasion, fully competitive black candidates. Income trends in the black community suggest a reservoir of prospective Republican support: the income of the top fifth of black families has over the past two decades been growing at a significantly faster rate than the income of the top fifth of white families. Trends among the well-to-do of both races have led to increasing racial equality of income, in sharp contrast to trends among the least affluent blacks and whites: the bottom fifth of the black community is falling steadily further behind the bottom fifth of the white community.

Insofar as the Republican drive to win support among affluent middle-class blacks is successful, and insofar as the party is able to insulate itself from charges of racism, it will further isolate the national Democratic Party as the party of poor, underclass black America. The isolation of



the Democratic Party continues a process damaging to the vitality of the American political system.

Fissures resulting from racial conflict, and fissures resulting from tensions over rights, culture, and values, separate the national Democratic Party from many of its former constituents. Such fissures have forced the party to increase its dependence on special interests in order to maintain its congressional majority.

Without the resource of plurality voter loyalty, Democratic members of the House of Representatives—the seemingly unshakable bastion of Democratic power in Washington—have come to rely increasingly on an essentially corrupt system of campaign finance, on the perquisites of incumbency, on pork-barrel spending, and on the gerrymandering of districts in order to thwart continuing demographic and ideological shifts favoring their opponents.

As recently as the mid-1970s the Democratic Party was able to portray itself as the party of political reform, battling a Republican Party dominated by moneyed interests. Now Democrats in the House of Representatives are more dependent on institutionalized special-interest groups than are their Republican adversaries. In 1990 the majority—52.6 percent—of the campaign contributions received by Democratic incumbent House members running for re-election came from political-action committees, while the percentage of support from individual donors represented a steady decline, from 44.8 percent in 1984 to 38.0 percent in 1990. Republican House incumbents, in contrast, received 50.9 percent of their financial support from individuals in 1988, and 41.1 percent from PACs, in a pattern virtually the mirror image of the Democrats'. In 1988 not only did labor PACs follow tradition by giving far more to Democratic House incumbents (\$16.7 million) than to Republican incumbents (\$1.9 million), but corporate PACs—the contemporary version of "mon-

eyed interests"—gave more money to Democratic House incumbents (\$15.7 million) than to their Republican counterparts (\$13.5 million). While helpful to incumbents in the short term, this kind of contribution pattern weakens any claim the Democratic Party may make to provide popular representation.

The Democratic reliance on special interests in fact extends beyond Congress to a second party stronghold, the nation's major cities. The public's ability to direct essential services—most important, the public school system—has been lost in varying degrees to institutionalized bureaucracies. Within urban school systems faced with declining tax bases and lessened federal support, associations and unions representing teachers, principals, administrators, clerical staff, custodians, carpenters, and security guards have become politically influential in protecting their members' tenure while carefully limiting their responsibility for meeting the larger goal—that of producing well-educated students.

Democratic vulnerability on this terrain is perhaps nowhere better reflected than in Detroit—possibly the most Democratic municipality in the nation, a city with one of the nation's worst school systems and perhaps the worst delivery of public services. In recent years Detroit voters elected a black Republican school-board president and a black Republican city councilman. Both were elected on platforms of promises to break through bureaucratic ossification and revive competitive market forces, through parental choice in school assignments, through private alternatives to public services, and through the transfer of power and responsibility from administrators downtown to principals and teachers in the trenches.

The congressional wing of the Democratic Party has become locked into an alliance with the forces of reaction—with interests and bureaucracies conducting largely futile efforts to resist, among other things, the consequences of international economic change. The Democratic Party has, in many respects, discovered that survival depends on the creation of a congressional party entrusted by the people to look after parochial interests—from water projects to rice subsidies to highways to health care for the elderly. However, to the degree that presidential elections have become referenda on the nexus of social, moral, racial, and cultural issues in the broadest sense, the Democratic Party has in five of the past six elections been at a competitive disadvantage.

The losers in this process are not only the Democratic Party and liberalism but also the constituencies and alliances they are obliged to represent. The fracturing of the Democratic coalition has permitted the moral, social, and economic ascendancy of the affluent in a nation with a strong egalitarian tradition, and has permitted a diminution of economic reward and of social regard for those who simply work for a living, black and white. Democratic liberalism—the political ideology that helped to pro-

duce a strong labor movement, that extended basic rights to all citizens, and that has nurtured free political and artistic expression—has lost the capacity to represent effectively the allied interests of a biracial, cross-class coalition. Liberalism, discredited among key segments of the electorate, is no longer a powerful agent of constructive change. Instead, liberal values, policies, and allegiances have become a source of bitter conflict among groups that were once common beneficiaries of the progressive state.

The failures of Democratic liberalism pose a larger problem. With the decline of liberal hegemony, conservatism has gained control over national elections and, to a significant degree, over the national agenda. No matter what its claims, conservatism has served for much of the twentieth century as the political and philosophical arm of the affluent. Entrusting the economic interests of the poor and the working class to such a philosophy risks serious damage to both groups.

That conservatism represents the interests of the well-to-do is to be expected—and even respected—as part of the system of representation in American democracy. A far more threatening development is that as liberalism fails to provide effective challenge, the country will lack the dynamism that only a sustained and vibrant insurgency of those on the lower rungs can provide. Such an insurgency, legitimately claiming for its supporters an equal opportunity to participate and to compete and to gain a measure of justice, is critical, not only to the politics and the economics of the nation but also to the vitality of the broader culture and to democracy itself.

Over the past twenty-five years liberalism has avoided confronting, and learning from, the experience of voter rejection, as institutional power and a sequence of extraneous events—ranging from Watergate to the 1981–1982 recession—have worked to prop up the national Democratic Party. For the current cycle to reach closure, and for there to be a breakthrough in stagnant partisan competition, the Democratic Party may have either to suffer a full-scale domestic defeat, including (to deal in the extremes of possibility) loss of control of the Senate and the House, or at the very least to go through the kind of nadir—intraparty conflict, challenge to ideological orthodoxy, in short, a form of civil war—experienced by the Republican Party and the right in the 1960s. The original strength of Democratic liberalism was its capacity to build majorities out of minorities—a strength that comes only from a real understanding of what it means to be out of power, from direct engagement in the struggle to build a majority, and from an understanding of what is worth fighting for in this struggle. Recapturing the ability to build a winning alliance requires learning the full meaning of defeat, and developing a conscious awareness of precisely what the electorate will support politically, what it will not, and when—if ever—something more important is at stake. □

PUT ON A HAPPY FACE

Masking the differences between blacks and whites

By Benjamin DeMott

At the movies these days, questions about racial injustice have been amicably resolved. Watch *Pulp Fiction* or *Congo* or *A Little Princess* or any other recent film in which both blacks and whites are primary characters and you can, if you want, forget about race. Whites and blacks greet one another on the screen with loving candor, revealing their common humanity. In *Pulp Fiction*, an armed black mobster (played by Samuel L. Jackson) looks deep into the eyes of an armed white thief in the middle of a holdup (played by Tim Roth) and shares his version of God's word in Ezekiel, whereupon the two men lay aside their weapons, both more or less redeemed. The moment inverts an earlier scene in which a white boxer (played by Bruce Willis) risks his life to save another black mobster (played by Ving Rhames), who is being sexually tortured as a prelude to his execution.

Pulp Fiction (gross through July: \$107 million) is one of a series of films suggesting that the beast of American racism is tamed and harmless. Close to the start of *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (gross through July: \$95 million) the camera finds a white man wearing sandwich boards on the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 138th Street in Harlem. The boards carry a horrific legend: I HATE NIGGERS. A group of young blacks approach the man with murderous intent, bearing guns and knives. They are figures straight out of a national nightmare—ugly, enraged, terrifying. No problem. A black man, again played by Jackson, appears and rescues the white man, played by Willis. The black man and white man come to know each other well. In time the white man declares flatly to the black, "I need you more

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than you need me." A moment later he charges the black with being a racist—with not liking whites as much as the white man likes blacks—and the two talk frankly about their racial prejudices. Near the end of the film, the men have grown so close that each volunteers to die for the other.

Pulp Fiction and *Die Hard with a Vengeance* follow the pattern of *Lethal Weapon 1, 2, and 3*, the Danny Glover/Mel Gibson buddy vehicles that collectively grossed \$357 million, and *White Men Can't Jump*, which, in the year of the L.A. riots, grossed \$76 million. In *White Men Can't Jump*, a white dropout, played by Woody Harrelson, ekes

out a living on black-dominated basketball courts in Los Angeles. He's arrogant and aggressive but never in danger because he has a black protector and friend, played by Wesley Snipes. At the movie's end, the white, flying above the hoop like a stereotypical black player, scores the winning basket in a two-on-two pickup game on an alley-oop pass from his black chum, whereupon the two men fall into each other's arms in joy. Later, the black friend agrees to find work for the white at the store he manages.

White (helpless): I gotta get a job. Can you get me a job?

Black (affectionately teasing): Got any references?

White (shy grin): You.

Such dialogue is the stuff of romance. What's dreamed of and gained is a place where whites are unafraid of blacks, where blacks ask for and need nothing from whites, and where the sameness of the races creates a common fund of sweet content.* The details of the dream matter less than the force that makes it come true for both races, eliminating the constraints of objective reality and redistributing resources, status, and capabilities. That cleansing social force supersedes political and economic fact or policy; that force, improbably enough, is friendship.

Watching the beaming white men who know how to jump, we do well to remind ourselves of what the camera shot leaves out. Black infants die in America at twice the rate of white infants. (Despite the increased

*I could go on with examples of movies that deliver the good news of friendship: *Regarding Henry*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Forrest Gump*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Philadelphia*, *The Last Boy Scout*, *48 Hours I-II*, *Rising Sun*, *Iron Eagle I-II*, *Rudy*, *Sister Act*, *Hearts of Dixie*, *Betrayed*, *The Power of One*, *White Nights*, *Clara's Heart*, *Doc Hollywood*, *Cool Runnings*, *Places in the Heart*, *Trading Places*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Q & A*, *Platoon*, *A Mother's Courage: The Mary Thomas Story*, *The Unforgiven*, *The Air Up There*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Losing Isaiah*, *Smoke*, *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Speed*, etc.

numbers of middle-class blacks, the rates are diverging, with black rates actually rising.) One out of every two black children lives below the poverty line (as compared with one out of seven white children). Nearly four times as many black families exist below the poverty line as white families. More than 50 percent of African American families have incomes below \$25,000. Among black youths under age twenty, death by murder occurs nearly ten times as often as among whites. Over 60 percent of births to black mothers occur out of wedlock, more than four times the rate for white mothers. The net worth of the typical white household is ten times that of the typical black household. In many states, five to ten times as many blacks as whites age eighteen to thirty are in prison.

The good news at the movies obscures the bad news in the streets and confirms the Supreme Court's recent decisions on busing, affirmative action, and redistricting. Like the plot of *White Men Can't Jump*, the Court postulates the existence of a society no longer troubled by racism. Because black-white friendship is now understood to be the rule, there is no need for integrated schools or a congressional Black Caucus or affirmative action. The Congress and state governors can guiltlessly cut welfare, food assistance, fuel assistance, Head Start, housing money, fellowship money, vaccine money. Justice Anthony Kennedy can declare, speaking for the Supreme Court majority last June, that creating a world of genuine equality and sameness requires only that "our political system and our society cleanse themselves . . . of discrimination."

The deep logic runs as follows: *Yesterday white people didn't like black people, and accordingly suffered guilt, knowing that the dislike was racist and knowing also that as moral persons they would have to atone for the guilt. They would have to ante up for welfare and Head Start and halfway houses and free vaccine and midnight basketball and summer jobs for schoolkids and graduate fellowships for promising scholars and craft-union apprenticeships and so on, endlessly. A considerable and wasteful expense. But at length came the realization that by ending dislike or hatred it would be possible to end guilt, which in turn would mean an end to redress: no more wasteful ransom money. There would be but one requirement: the regular production and continuous showing forth of evidence indisputably proving that hatred has totally vanished from the land.*

I cannot tell the reader how much I would like to believe in this sunshine world. After the theater lights brighten and I've found coins for a black beggar on the way to my car and am driving home through downtown Springfield, Massachusetts, the world invented by *Die Hard* with a Vengeance and America's highest court gives way only slowly to the familiar urban vision in my windshield—homeless blacks on trash-strewn streets, black prostitutes staked out on a corner, and signs of a not very furtive drug trade. I know perfectly well that most African Americans

The movies reflect the larger dynamic of wish and dream. Day after day the nation's corporate ministries of culture churn out images of racial harmony. Millions awaken each morning to the friendly sight of Katie Couric nudging a perky elbow into good buddy Bryant Gumbel's side. My mailbox and millions of demographically similar others are choked with flyers from companies (Wal-Mart, Victoria's Secret) bent on publicizing both their wares and their social bona fides by displaying black and white models at cordial ease with one another. A torrent of goodwill messages about race arrives daily—revelations of corporate largesse, commercials, news features, TV specials, all proclaiming that whites like me feel strongly positive impulses of friendship for blacks and that those same admirable impulses are effectively eradicating racial differences, rendering blacks and whites the same. BellSouth TV commercials present children singing "I am the keeper of the world"—first a

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white child, then a black child, then a white child, then a black child. Because Dow Chemical likes black America, it recruits young black college grads for its research division and dramatizes, in TV commercials, their tearful-joyful partings from home. ("Son, show 'em what you got," says a black lad's father.) American Express shows an elegant black couple and an elegant white couple sitting together in a theater, happy in one another's company. (The couples share the box with an oversized Gold Card.) During the evening news I watch a black mom offer Robitussin to a miserably coughing white mom. Here's *People* magazine promoting itself under a photo of John Lee Hooker, the black bluesman. "We're these kinds of people, too," *People* claims in the caption. In the current production of *Hamlet* on Broadway, Horatio is played by a black actor. On *The 700 Club*, Pat Robertson joshes Ben Kinchlow, his black sidekick, about Ben's far-out ties.

What counts here is not the saccharine clumsiness of the interchanges but the bulk of them—the ceaseless, self-validating gestures of friendship, the humming, buzzing background theme: *All decent Americans extend the hand of friendship to African Americans; nothing but nothing is more auspicious for the African American future than this extended hand.* Faith in the miracle cure of racism by change-of-heart turns out to be so familiar as to have become unnoticeable. And yes, the faith has its benign aspect. Even as they nudge me and others toward belief in magic (instant pals and no-money-down equality), the images and messages of devoted relationships between blacks and whites do exert a humanizing influence.

Nonetheless, through these same images and messages the comfortable majority tells itself a fatuous untruth. Promoting the fantasy of painless answers, inspiring groundless self-approval among whites, joining the Supreme Court in treating "cleansing" as inevitable, the new orthodoxy of friendship incites culture-wide evasion, justifies one political step backward after another, and greases the skids along which, tomorrow, welfare block grants will slide into state highway-resurfacing budgets. Whites are part of the solution, says this orthodoxy, if we break out of the prison of our skin color, say hello, as equals, one-on-one, to a black stranger, and make a black friend. We're part of the problem if we have an aversion to black people or are frightened of them, or if we feel that the more distance we put between them and us the better, or if we're in the habit of asserting our superiority rather than acknowledging our common humanity. Thus we shift the problem away from politics—from black experience and the history of slavery—and perceive it as a matter of the suspicion and fear found within the white heart; solving the problem asks no more of us than that we work on ourselves, scrubbing off the dirt of ill will.

The approach miniaturizes, personalizes, and moralizes; it removes the large and complex dilemmas of race from the public sphere. It tempts audiences to see history as irrelevant and to regard feelings as decisive—to believe that the fate of black Americans is shaped mainly by events occurring in the hearts and minds of the privileged. And let's be frank: the orthodoxy of friendship feels nice. It practically consecrates self-flattery. The "good" Bill Clinton who attends black churches and talks with likable ease to fellow worshipers was campaigning when Los Angeles rioted in '92. "White Americans," he said, "are gripped by the isolation of their own experience. Too many still simply have no friends of other races and do not know any differently." Few black youths of working age in South-Central L.A. had been near enough to the idea of a job even to think of looking for work before the Rodney King verdict, but the problem, according to Clinton, was that whites need black friends.

Most of the country's leading voices of journalistic conscience (editorial writers, television anchorpersons, syndicated columnists) roundly endorse the doctrine of black-white friendship as a means of redressing the inequalities between the races. Roger Rosenblatt, editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and an especially deft supplier of warm and fuzzy senti-

ment, published an essay in *Family Circle* arguing that white friendship and sympathy for blacks simultaneously make power differentials vanish and create interracial identity between us, one by one. The author finds his exemplum in an episode revealing the personal sensitivity, to injured blacks, of one of his children.

"When our oldest child, Carl, was in high school," he writes, "he and two black friends were standing on a street corner in New York City one spring evening, trying to hail a taxi. The three boys were dressed decently and were doing nothing wild or threatening. Still, no taxi would pick them up. If a driver spotted Carl first, he might slow down, but he would take off again when he saw the others. Carl's two companions were familiar with this sort of abuse. Carl, who had never observed it firsthand before, burned with anger and embarrassment that he was the color of a world that would so mistreat his friends."

Rosenblatt notes that when his son "was applying to colleges, he wrote his essay on that taxi incident with his two black friends. ... He was able to articulate what he could not say at the time—how ashamed and impotent he felt. He also wrote of the power of their friendship, which has lasted to this day and has carried all three young men into the country that belongs to them. To all of us."

In this homily white sympathy begets interracial sameness in several ways. The three classmates are said to react identically to the cabdrivers' snub; i.e., they feel humiliated. "[Carl] could not find the words to express his humiliation and his friends *would* not express theirs."

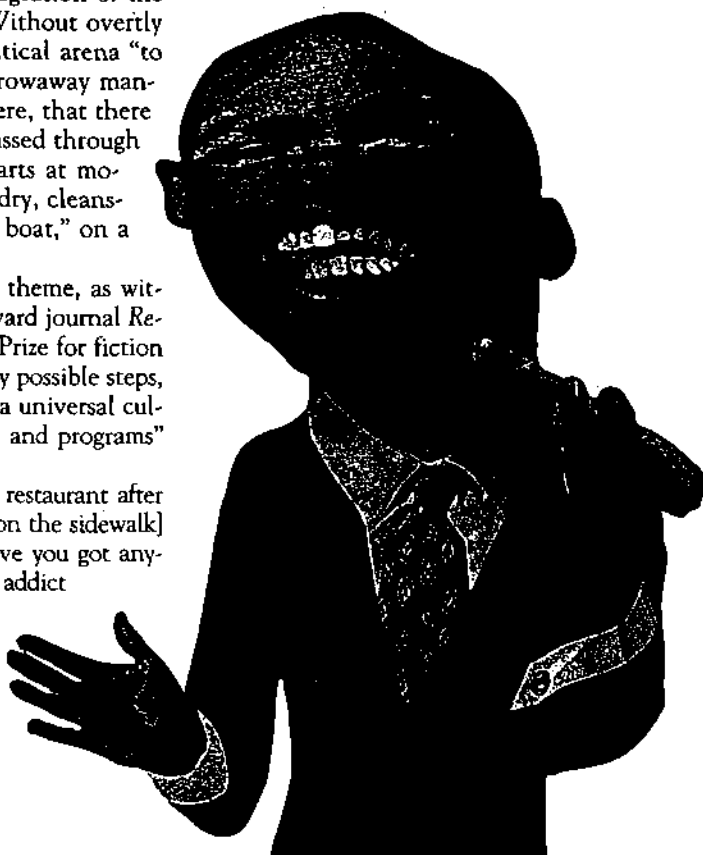
The anger that inspires the younger Rosenblatt's college-admission essay on racism is seen as identical with black anger. Friendship brings the classmates together as joint, equal owners of the land of their birth ("the country that belongs to [all of] them"). And Rosenblatt supplies a still larger vision of essential black-white sameness near the end of his essay: "Our proper hearts tell the truth," he declares, "which is that we are all in the same boat, rich and poor, black and white. We are helpless, wicked, heroic, terrified, and we need one another. We need to give rides to one another."

Thus do acts of private piety substitute for public policy while the possibility of urgent political action disappears into a sentimental haze. "If we're looking for a formula to ease the tensions between the races," Rosenblatt observes, then we should "attack the disintegration of the black community" and "the desperation of the poor." Without overtly mocking civil rights activists who look toward the political arena "to erase the tensions," Rosenblatt alludes to them in a throwaway manner, implying that properly adjusted whites look elsewhere, that there was a time for politicking for "equal rights" but we've passed through it. Now is a time in which we should listen to our hearts at moments of epiphany and allow sympathy to work its wizardry, cleansing and floating us, blacks and whites "all in the same boat," on a mystical undercurrent of the New Age.

Blacks themselves aren't necessarily proof against this theme, as witness a recent essay by James Alan McPherson in the Harvard journal *Reconstruction*. McPherson, who received the 1977 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his collection of stories *Elbow Room*, says that "the only possible steps, the safest steps ... small ones" in the movement "toward a universal culture" will be those built not on "ideologies and formulas and programs" but on experiences of personal connectedness.

"Just this past spring," he writes, "when I was leaving a restaurant after taking a [white] former student to dinner, a black [woman on the sidewalk] said to my friend, in a rasping voice, 'Hello, girlfriend. Have you got anything to spare?'" The person speaking was a female crack addict with a child who was also addicted. "But," writes McPherson, when the addict made her pitch to his dinner companion, "I saw in my friend's face an understanding and sympathy and a shining which transcended race and class."

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Her face reflected one human soul's connection with another. The magnetic field between the two women was charged with spiritual energy."

The writer points the path to progress through interpersonal gestures by people who "insist on remaining human, and having human responses. . . . Perhaps the best that can be done, now, is the offering of understanding and support to the few out of many who are capable of such gestures, rather than devising another plan to engineer the many into one."

The elevated vocabulary ("soul," "spiritual") beatifies the impulse to turn away from the real-life agenda of actions capable of reducing racial injustice. Wherever that impulse dominates, the rhetoric of racial sameness thrives, diminishing historical catastrophes affecting millions over centuries and inflating the significance of tremors of tenderness briefly troubling the heart or conscience of a single individual—the boy waiting for a cab, the woman leaving the restaurant. People forget the theoretically unforgettable—the caste history of American blacks, the connection between no schools for

longer than a century and bad school performance now, between hateful social attitudes and zero employment opportunities, between minority anguish and majority fear.

How could this way of seeing have become conventional so swiftly? How did the dogmas of instant equality insinuate themselves so effortlessly into courts and mass audiences alike? How can a white man like myself, who taught Southern blacks in the 1960s, find himself seduced—as I have been more than once—by the orthodoxy of friendship? In the civil rights era, the experience for many millions of Americans was one of discovery. A hitherto unimagined continent of human reality and history came into view, inducing genuine concern and at least a temporary setting aside of self-importance. I remember with utter clarity what I felt at Mary Holmes College in West Point, Mississippi, when a black student of mine was killed by tailgating rednecks; my fellow tutors and I were overwhelmed with how shamefully wrong a wrong could be. For a time, we were released from the prisons of moral weakness and ambiguity. In the year or two that followed—the mid-Sixties—the notion that some humans are more human than others, whites more human than blacks, appeared to have been overturned. The next step seemed obvious: society would have to admit that when one race deprives another of its humanity for centuries, those who have done the depriving are obligated to do what they can to restore the humanity of the deprived. The obligation clearly entailed the mounting of comprehensive long-term programs of developmental assistance—not guilt-money handouts—for nearly the entire black population. The path forward was unavoidable.

It was avoided. Shortly after the award of civil rights and the institution, in 1966, of limited preferential treatment to remedy employment and educational discrimination against African Americans, a measure of economic progress for blacks did appear in census reports. Not much, but enough to stimulate glowing tales of universal black advance and to launch the good-news barrage that continues to this day (headline in the *New York Times*, June 18, 1995: "Moving On Up: The Greening of America's Black Middle Class").

After Ronald Reagan was elected to his first term, the new dogma of black-white sameness found ideological support in the form of criticism of so-called coddling. Liberal activists of both races were berated by critics of both races for fostering an allegedly enfeebling psychology of dependency that discouraged African Americans from committing themselves to individual self-development. In 1988, the charge was passionately voiced in an essay in these pages, "I'm Black, You're White, Who's Innocent?" by Shelby Steele, who



attributed the difference between black rates of advance and those of other minority groups to white folks' pampering. Most blacks, Steele claimed, could make it on their own—as voluntary immigrants have done—were they not held back by devitalizing programs that presented them, to themselves and others, as somehow dissimilar to and weaker than other Americans. This argument was all-in-the-same-boatism in a different key; the claim remained that progress depends upon recognition of black-white sameness. Let us see through superficial differences to the underlying, equally distributed gift for success. Let us teach ourselves—in the words of the Garth Brooks tune—to ignore “the color of skin” and “look for . . . the beauty within.”

Still further support for the policy once known as “do-nothingism” came from points-of-light barkers, who held that a little something might perhaps be done if accompanied by enough publicity. Nearly every broadcaster and publisher in America moves a bale of reportage on pro bono efforts by white Americans to speed the advance of black Americans. Example: McDonald's and the National Basketball Association distribute balloons when they announce they are addressing the dropout problem with an annual “Stay in School” scheme that gives schoolkids who don't miss a January school day a ticket to an all-star exhibition. The publicity strengthens the idea that these initiatives will nullify the social context—the city I see through my windshield. Reports of white philanthropy suggest that the troubles of this block and the next should be understood as phenomena in transition. The condition of American blacks need not be read as the fixed, unchanging consequence of generations of bottom-caste existence. Edging discreetly past a beggar posted near the entrance to Zabar's or H&H Bagels, or, while walking the dog, stepping politely around black men asleep on the sidewalk, we need not see ourselves and our fellows as uncaring accomplices in the acts of social injustice.

Yet more powerful has been the ceaseless assault, over the past generation, on our knowledge of the historical situation of black Americans. On the face of things it seems improbable that the cumulative weight of documented historical injury to African Americans could ever be lightly assessed. Gifted black writers continue to show, in scene after scene—in their studies of middle-class blacks interacting with whites—how historical realities shape the lives of their black characters. In *Killer of Sheep*, the brilliant black filmmaker Charles Burnett dramatizes the daily encounters that suck poor blacks into will-lessness and contempt for white fairy tales of interracial harmony; he quickens his historical themes with images of faceless black meat processors gutting undifferentiated, unchoosing animal life. Here, say these images, as though talking back to Clarence Thomas, here is a basic level of black life unchanged over generations. Where there's work, it's miserably paid and ugly. Space allotments at home and at work cramp body and mind. Positive expectation withers in infancy. People fall into the habit of jeering at aspiration as though at the bidding of physical law. Obstacles at every hand prevent people from loving and being loved in decent ways, prevent children from believing their parents, prevent parents from believing they themselves know anything worth knowing. The only true self, now as in the long past, is the one mocked by one's own race. “Shit on you, nigger,” says a voice in *Killer of Sheep*. “Nothing you say matters a good goddamn.”

For whites, these works produce guilt, and for blacks, I can only assume, pain and despair. The audience for tragedy remains small, while at the multiplex the popular enthusiasm for historical romance remains constant and vast. During the last two decades, the entertainment industry has conducted a siege on the pertinent past, systematically excising knowledge of the consequences of the historical exploitation of African Americans. Factitious renderings of the American past blur the outlines of black-white conflict, redefine the ground of black grievances for the purpose of diminishing the grievances, restage black life in accordance with the illusory conven-

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tions of American success mythology, and present the operative influences on race history as the same as those implied to be pivotal in *White Men Can't Jump* or a BellSouth advertisement.

Although there was scant popular awareness of it at the time (1977), the television miniseries *Roots* introduced the figure of the Unscathed Slave. To an enthralled audience of more than 80 million the series intimated that the damage resulting from generations of birth-ascribed, semi-animal status was largely temporary, that slavery was a product of motiveless malignity on the social margins rather than of respectable rationality, and that the ultimate significance of the institution lay in the demonstration, by freed slaves, that no force on earth can best the energies of American Individualism. ("Much like the Waltons confronting the depression," writes historian Eric Foner, a widely respected authority on American slavery, "the family in *Roots* neither seeks nor requires outside help; individual or family effort is always sufficient.") Ken Burns's much applauded PBS documentary *The Civil War* (1990) went even further than *Roots* in downscaling black injury; the series treated slavery, birth-ascribed inferiority, and the centuries-old denial of dignity as matters of slight consequence. (By "implicitly denying the brutal reality of slavery," writes historian Jeanie Attie, Burns's programs crossed "a dangerous moral threshold.") To a group of historians who asked him why slavery had been so slighted, Burns said that any discussion of slavery "would have been lengthy and boring.")

Mass media treatments of the civil rights protest years carried forward the process, contributing to the "positive" erasure of difference. Big-budget films like *Mississippi Burning*, together with an array of TV biographical specials on Dr. Martin Luther King and others, presented the long-running struggle between disenfranchised blacks and the majority white culture as a heartwarming episode of interracial unity; the speed and caringness of white response to the oppression of blacks demonstrated that broadscale race conflict or race difference was inconceivable.

A consciousness that ingests either a part or the whole of this revisionism loses touch with the two fundamental truths of race in America; namely, that because of what happened in the past, blacks and whites cannot yet be the same; and that because what happened in the past was no mere matter of ill will or insult but the outcome of an established caste structure that has only very recently begun to be dismantled, it is not reparable by one-on-one goodwill. The word "slavery" comes to induce stock responses with no vital sense of a grinding devastation of mind visited upon generation after generation. Hoodwinked by the orthodoxy of friendship, the nation either ignores the past, summons for it a detached, correct "compassion," or gazes at it as though it were a set of aesthetic conventions, like twisted trees and fragmented rocks in nineteenth-century picturesque painting—lifeless phenomena without bearing on the present. The chance of striking through the mask of corporate-underwritten, feel-

good, ahistorical racism grows daily more remote. The trade-off—whites promise friendship, blacks accept the status quo—begins to seem like a good deal.

Cosseted by Hollywood's magic lantern and soothed by press releases from Washington and the American Enterprise Institute, we should never forget what we see and hear for ourselves. Broken out by race, the results of every social tabulation from unemployment to life expectancy add up to a chronicle of atrocity. The history of black America fully explains—to anyone who approaches it honestly—how the disaster happened and why neither guilt money nor lectures on personal responsibility can, in and of themselves, repair the damage. The vision of friendship and sympathy placing blacks and whites "all in the same boat," rendering them equally able to do each other favors, "to give rides to one another," is a smiling but monstrous lie. ■

Race, Identity and Political Activism: The Shifting Contours of the African American Public Sphere

Steven Gregory

We in Corona-East Elmhurst are people who live with blacks but in a white community. We think outside of our community.

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

In 1988 a multi-ethnic committee of neighborhood activists met in the basement of an African American church in Corona, Queens in New York City to discuss ways of improving intergroup relations. The committee, calling itself the Cultural Awareness Council, had been formed two years earlier in the wake of the racial attack on three black men by whites in Howard Beach. Most of the members of the Council, which included Jews, Asians and Latinos, were from the neighboring community of Jackson Heights and had been invited to the church by its newly appointed pastor. For the five church members who attended, all well over sixty, the sparsely furnished church basement was steeped in local political history. During the 1960s, voter registration drives, school desegregation battles and political campaigns had been discussed and planned here. The basement had also housed the church's Head Start Program. Square wooden cupboards that once held the preschoolers' lunch boxes still lined one of the walls. Most of the black church members present that evening had participated in those activities. For example, John Booker, a retired real estate agent in his eighties, had served on the Board of Trustees of the Congregational Church during the 1960s and played a key role in organizing church-based antipoverty programs. When the former pastor of the church ran for City Council in 1963, challenging Corona's white Democratic party machine, Booker worked to forge alliances with reform Democrats in predominantly white Jackson Heights.

The memory of this coalition-building during the 1960s framed the opening of discussion. Judy Grubin, the Jewish founder of the Council, began the meeting by recalling the long-standing relationship that activists in Jackson Heights have had with African Americans in Corona and East Elmhurst. With the assembly seated in a wide circle, she recounted the struggle twenty years before to desegregate the community's schools. Grubin went on to describe the Council's purpose; "We were formed to discuss the cultures and traditions of different groups, and to open up a dialogue. Sharing diverse ethnic backgrounds is just the first step towards promoting harmony among people." Glancing at her clipboard, Grubin explained the format of the Council's meetings, held monthly at various locations in Queens, "Each person in the circle talks personally about their particular ethnic background and the experiences that they've had in the neighborhood."

Mrs. Blanche Hubbert, a church member and part-time caterer in her seventies, frowned and peered over her glasses at John Booker. "What do I want to be talkin' about my ethnic background for?" she asked him. Booker shrugged his shoulders and then focused his attention on the first speaker, Zakallah Prasada, a slender man from Pakistan. Prasada described how during the Iranian hostage crisis he and his wife had been harassed by people because they are Muslims. "Two times they burned our mosque in Corona," he reported. "For me, religious freedom is the most important issue." Yanghee Hahn, a woman from Korea, described cultural misunderstandings between Korean merchants and African Americans, and emphasized the importance of good communication. When Blanche Hubbert's turn came, she hesitated and fidgeted with her notepad. After an awkward silence, she spoke about food stereotypes, suggesting that this too was a form of prejudice. "I'm a caterer," she said, "and people always assume that I'm going to serve collard greens."

John Bell, who was next, appeared annoyed. Just turning seventy, Bell had been a labor organizer in the furriers union and active in Harlem politics during the 1930s. Looking youthful and debonair, Bell stood, striking a pose that betrayed decades of political speaking. "John Booker and I are the only ones here who have been active in both communities," he began, motioning to Mr. Booker at his side. "It seems like history is repeating itself! All that you have experienced here," he continued, gesturing to the group from Jackson Heights, "we already experienced. We have to become a political force, not a social one."

For John Bell, as for many African Americans in Corona, the post-civil rights period represents less a political victory than a rupture with politics. The sense that "history is repeating itself" registers not merely the awareness that the struggle for racial equality is not yet over, but more profoundly, the perception that its

conditions of possibility, both political and discursive, have been weakened, if not undermined. Blanche Hubbert's choice of a story about catering and collard greens was neither intended to be humorous, nor to trivialize the question of racism. Rather, it was a strained attempt to convey the complex politics of race in the United States through the reductive logic of cultural misunderstanding. The Awareness Council's strategy for addressing the problem of intergroup relations captures in microcosm important changes in how many Americans have come to think—and not think—about issues of race, politics and social justice in the post-civil rights era. The (re)construction of racial and other systemic inequalities as problems of individual awareness, communication and sensitivity characterizes how a host of social issues, ranging from racially motivated violence to multicultural education, are framed in contemporary discussions, debates and scholarly research.

The case of Corona not only affirms the persistence of racial inequalities, it also reveals the power relations and practices that obscure and mask inequality. Put another way, in the post-civil rights period why have issues of racial inequality receded from public debate and contestation in the political life of African Americans in Corona? The answer lies in changes in institutional power arrangements that disarticulate questions of race from important arenas of political activism and discourse in Corona, thereby shielding practices of racial subordination from public debate and contestation.

This depoliticizing of race in local activism can be viewed in part as the result of a harnessing of the public sphere of African American neighborhood life to state-sponsored mechanisms of political participation, established in the wake of civil rights era activism and urban unrest. By directing attention to this restructuring of the public sphere of black community life—that is, to the multiple social arenas where people deliberate about neighborhood needs and formulate strategies for political action—I want to challenge a view that is prominent in discussions about the inner city. This view holds that the increasing intensity of the effects of racial inequalities or inner-city poverty is tied to a decay of black civil society, promoted by an exodus of the middle classes.¹ This view offers a reductive and decontextualized perspective on class identities, narrowly conceptualizing African American class formation as a function of occupational mobility. Equally important, this exodus model deflects attention from the institutional power rela-

1. See, for example, William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) and Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

tions and practices through which racial inequalities and class asymmetries are secured, negotiated and contested in the everyday lives of urban African Americans.

The state's role in shaping and reshaping the socio-political terrain on which African Americans in Corona interpret their needs, construct their identities and formulate their political commitments needs to be stressed. The heterogeneity and plasticity of African American identities can be seen in the social processes through which black class identities are formulated and reworked, "subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power."²

Inner-City Exodus and the Politics of the Public Sphere

The debate about the degree to which class stratification has occurred among African Americans has tended to gravitate around the work William Julius Wilson. Wilson has proposed that since 1940 the black occupational structure has shown a "consistent pattern of job upgrading," leading to growth in the ranks of the black working and middle classes.³ However, this job mobility has not benefited all sectors of the black population equally: structural changes in the economy decreased the number of entry-level jobs for poorly educated, low-skilled blacks at the very time that their more educated and skilled counterparts were experiencing upward job mobility. Thus, despite gains made by the black work force, Wilson argues that there has been "an uneven development of economic resources in the black community" and the "income gap between the black poor and higher-income groups has widened."⁴ Wilson also points to what he sees as the rise of an intense form of poverty concentrated in inner cities and linked to an array of social problems unprecedented in black community life. The emergence of this persistent form of ghetto poverty presents a paradox for Wilson, and he presents this paradox as a challenge to those who stress the importance of contemporary discrimination in producing black poverty. Backers of this "discrimination thesis," Wilson writes,

find it difficult to explain why the economic position of poor urban blacks actually deteriorated during the very period in which the most

2. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), xx.

3. William J. Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 129.

4. *Ibid.*, 134.

sweeping anti-discrimination legislation and programs were enacted and implemented. Their emphasis on discrimination is even more problematic, in view of the economic progress of the black middle class during the same period.⁵

Wilson's solution to this paradox rests partly on his analysis of changes in the economy, which undermined the period's gains for the black poor. To this macroeconomic argument Wilson adds a sociological one that relates changes in black occupational structure to the concentration of the black poor in inner cities. In Wilson's view, changes in occupational structure widened the income gap between the poor and non-poor, provoking an outmigration of the working and middle classes from inner-city areas. The exodus of the non-poor, Wilson contends, weakened community institutions and divested the inner cities of "mainstream role models that help keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception."⁶

The case of Corona contrasts with the exodus hypothesis proposed by Wilson and variously challenged by others.⁷ Corona did *not* experience a wholesale exodus of the black middle classes and a weakening of its civic infrastructure. Rather, deepening class divisions interacted with state interventions to harness the social institutions of black civil society to arenas of political activism where race was shielded from contestation, and where community needs and demands were increasingly refracted through the property-based interests and ideologies of middle-class homeowners. By directing attention to these changes in institutional power arrangements *within* African American communities, the role of the state can be seen both in shaping the process of black class formation, and in articulating its specific political, economic and ideological effects. From this perspective, the isolation of the inner-city poor becomes less the result of the flight of middle

5. Wilson 1987, 30.

6. *Ibid.*, 56.

7. See Douglas Massey and Mitchell Eggers, "The Ecology of Inequality: Minorities and the Concentration of Poverty, 1970-1980," *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1990): 1175-77; Douglas Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993); Robin D. G. Kelly, "The Black Poor and the Politics of Opposition in a New South City, 1929-1970," in *The Underclass Debate*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 293-333; Thomas F. Jackson, "The State, the Movement, and the Urban Poor: The War on Poverty and Political Mobilization in the 1960s," in *The Underclass Debate*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 403-439; and Adolph Reed, "The Underclass Myth," *The Progressive* 55 (August 1991): 18-20.

class social, cultural and institutional capital than it is an effect of a restructuring of political life in ways that shield racial inequalities from civic activism. This can be readily seen by examining activism in the context of the public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* investigates the development of the "liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere," which emerges along with the widening of political participation and the consolidation of citizenship rights in early modern Europe.⁸ As a counterweight to the absolutist state, the bourgeois public acted as a mediator between society and the state, holding the state accountable to "publicity" and to the critical scrutiny of an organized body of public opinion. In its mature form, this mediating role meant transmitting the interests of the bourgeoisie to the state through "forms of legally guaranteed free speech, free press, and free assembly, and eventually through the parliamentary institutions of representative government."⁹ Habermas contends that the utopian potential of the bourgeois public sphere was never realized. The contradictions of capitalist development giving rise to monopoly capitalism, state intervention in social conflicts, and the fragmentation of the public into competing interest groups undermined the liberal ideal of an autonomous public sphere, where citizens could engage in rational-critical deliberation, unfettered by state power and the market economy.¹⁰

Habermas's account of the rise and transformation of the public sphere has been repeatedly critiqued.¹¹ The criticism most relevant here is that Habermas largely ignores "plebeian" and other competing, often oppositional public spheres. "From the beginning," writes Nancy Fraser, "counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the 'official' bourgeois public sphere, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech."¹² Pointing to contemporary social movements, Fraser notes that members of subordinated groups, such as women, people of color, lesbians and gays have found it politically important to constitute alternative, or "subaltern counterpublics"; that is, "parallel discursive arenas where those excluded from dominant discourses, invent and

8. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, xviii.

9. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 4.

10. Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 289-339.

11. See for example, Dana R. Villa, "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere," *American Political Science Review* 86:3 (1992), 712-721.

12. Fraser 1993, 8.

circulate *counterdiscourses*, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."¹³ The proliferation of such counterpublics allows issues that were previously shielded from contestation to be publicly argued. Through public deliberation and contestation across a range of discursive arenas and publics, Fraser suggests, issues and concerns become *politicized* and therefore, subject to political struggle.¹⁴

The idea of a subaltern public sphere highlights the problem of understanding how specific power arrangements shape and reshape the discursive spaces within which social groups interpret their needs, invent their identities and collectively formulate their political commitments. Put another way, the presence of a counterpublic can direct attention to the public arenas where micro-level discursive interactions are shaped by wider institutional power arrangements and discourses, and it locates the process of politicization and the formation of oppositional identities in social relations and practices that engender, or incite public deliberation and debate. In the case of Corona, the shift in the focus of political activism in the post-civil rights era is a shift from issues of racial inequality to the quality of life concerns of middle-class homeowners. This shift can be read, in part, as the effect of a restructuring of the public sphere of black neighborhood life as seen from the perspective of the face-to-face associational settings of neighborhood activism.¹⁵

Black Resistance and State Reform

Corona and the adjoining neighborhood of East Elmhurst today form the second largest concentration of African Americans in Queens County, New York. The two communities have a common history and common institutions, and are considered by residents and nonresidents alike to be a single black community. African American families began settling in Corona at the turn of the century. Many early arrivals were skilled workers, household workers, and professionals who

13. *Ibid.*, 14.

14. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989).

15. In this essay I say less about structures of mass-mediated public communication which play an increasingly important role in the production, circulation and consumption of meaning in the imagining of publics. For accounts of these structures, see Craig Calhoun, "Tiananmen, Television, and the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 2:1 (1989), 54-71; Bruce Robbins, "Introduction," *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), vi-xxvi; Miriam Hansen, "Unstable Mixtures, Dilated Spheres: Negt and Kluge's *The Public Sphere and Experience*, Twenty Years Later," *Public Culture* 5:2 (1993), 179-212.

left congested areas of black settlement in Manhattan in search of homeownership and better living conditions in Queens. In 1910 black settlement in Corona was boosted when the Pennsylvania Railroad completed construction of the Sunnyside Yards in Long Island City, just west of Corona. African Americans, employed as Pullman porters, maids, cooks and in other railroad-related jobs moved to Corona to be closer to the Sunnyside Yards. Many Corona women found employment with commercial laundries and other local industries servicing the railroad. Prior to the Second World War, African Americans lived throughout Corona alongside European, working-class immigrants.

As their numbers grew during the 1920s and 1930s, black Corona residents organized an infrastructure of churches and voluntary associations, such as the Elks, Prince Hall Masons and Urban Big Sisters, while maintaining important social, cultural and political ties to Harlem. Black social clubs proliferated, carving up Corona society into overlapping, and often competing social sets, along age, gender and class lines.¹⁶ Older residents often speak of the period between the world wars as a Golden Age, a time when the area boasted a "better class of people" and "good society." A weekly feature of the *New York Age*, New York's leading black newspaper of the period, was called Corona Chatter, which regularly reported on Corona society and community events during the 1930s. Written by We Seven, seven anonymous residents, Corona Chatter was a gossip column that provided an important forum where claims to status and class identity were publicly aired and contested, often along the axis of gender. In a caustic response to the announcement of a cocktail party hosted by the Glamour Girl Social Club, We Seven wrote: "There are several chippies in Corona who claim to be sub-debutantes. Where did they get this? A point of reality [sic], they are just a bunch of plain Corona chicks. The meaning of sub-debs is to be found in the dictionary and you will find that they are far from that so-called society class."¹⁷

During the 1930s Corona's black population increased fifty percent and the community began to exert its political muscle. Black political clubs established patron-client relations with white political kingpins, exchanging patronage for Corona's growing black vote. One prominent realtor and "race politician" organized boycotts of local businesses that refused to hire blacks and, together with local ministers, picketed the 1939 World's Fair for its discriminatory hiring prac-

16. See St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945) and E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Collier, 1962).

17. *New York Age*, 11 March 1939, 7.

tices. Black voluntary associations, such as the Negro Youth Association, the Phyllis Wheatly Sewing Circle and Corona's social clubs provided resources and labor for these actions, as well as important public forums for cultivating oppositional views and styles of political behavior. For example, in a 1941 Corona Chatter column, the Musketeer Social Club appealed to the "Negro people of Corona" to mobilize for a boycott of a segregated local theater. Far from merely providing "status without substance," as Franklin Frazier wrote of black bourgeois society, Corona's voluntary associations formed a fluid, heterogeneous and, from the vantage point of white society, largely invisible network of constituencies or publics, which could be, and often were mobilized for political activities.

By 1950 the black population of Corona had reached nearly 10,000. Those who arrived during the 1940s and 1950s were more diverse economically than had been their working and middle-class predecessors. Many had arrived directly from the South in search of jobs during the war. Other were displaced from nearby Flushing, when a slum area was cleared through the federal Urban Renewal, or, as James Baldwin put it, "Negro removal program." Housing in black sections of Corona deteriorated as single family homes were converted into apartments and rooming houses. "Whatever happened to the Corona of old?" asked the editors of Corona Chatter. "It is getting so that desirable and respectable families, migrating from other parts, venture further out on Long Island to avoid Corona."¹⁸

Rapid population growth, coupled with overcrowded housing and poor city services, promoted a differentiation of the area along the lines of race and class. Whites fled black areas of Corona for other sections of Long Island while many middle-class black families left declining areas of Corona and bought homes in the adjoining, more affluent community of East Elmhurst. Although the socioeconomic differences between the two areas remained fluid and contested, moving out of Corona became increasingly meaningful as a marker of status and economic stability for middle-class homeowners in East Elmhurst. To enhance and emphasize their distinction, residents of East Elmhurst pressured the postal service to have their area assigned a separate zip code. One woman, who had moved with her family to East Elmhurst from Corona in 1952, told me: "If you didn't have a college degree, the neighbors would walk all over you." She added: "I was surrounded by people who owned their own businesses, and they got to putting on airs. So I told them, 'I pay the same taxes as you all, I throw out *just* as much garbage as you do, and I do just as much for my children.' *That* stopped them!"

18. *New York Age*, 7 November 1941, 8.

Neighborhood deterioration, fueled by post-war suburbanization, black immigration and structural weaknesses in the urban economy, sharpened the perception of class and status differences between the two areas. But it also heightened awareness among activists that Corona's growing problems of poverty, housing deterioration and poor city services were tied to its lack of political power as a *black* community. Real and imagined class differences remained important in articulating black identities and in shaping the specific effects of racial exclusion. But the impact of neighborhood decline, underscored for many the vulnerability of African American residents across class lines to wider structures and processes of racial exclusion.

During the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans in Corona pursued a range of strategies to address the interrelated goals of political empowerment and neighborhood preservation. Given its constricted playing field of the patronage system, politics was for many synonymous with corruption and narrow, sectarian interests; yet politics came to be seen as vital to the preservation of black neighborhood life. Indeed, civil rights era activism is distinguished from earlier periods of mobilization by the widespread politicization of the social networks and institutions of black civil society. This process of politicization involved both an expansion of the range of power relations contested by activists in Corona, as well as a proliferation of the public arenas within which such contests took place.

A broad spectrum of issues—ranging from school segregation and political exclusion, to unemployment and racist mortgage lending practices—became targets for social activism, and were publicized as *interrelated* effects of structural economic and political inequalities.¹⁹ A campaign flyer circulated during the unsuccessful campaign of a Corona minister for the City Council in 1963, illustrates the close interweaving of neighborhood concerns with structural economic issues and the national agenda of the Civil Rights Movement. Reverend Robert D. Sherard, the flyer reads, “will lead the community’s fight for civil rights for all and an end to discrimination, a full employment economy, improved and integrated education, better housing for low- and middle income families, consumer protection against increased fares, rates and prices, and honest, efficient and responsible government.” In addition to this proliferation of contested issues, the public arenas, where these inequalities were defined and acted upon, expanded to embrace a heterogeneous array of social networks and institutions. For example, although Corona’s churches had played a minor role at best in earlier political

19. See Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).

contests, they provided an important political base for much of the activism in Corona during the 1960s and 1970s.

This rapid politicization of black civil society had multiple causes, linked to national and local political and economic conditions. The Civil Rights Movement provided both a new political vocabulary and model of social mobilization which rearticulated the meaning, terrain and borders of politics. Corona activists formed ad hoc, direct action committees, which drew support from an assortment of social networks and institutions. One committee, the Independent Citizens for Good Government, adopted strategies used by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in its Crusade for Citizenship, and convened activists from an unprecedented array of political clubs, voluntary associations and churches to address political empowerment, school desegregation and other issues. The federally sponsored Urban Renewal and War on Poverty programs created new, although short-lived political spaces where activists could deliberate about community interests and needs. Federal regulations intended to promote the "maximum feasible participation" of residents in poverty areas led to the creation of citizens' advisory bodies such as Corona's Community Action Council (1961) and the Urban Action Task Force (1968). These citizens' councils convened diverse groups of activists, whose political skills and identities had been honed within a range of political arenas, including the trade union movement, school-based parents associations, and in emerging sectors of the Black Power and Black Nationalist movements.

Although offering only limited participation in decision-making, these government-sponsored citizens' advisory councils provided important public arenas where activists learned the mechanics, as well as structural weaknesses of urban governing regimes.²⁰ For example, in Corona as elsewhere, activists often appropriated the federal rhetoric of citizen participation, and the institutional resources provided by the government's War on Poverty to press demands against local governing agencies and political elites. In so doing, they extended the concept of "maximum feasible participation" to goals and arenas of activism that reached beyond the service-coordination focus on the War on Poverty. In Corona, activists working through antipoverty agencies mobilized voters against local politicians, and organized parents in struggles over the control of schools.

20. On this issue see Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, *Urban Political Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974) and "Economic Change, National Policy and the System of Cities," in *Restructuring the City*, eds. Susan S. Fainstein, Norman I. Fainstein, et al. (New York: Longman, 1983), 1-26.

To briefly summarize, the civil rights period witnessed an expansion of the public sphere of black political activism. This involved the politicization of existing public arenas, such as the churches, block clubs and other civic institutions, as well as the creation of new political spaces, in part through federal and local attempts to manage civil rights era activism through strategies of bureaucratic enfranchisement. The proliferation and coordination of these insurgent groups or counterpublics was evidenced in neighborhood struggles. Activism in Corona was characterized by intense coalition-building, often cross-cutting class, ideological and racial lines. For example, in 1964, the Independent Citizens for Good Government joined with the NAACP, black Republican and Democratic political clubs, block associations and an interdenominational coalition of churches to establish the Ad Hoc Committee for Voter Registration. "We have pledged to put aside all individual differences," wrote the Committee's chair in a letter to community residents, "and work as one to achieve our objective."

Similarly, when the 1968 New York City teachers' strike threatened to close local schools, the Corona branch of the Black Panther Party, many of whose members had been recruited from the Enforcers, a Corona street gang, joined in demonstrations with a multiracial coalition of parents and members of the largely middle-class East Elmhurst Civic Association. In the early 1970s block and civic associations worked closely with clergy, parents' groups and members of the Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam to pressure the city to fund a community library specializing in black history and culture.

These struggles produced important results. Through the War on Poverty, community action agencies were established to provide job training, day-care and other social services. Political decentralization in New York led to the creation of government-sponsored, citizens' advisory boards intended to bridge the gap between local communities and city government. Black community activists were appointed and elected to newly formed institutions such as the Community Board, the Police Precinct Council and the Local Community School Board. Finally, voter registration drives of the 1960s mobilized black voters, making them a force to be reckoned with by local white politicians. In 1974, following a power-sharing agreement with the Queens County Democratic Party, Corona-East Elmhurst elected Helen Marshall, a parents' association activist, to be a State Assembly District Leader and later a member of the State Assembly.

These civil rights era gains increased African American representation in electoral politics, in the administration of social welfare programs and on newly formed citizens' advisory boards. However, as I proposed below, the state's response to the insurgent politics of the 1960s was to restructure political space

in ways that shielded racial inequalities from contestation, while empowering class-specific forms of civic activism and consciousness.

Contested Publics

The opening of opportunities for political participation in government bureaucracies and mainstream political parties served to funnel activists in Corona into specialized public arenas, where community needs were interpreted and framed in narrow, enclaved contexts. The antipoverty program in Corona led to the creation of highly specialized neighborhood service corporations, bureaucratically tied to a tangled assortment of city, state and federal agencies. In 1970 these community action agencies were consolidated under the aegis of Elmcors Youth and Adult Services, a multiservice agency providing job training, housing assistance and other services. Poverty, once interpreted as an effect of an interrelated set of racially constructed inequalities, was reframed as an administrative problem, which would be managed, as Thomas Jackson puts it, in a "segregated 'arena' of poverty politics."²¹

Elmcors was not only dependent on government agencies for funding, but was also constrained to interpret and respond to community needs in ways that complied with the bureaucratic, client-driven service strategies of its funding sources. Moreover, the viability of Elmcors depended less on the political mobilization of residents than on the tactical support of local political elites. Elwanda Young, the executive director of Elmcors and a former Black Panther Party activist, spoke to how this client-based service strategy restricted social interaction across class lines:

I'm thinking about the clients we serve and how they might even begin to interact with upper class blacks and there's no type of connection. Their paths never cross anymore. The only possible connection might be in the church where you might have this grassroots person still attending this church. But other than that there's little opportunity for them to meet.

An equally important effect of this process was to remove the issue of poverty from the purview of institutions, such as the church, the NAACP and other civic

21. Thomas Jackson, "The State, the Movement, and the Urban Poor: The War on Poverty and Political Mobilization in the 1960s," in *The Underclass Debate*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

groups, which had earlier played important roles in defining and publicizing the *political* significance of black poverty. It was not that the membership and leaders of these groups had lost interest in the "plight of the poor"; rather, their roles in both defining and mobilizing residents to *act* on the issue of poverty were superseded through the bureaucratic institutionalization of the War on Poverty. As one former pastor of the Corona Congregational Church put it, "The loyalty of the people went to Borough Hall, rather than to the church and what it was doing."

This separation of the issue of black poverty from the public arenas of neighborhood activism was exacerbated by state actions limiting citizens' involvement in community development. As early as 1965 the United States Conference of Mayors, alarmed by African American and Latino political mobilization in cities, pressured the federal government to prohibit voter registration activities by federally funded community action agencies. In 1974, under the Nixon administration's new federalism policy, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program was established, which weakened federal requirements for citizen participation by relegating decisions concerning community participation to local officials.²²

Similarly, the funneling of activists into mainstream channels of political participation fragmented interrelated community issues and restricted their deliberation to highly specialized governing elites. Problems in the schools, for example, today fall under the jurisdiction of the Local Community School Board. Housing, zoning and other issues pertaining to the performance of city agencies are managed by a politically appointed Community Board. Each of these governing bodies has its own electoral or appointment process, meeting schedule and decision-making protocol, rendering the mechanics of political participation confounding, if not inaccessible to most community residents.

Bureaucratic enfranchisement also narrowed the range of neighborhood concerns deliberated and contested in public through Corona's voluntary associations. Problems of run-down housing and police misconduct, for example, were once focal points for community mobilization and coalition-building, and are now routinely channeled through the formal complaint mechanisms of government-sponsored institutions. Once relatively autonomous, even oppositional civic groups, such as the NAACP, block clubs and civic associations, today work in tandem with local politicians and city officials, translating neighborhood needs and demands into the narrow service categories and power-evasive worldviews

22. Fainstein and Fainstein, 1983.

of city officials. For example, at a meeting of the East Elmhurst-Corona Civic Association, which I attended in 1989, an official from the Department of Sanitation was invited to respond to complaints about services, which residents felt were inferior to those provided in neighboring white communities. The Sanitation Department's community liaison gave a presentation on his agency's efforts to better serve the neighborhood. The official's presentation provides an example not only of how expert knowledge is bureaucratically deployed to fragment and depoliticize community issues, but also of how officially sanctioned ideologies penetrate local contexts, in this case to redefine a problem of political weakness as one of moral crisis. In response to complaints about erratic garbage collection, the Sanitation Department official cited statistics on the number of summonses that had been issued in the area for "behavioral incidents"; that is, for the failure of residents to sweep the fronts of their homes and businesses. Continuing in a more philosophical vein, he observed, "Garbage is no longer out of sight, out of mind. There is a moral breakdown in our society that includes crime, drugs, garbage and everything. It is the young *kids* who don't care about your houses and don't have values and morals."

This example suggests how bureaucratic incorporation depoliticizes racial inequalities, disarticulating related community needs, while directing demands into enclaved arenas of political participation. Bureaucratic incorporation has also shaped the political effects of deepening black class divisions. The arenas of activism that opened in the post-civil rights period have proven to be disproportionately responsive to middle-class homeowners who are organized into tightly knit networks of block and civic associations.

Block associations, once referred to by the area's state assemblywoman as the "building blocks" of the community, criss-cross East Elmhurst and to a lesser extent Corona. These block clubs have proven to be important resources for government, for gauging, and whenever possible, regulating public reaction to controversial policies. Through them problems of poor services, housing decline and inadequate police protection can be micro-managed and contained by city officials at the local, block-focused level. For this and other reasons, block clubs and their umbrella organization, the East Elmhurst-Corona Civic Association, are important venues for state and private sector intervention in neighborhood politics. Accordingly, these block and civic clubs enjoy privileged access to power.

This concentration of political power is refracted through the prism of class. As David Harvey has pointed out, a strong correlation exists between homeown-

ership and community activism through block and civic clubs.²³ In fact today there are more than twice as many block associations active in middle-class East Elmhurst as there are in Corona, a relation which reflects East Elmhurst's higher rate of homeownership. In short, the mechanisms of political participation that emerged in the post-civil rights era served to disproportionately empower middle-class homeowners by responding vigorously both to their class-specific forms of civic activism and their property-based interpretations of community needs.

The complex restructuring of Corona's political landscape has given rise to forms of political discourse, subjectivity and activism that emphasize the defense of household equity and residential privilege, not unlike the "slow growth" movements that Mike Davis has associated with homeowner politics and its ideology of "responsible environmentalism."²⁴ The ascendancy of homeowner politics in Corona registers wider political transformations that have occurred in many cities within the context of global economic restructuring. Economic restructuring in the United States, driven by the crisis of the Fordist regime of accumulation in the 1970s, accelerated the deindustrialization of central cities and incited important changes in the pattern of state intervention. Specifically, as Manuel Castells points out, the emphasis in state intervention shifted from strategies of social redistribution to policies aggressively facilitating capital accumulation.²⁵ In New York City this economic and political restructuring provided a context for reorienting policy priorities away from community-based development initiatives and toward fiscal austerity and economic development strategies promoting capital accumulation in post-industrial growth areas, such as finance and real estate.²⁶ As a result, in Corona and other communities, land-use politics has come to dominate the local political agenda, as governing alliances of city officials, bureaucrats and private land development interests appeal to, and attempt to marshal tightly knit networks of homeowners to support elite-driven land-use strategies.

Thus the arenas of political participation that have proven the most accessible and responsive to African Americans in Corona are precisely those within which the land-use strategies of governing elites resonate with, or better, interpellate property-based constructions of black middle-class identity. Here I stress how

23. "Labor, Capital and Class Struggle around the Built Environment in Advanced Capitalist Societies," in *Urbanization and Conflicts in Market Societies*, ed. K. R. Cox (New York: Methuen, 1978), 9-37.

24. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 1990), 156-160.

25. *The Informational City* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989).

26. Ibid. See also Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (London: Verso, 1993) and Susan S. Fainstein, *The City Builders* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

institutional power arrangements and practices both engender and hinder particular constructions of political needs, identity and interests.

Finally, the ideological contours and contradictions of this quality of life politics can be seen in a 1989 meeting of the East Elmhurst-Corona Civic Association. The association met at the La Guardia Airport Holiday Inn to consider a New York State-funded proposal to establish a group home for mentally retarded adolescents in East Elmhurst. The plan had already been rejected by the 99th Street Block Association, where the state had purchased a building for the group home. State Assemblywoman Helen Marshall invited representatives of the not-for-profit agency sponsoring the home to present its plan to the community. After the presentation, Civic Association members were invited to question the home's sponsors. One resident asked, "Shouldn't you come to the community *first* before you contract to buy a house?" The representative responded with a question: "Do you ask permission from neighbors when you move into a new neighborhood? We see our home as one big family." This response provoked an angry outburst from the audience, since it seemed to conflate the establishment of the group home with the experience of black families moving into segregated white neighborhoods. Assemblywoman Marshall tried to restore calm, assuring the audience that the area's Community Board would hold a public hearing later in the month.

"Will there be drug testing?" a young woman asked. "The residents will be mentally retarded adolescents and not drug addicts," came the response. The audience again erupted in anger. "No way! We have enough problems with our own families," one man stated. A second shouted: "I don't want them; I live two doors away. I'm a pretty good shotgun artist," he added, menacingly. A woman asked: "How can you force this on us when we don't want it? Our property values will go down. This is basically a business and a quality of life decision for us." Assemblywoman Marshall, again trying to calm the audience, stood and addressed the representative. "You see, Mr. Farnum, this is a *black* community and everyone has put their life savings into this community. We care *so* much about the disadvantaged that we already have 481 beds for special populations. We did our share, but the city didn't do its share."

The Civic Association's response to the proposal for the group home suggests that these public spheres of black middle-class activism can also be sites for contesting governing practices and for rearticulating class identities. Association members challenged the sponsor's compliance with both the procedures of bureaucratic service provision ("Will there be drug testing?") and the legitimating conventions of urban regime politics ("Shouldn't you come to the community *first* before you go into contract?"). Although these critical responses were narrowly

framed as a defense of property and family values, they did question the right of the state and its allies to dictate patterns of urban land-use.

But more importantly, Assemblywoman Marshall's assertion that Corona "is a black community" and that the "city didn't do its share" disrupted the construction of black middle-class identity as raceless and overdetermined by property values. By naming Corona a black community, Marshall recovered the specificity of race, reframing the community's refusal to accommodate special populations as a wider issue of environmental justice. For like other communities of color, Corona has borne a disproportionate share of quality of life threats within the increasingly polarized postindustrial city.²⁷ However, we need to be careful not to exaggerate the oppositional possibilities of this, or similar recoveries of wider relations of social injustice. The middle-class identities called into being within the public arenas of black homeowner activism are at once enabling and limiting, offering residents a specific perspective of elite power, as well as of the possibilities for resisting it.

What needs to be emphasized is the heterogeneity and plasticity of African American social identities and the multiplicity of public spaces where they are crafted. The ascendancy of homeowner politics is not a simple reflection or realization of an essential and monolithic black middle-class identity. Rather, it is a complex and often contradictory result of the interplay of resistance and state power—"a war of position," as Gramsci put it, in which the stakes are the very surfaces (what I have been calling the public sphere) on which people imagine their political needs, identities and projects. If we are to change this society, we must learn much more about the church basements, hotel meeting rooms and other public arenas where we do politics, and indeed, where politics does us.

Steven Gregory teaches anthropology and Africana Studies at New York University. His recent work has appeared in *Cultural Anthropology*, *Diaspora* and *POLAR*. He is co-editor with Roger Sanjek of the forthcoming volume *Race* (Rutgers University Press) and is currently writing *Race and the Politics of Subjugation in the Post-Civil Rights Era*.

27. See Robert D. Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION

NO. 78580Date of Request: Feb. 9, 1996

1. TRAVELER'S NAME: <u>Margaret Williams</u>					
Extension: <u>6-5266</u>		Room: <u>100 DEOB</u>		☒ White House Staff ☐ Other:	
2. PURPOSE(s) AND DATE(s): Conference on racial issues and the process and organizational structures needed to strengthen African American leadership. Leaving for New York Feb. 12, 1996 Arriving back in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 13, 1996			3. ITINERARY (List all cities where stopovers occur): Leaving 7AM on 12th, arriving in NY at 8AM. Leaving NY 5PM on the 13th of Feb. 1996		
4. DEPARTURE			RETURN		
Date: <u>Feb. 12, 1996</u>	Time:	Mode: <u>Airplane</u>	Date: <u>Feb. 13, 1996</u>	Time:	Mode: <u>Airplane</u>
5. FUNDING SOURCE: ☐ Official ☐ Political ☐ 501 (c)(3) ☒ Other: <u>Foundation (Rockefeller)</u>					

Please Read Instructions Regarding Travel Expenses on Reverse side of this Form

6. SPECIAL EXPENSES ☐ Commercial Car Rental ☐ Taxi		TRAVEL ADVANCE REQUESTED ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Amount \$	
Hotel Name:		Recipient's Signature:	
Other:		Date:	

7. TRAVELER'S SIGNATURE (I HAVE READ AND AGREE TO THE TERMS SET FORTH ON THE REVERSE SIDE):

8. APPROVING SIGNATURES:

Office Head:

Approving Official (Political or Foreign Travel):

Special Assistant to the President and Director of White House Operations:

Control No.:

Account:

REV. 8/90

ORIGINAL (Return with Voucher)

Contact person: Evan Ryan
Phone number: (202) 456-6266
Date of request: Feb. 9, 1996

ACCEPTANCE OF TRAVEL EXPENSES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCE

In order to consider whether the Government may accept from an outside source payment of your travel, subsistence and related expenses under the GSA travel rule, you must complete the information below. The outside source need not be a 501(c)(3) organization, but if it is, please state so on this form and include the IRS determination letter.

Please include a copy of the letter of invitation if one was received.

Your name and position:

Margaret A. Williams
Chief of Staff to the First Lady

Nature of meeting or similar function and how it relates to your official duties:

Conference on racial issues and the process and organizational structures needed to strengthen African American leadership.

Date and place(s) of travel:

Feb. 12, 1996 Leave Washington National Airport for New York La Guardia Airport
Feb. 13, 1996 Leave La New York La Guardia Airport for Washington National Airport

Persons or entity making the payment (please also note any financial interests of the person or entity known to you that may be affected by the exercise of your Government responsibilities):

The Rockefeller Foundation

Nature of expense(s) paid for:

travel, lodging, and meals

Method and approximate amount of payment (payment may be made either in-kind or by check made payable to U.S. Treasury; you may not directly receive payment in cash or check made out to you):

This form and any accompanying memorandum of approval must be attached to your travel authorization. You must complete a travel voucher following the trip. Please send completed form to Room 128, OEOB, at least 3 days before commencement of travel.

Center for African American History and Culture
Smithsonian Institution

VISUAL JOURNAL:
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I/We will attend the opening reception on
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Limit two reservations per invitation.
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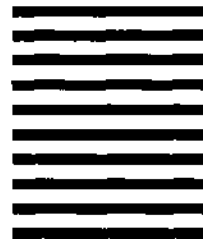
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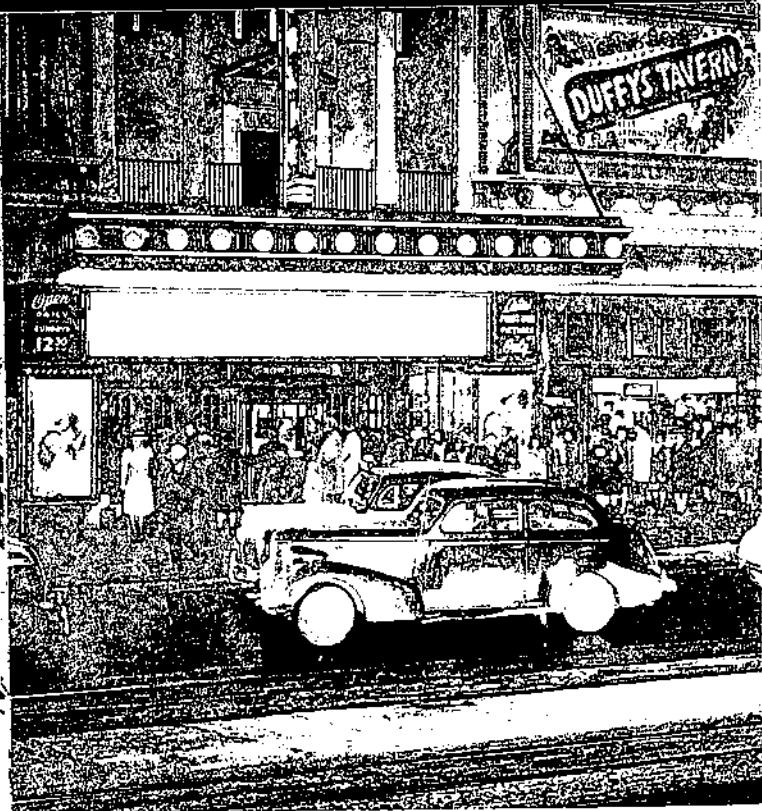
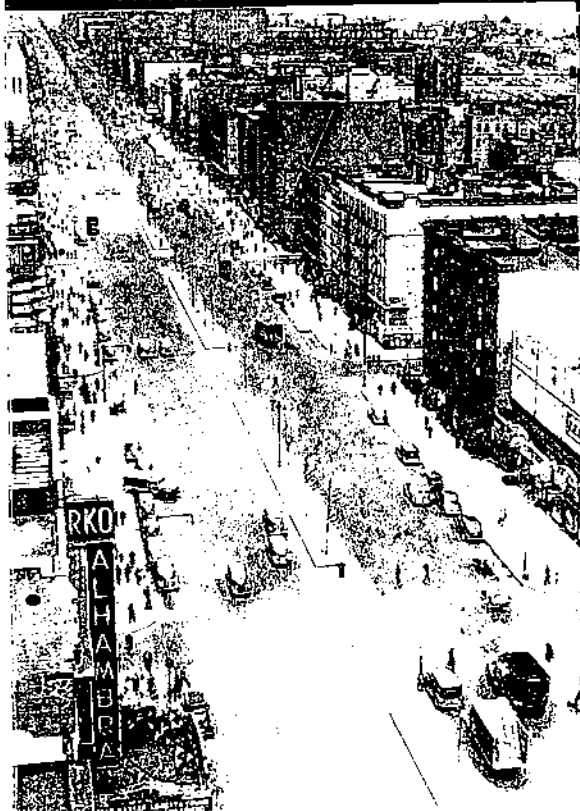
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WASHINGTON DC 20277-2915



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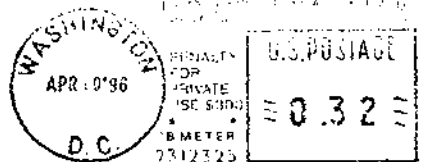
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CELEBRATING THE
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The United States Olympic Committee
wishes to thank
Textron
for its commitment to our
Olympic athletes through its
generous underwriting of
the 1996 United States Olympic Dinner

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Honorary President of the United States Olympic Committee

Vice-President Albert Gore, Jr.
Honorary Vice-President of the United States Olympic Committee

Dr. LeRoy T. Walker
President of the United States Olympic Committee

Richard D. Schultz
Executive Director of the United States Olympic Committee

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Senate Majority Leader ~ Bob Dole

Senate Democratic Leader ~ Tom Daschle

House Majority Leader ~ Richard Armitage

House Democratic Leader ~ Richard Gephardt



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Wednesday, May 1, 1996
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R.S.V.P. card enclosed ~ Black Tie
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The House Committee on Standards of Official

Conduct and the Senate Select Committee on

Ethics have formally determined that the

Congressional Gift rules permit Members and

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1996 Olympic Dinner

as guests of the

United States Olympic Committee.

The office of the Legal Counsel to the President

has made a similar determination for members of

the White House Staff.

Letters available upon request

United States Olympic Dinner

3205 N Street, NW

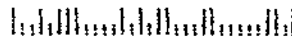
Washington, DC 20007



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new notes

The Honorable
Margaret Williams
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500



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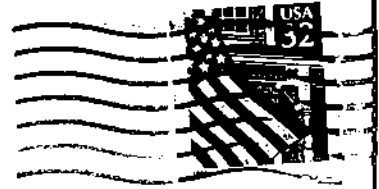
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BY ELIZABETH DREW

Tuesday, April 16, 1996
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
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R.S.V.P.
202 898 6458



Ms. Maggie Williams
Chief of Staff
Office of the First Lady
The White House
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on her promotion as
Senior Presidential Speechwriter and
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Friday, February 16, 1996

6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

at the

Home of Carmen Lomellin

The Prospect House

1200 N. Nash Street #539

Arlington, Virginia

RSVP: (703) 525-8270

For directions, please call Ms. Lomellin at (202) 606-5052

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Re: invites

Ms. Maggie Williams
Chief of Staff to the First Lady
The White House
2nd Floor - West Wing
Washington, DC 20220

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