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This article reviews the societal forces that have made homelessness the end result of racial exclusion and inner city isolation. It is argued that significant societal change is necessary to reduce racial exclusion and prevent homelessness.

Poverty, Homelessness and Racial Exclusion

Homelessness in urban America includes all racial groups. However, recent data has noted the overrepresentation of minority groups (Rossi & Wright, 1987; Gelberg et al, 1988; Angotti, 1983). A major reason for the overrepresentation of minority groups, particularly Afro-Americans, among the homeless is that more minorities in urban America live in sub-standard housing, are jobless, and are dependent on welfare. These factors make minority groups in urban areas particularly vulnerable to homelessness. They must often double-up with family and friends and are likely to be without shelter at some point in time.

Belcher, Scholler, Jaquish, and Drummond (1991) conducted a study of urban homeless persons in Baltimore, Maryland and found that homelessness is often composed of three stages. The first stage consists of living with family and friends and is often a result of severe and persistent poverty. Interestingly, the federal government and conservative scholars have been reluctant to admit that severe and persistent poverty are a catalyst for homelessness and that many people who live in substandard housing or are doubled-up with family and friends are already homeless Leonard, Dolbeare, and Lazere, 1989; Belcher and DiBlasio, 1990). However, many scholars who are familiar

with poor people readily acknowledge that severe and persis-
tent poverty act as a catalyst for homelessness and in many
cases a person in this condition is already homeless (Bratt,
et al, 1986).

Severe and persistent poverty is characteristic of many ur-
ban areas and since Afro-Americans are more likely to be living
in poverty in urban areas than are white Americans it is im-
portant to examine the issue of racial exclusion as it relates to
homelessness. Wilson (1985) noted:

> The social problems of urban life in the United States are, in
> large measure, associated with race. The rates of crime, drug
> addiction . . . and welfare dependency have risen dramatically in
> the last several years, and they reflect a noticeably uneven distri-
> bution of race (p.129).

Unfortunately, many scholars, such as Mead (1986), attempt to
explain the high rate of welfare dependency and other social
problems among inner city Afro-Americans as representing infe-
rior individual attributes and the so-called culture of poverty. In
sharp contrast, this article focuses on the structural impediments
that work in tandem to keep many inner city AfroAmericans in
poverty and make them vulnerable to homelessness.

Many Afro-Americans in inner cities are vulnerable to social
problems such as homelessness. This is a cost of the racial
exclusion that permeates American society (Wacquant & Wil-
son, 1989). Decades of social isolation have created a closed
opportunity structure that frequently results in a life-time of
poverty for many inner city Afro-Americans. The fervor of the
1960s, despite advances by many middle class Afro-Americans,
did not last long enough to enable many minorities, particularly
low-income and uneducated Afro-Americans in inner cities, to
escape severe isolating poverty. Efforts to assist the homeless
have largely ignored the fact that the reversal of racial exclusion
is linked to the prevention of homelessness among lowincome
Afro-Americans in the inner city. In the final analysis racial ex-
clusion contributes to severe and persistent poverty and severe
and persistent poverty contributes to homelessness.

This paper will examine the link between racial exclusion,
severe and persistent poverty, and homelessness and suggest

ways of raising low-income Afro-Americans in inner cities out of poverty so that they are less vulnerable to homelessness.

Vulnerability to Homelessness: Blocked Opportunities

A major reason that many Afro-Americans in inner cities are vulnerable to homelessness is that they, because of blocked opportunities, often rely on the welfare system. In fact, AfroAmericans rely more heavily on the welfare system than do white Americans (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1989, 11–14). The primary reason for the higher incidence of welfare dependence among AfroAmericans is a historical set of structural factors that have inhibited many Afro-Americans in their progress up the social class ladder (Fabricant, 1987; Darity & Meyers, 1988, Wacquant & Wilson, 1989; Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990).

One of the greatest impediments to income stability for Afro-Americans is the abandonment of manufacturing by U.S. industry. The decline of manufacturing jobs and replacement with relatively low paying service sector jobs has been most pronounced in inner cities. Sixty percent of the unemployed Afro-Americans in the United States reside in inner cities (Wilson, 1985). That number is probably an underestimate as a result of undercounting by the U.S. Bureau of Census (Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990). Kasarda (1988) noted:

> Between 1953 and 1985, for example, New York city lost over 600,000 jobs in manufacturing, while white-collar service jobs grew by nearly 800,000. During this period, Philadelphia lost more than two-thirds of its manufacturing jobs. Manufacturing in Boston declined from 114,000 to 49,000; in Baltimore from 130,000 to 55,000; and in St. Louis, from 194,000 to 66,000 (p.171).

Newly created well paying jobs in inner cities usually require at least two years of college (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1986). This has created a mismatch between the existing skills of many inner city Afro-Americans and the job skills required by industry.

As Afro-Americans migrated from the South to the North and settled in inner cities they often worked in manufacturing. However, unions, which were often controlled by whites, systematically blocked Afro-Americans from participating in wage and salary bargaining agreements (Smith, 1987). Between 1950

and 1970 there was a dramatic increase in federally subsidized building programs that benefitted union workers. Since many Afro-Americans had been shut-out of broad union participation, they were unable to take advantage of this building boom. Congress had enabled unions through federal legislation to protect craft jobs for white Americans to the exclusion of Afro-Americans.

The economic and social implications of excluding Afro-Americans from the labor market had profound consequences. Afro-American men tended to be more heavily dependent on unskilled laborer and service work as opposed to whites. Consequently, the bootstraps that helped to propel white Europeans out of poverty were not as available for Afro-Americans.

Another factor that inhibited the advancement of Afro-Americans was the fact that they, like Japanese and Chinese immigrants, shared the disadvantage of skin color. Asian migration was cutoff in the late nineteenth century, while the number of Afro-Americans who migrated from the South to inner cities in the North continued to grow (Liberson, 1980). Difference in population sizes meant that Asian immigrants were not as readily perceived as a threat by white Americans, while the growing numbers of Afro-Americans in inner cities were viewed as a threat by European arrivals and white Americans. Unable to fully participate in expanding incomes, Afro-Americans in inner cities often found that their limited incomes prohibited them from living outside of certain neighborhoods.

The combination of low wages and real estate exclusion meant that Afro-Americans became dependent upon their own neighborhoods. Since the majority of the able bodied in the ghetto were also suffering from joblessness and underemployment, the Afro-American ghettos of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s did not develop organizations and lifelines that enabled them to successfully escape the ghetto. Wacquant and Wilson (1989) note:

> . . .joblessness and economic exclusion, having reached dramatic proportions, have triggered a process of hyperghettoization (p.9).

The black-white unemployment ratio began to rise in 1954 as manufacturing jobs began to decline and did not dip below 2.1

until 1975 and then rose again (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1974 and 1980). Even though many Afro-Americans were either locked out of skilled crafts or with the return of large numbers of white veterans after World War II were forced out of skilled crafts, manufacturing jobs were available to Afro-Americans during the 1930s through 1960s. These jobs, while paying far less than the skilled crafts, were primarily unskilled and did pay more than the prevailing wage for unskilled labor in non-manufacturing employment.

Completing high school was not a prerequisite to work in manufacturing. As the economy became more service oriented and manufacturing jobs disappeared the unemployment rate began to soar among black high school dropouts. For example, in 1974, nine percent of black males between the ages of 20 and 24 were unemployed, however, by 1986 the number had risen to 15.7 percent (Ballen & Freeman, 1986).

The end result of the abandonment of manufacturing and the corresponding decline in the assessable tax base of inner cities (Levine, 1987) has meant that many Afro-American males in inner cities are either institutionalized (jail, prison, or psychiatric hospital) or they are jobless and vulnerable to becoming homeless. Wilson (1985) noted:

> The fact that only 55 percent of all black young adult males,, 31 percent of all black males aged 18 to 19, and 14 percent of those aged 16 to 17 were employed in 1983 reveals a problem of joblessness for young black men that has reached catastrophic proportions (p.155).

Also noteworthy is the fact that since 1983 unemployment in inner cities has risen.

Able bodied males are generally ineligible for welfare benefits, except for temporary benefits. Unemployment insurance is only for those who have worked and is usually limited to 26 weeks. Homelessness among males is the end result of living with no income. Long-term joblessness and lack of opportunities have led to severe and persistent poverty, which is a catalyst for homelessness. Counts of the homeless, particularly of minority male populations, have been notoriously unreliable (Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990) and the recent count by the U.S. Bureau of

Census was flawed and ended up with a significant undercount (Sokolovsky & Belcher, 1989). Therefore the fact that much of the literature does not document the fact that homelessness is a norm in many inner cities reflects the use of census data that fail to count jobless individuals and minority males.

Much of the literature discusses the fact that joblessness is high in inner cities, but fails to link severe and persistent poverty to homelessness. Instead, this literature focuses on the problem of joblessness without discussing the end result of joblessness, which is severe and persistent poverty.

Mead (1987) and Kasarda (1985), have argued that inner city Afro-Americans need to either take advantage of the newly created jobs in inner cities or travel to the growing number of jobs in the suburbs. Kasarda (1985) argues that disadvantaged unemployed minorities in inner cities need to be encouraged to migrate away from deteriorating inner cities. Kasarda does admit that many inner city Afro-Americans lack the formal educational requirements necessary to take advantage of newly created jobs in the inner cities. However, Kasarda concludes that the answer to this problem is migration as opposed to upgrading the education of inner city Afro-Americans.

Kasarda's position is similar to other policy analysts who do not want to alter the existing status quo to address structural problems, such as an inadequate public education system, that often impedes the progress of many Afro-American inner city residents.

Mead (1987; 1989) also takes a victim blaming approach and assumes that the solution to the problems of widespread joblessness among inner city Afro-Americans is workfare in which people are compelled to work.

These positions are in stark contrast to scholars such as Lash and Urry (1988), Block (1987), Bluestone and Harrison (1988), and Belcher and DiBlasio (1990), who argue that the economy has to be restructured to enable more people to have an equal opportunity to escape poverty.

Incomes, Race, and Inner Cities

The link between joblessness, race, severe and persistent poverty and homelessness is evident in the abandonment of the

inner city school system. Inadequate inner city schools reflect the fact that these school systems serve largely Afro-Americans who are often jobless and who often suffer from severe and persistent poverty. As industry has largely abandoned manu-facturing jobs in inner cities and black and white middle class flight to the suburbs has not significantly abated, residents in inner cities have found that school systems have deteriorated because of insufficient resources (Sanchez, 1989). A combination of inadequate school systems and a future of deadend jobs, even with a high school diploma, means there is little incentive to remain in school. (Botstein, 1988). Current efforts to address the problems of schools focus on better management and parental choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The desperate fiscal situations of inner city schools are largely ignored.

Economic development efforts have also taken a toll on inner city schools by creating jobs that rarely benefit residents (Levine, 1987; Friedland & Sanders, 1988). For example, the large downtown urban renewal projects, such as Baltimore, Maryland's Inner Harbor, primarily employ suburban residents (Levine, 1987). Increased joblessness among city residents mean a reduction in the residential assessable tax base. These reduc-tions are accompanied by tax abatements given to industry to locate in inner cities which has further eroded the ability of inner cities to adequately fund a secondary school system (Reich, 1991).

Reform of the inner city education system and a more eq-uitably based economic development effort are directly linked to serious efforts to solve the problem of severe and persis-tent poverty, which is a catalyst for homelessness. The fact that society has chosen to not link structural changes in the economy to the prevention of homelessness reflects a national reluctance to address inequities in the distribution of wealth that is often caused by lack of opportunity for oppressed groups, such as Afro-Americans in inner cities. The gap between the haves and the have nots has significantly grown over the last decade (Greenstein & Barancik, 1990). Disparity between black and white incomes is particularly significant.

Afro-American scholars, such as Steele (1990), are skeptical of notions that link neglect of the inner cities to racism. Rather

than focus on structural inhibitors in the economy, which are related to race and class, Steele encourages Afro-Americans to move ahead despite apparent racism. Steele's admonishment is similar to the White House's apparent view that race is no longer a factor in poverty. These views ignore a basic principle of a market economy which is that money and power determine political clout.

The inner city homeless, both black and white, lack political power, because they are a disenfranchised group without money or property. The fact that most inner cities are largely populated by Afro-Americans means that the homeless in inner cities will be neglected not only because they are homeless, but also because they live in an urban environment that is predominantly black and poor.

Racial Exclusion and Politics

Proposals to end the problem of homelessness, even those that advocate some redistribution of wealth (Dreier & Atlas, 1989), must also address the impact of race on national decisions to address social problems. Hochschild (1989) noted:

> the problem of severe poverty and its attendant behaviors are emotions can be solved only when Americans choose actually, not merely rhetorically, to open the opportunity structure to all regardless of their race, class, or gender (p.144).

The promises of opportunity promoted in the 1960s that have since disappeared need to be restored to desperately poor inner city Afro-American communities. While Mead (1986) argues that every American has a responsibility toward society, that responsibility vanishes as resources disappear and the community ceases to be a community.

Restoring the hopes and aspirations of desperately poor inner city Afro-Americans will not be inexpensive (National League of Cities, 1987). The costs should include; revitalizing inner city schools, creating jobs in both the public and private sectors for inner city residents, and increasing participation of inner city Afro-Americans in the governance of the nation. Problematic behaviors or actions that result from severe poverty and isolation also need to be addressed. Teenage pregnancy,

high school dropouts, and crime are symptoms of lost hope and blocked opportunities.

The stark contrast between public policies that support the middle class, particularly white middle class Americans, and policies that interface with inner city Afro-Americans must be addressed. Middle class white Americans are encouraged to finish high school, secure a job, and support their children. These supportive policies take many different forms, such as well funded secondary schools, and a link to a college education because their parents are usually employed and have been able to use tax shelters, such as the home 'mortgage interest deduc- tion, to build up a resource for college tuition. In addition, white Americans rarely have to struggle against racial discrimination.

In contrast, public policies that interface with poor inner city Afro-American children increasingly rely on fear and intimida- tion (Mead, 1986; Botstein, 1988). Inner city school systems are desperately underfunded and provide poor quality education, yet society expects inner city school children to finish high school and compete with children who graduate from well funded school systems regardless of the fact that inner city children who are poor and Afro-American are already disad- vantaged because American society continues to discriminate on the basis of skin color and class.

Radical reforms of such a broad nature are difficult and engender controversy. It is conservatively argued that poverty is best addressed by voluntarism or charity. (Stepp, 1991). Cur- rent efforts to address the problem of homelessness are largely failing (Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990) because structures, such as race and class exclusion, remain intact. Hochschild (1989) sums it up best;

> So far, the American policy making system has made a lot of wrong choices, but there is no reason why we cannot change our course, and lots of reasons why we should (p.155).

The following set of elements are necessary to begin the change necessary to bring about reform; first, national leaders must declare that the plight of many inner city Afro-Americans has reached crisis proportions; second, a strong national leader- ship has to be willing to risk offending entrenched elites, such as

lending institutions, the National Association of Realtors, and upper income tax payers; and third, an agenda for change to address severe and persistent poverty must be developed and implemented. There are interest groups, such as the National Association of Social Workers and the Public Welfare Associ-ation, that are concerned about racial exclusion and poverty. These groups have to form a coalition, ignore their differences, and work with groups, such as the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, to put pressure on receptive national leaders to begin the process of change.

The focus of these reforms must be designed to provide bootstraps to people who have been historically excluded from acquiring the means to escape severe and persistent poverty. Harrington (1984) has argued that it is important to unite the poor and the middle class in an alliance of mutual self-interest that focuses on providing bootstraps to both groups. The middle class, while certainly not as vulnerable to homelessness as the urban poor, are vulnerable to lower standards of living (Belcher and Hegar, 1991). The same forces of deindustrialization and underemployment that have trapped the urban poor are also coming together to entrap the middle class.

Gil (1981) has described a revolution of education in which the values behind policies would be debated and analyzed Rein (1976). Admittedly, it will be difficult to unite the middle class and the urban poor into a force for change that can address the needs of both groups. It is also not simply an issue of class, but race also transcends the struggle between suburbanites and city dwellers. Despite some advances in race relations, Ameri-can society continues to be plagued by issues of race. Therefore, it is important to focus on issues that are a problem to both middle and lower-income Americans.

The American health care system is in shambles and hos-pitals and business groups, who have historically been on opposing sides of the national health insurance debate, are now increasingly calling for national health insurance reform (Belcher and Palley; 1991; Swaboda and Crenshaw, 1989). Race is an issue in the politics of health care, but income has usually been the sword that has been used to divide the groups. Conser-vative rhetoric has focused on blaming the high cost of health

care on the myth that the middle class are paying higher health insurance premiums to provide health care to the indigent. In reality, responsibility for the rising cost of health care and the inability of many middle class Americans to obtain affordable health insurance rests with the over-use of technology, burdensome paperwork, and provider profits that have outpaced other increases, such as food, in the Gross National Product (Enthoven and Kronick, 1989).

Education to unite the middle and lower classes must demythologize myths, such as the notion that the provision of health care for the poor is the sole cause of rising health care costs. This type of education can help to break down the barriers that divide the middle and lower classes. Resolving decades of racial discrimination will not take place overnight. Nevertheless, any effort that brings together people from different income groups and focuses their attention on a common problem is a step in the right direction. As different income groups find that they share some common problems, it becomes easier to educate middle class groups about the need for greater resources for inner city education and to create more equitable approaches to economic development.

In the final analysis, middle class groups have to be educated to believe that the demise of the inner city is not in the best interests of people who live in the middle class suburbs. Business groups can be educated that severe and persistent poverty in the inner city is costly because businesses are increasingly unable to find skilled workers and businesses located in urban areas are confronted with soaring crime rates and higher insurance premiums for property coverage. Therefore, reform of the inner cities is beneficial to business because it increases the supply of potential employees and creates a more positive environment for commerce.

The social work profession can provide a catalyst for reform of the inner cities by educating its own members, which are mostly middle class. The politics of reform are fraught with difficulties because significant reform is often unpopular. Nevertheless, these difficulties should not dissuade the profession from raising issues, such as the link between racial exclusion, severe and persistent poverty, and homelessness.

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