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THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE INNER CITY--*FUNCTIONALITY FOR PRACTICE

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Many aspects of the future seem imponderable, in the sense that they are impossible of reckoning, and into this category falls the plight of cities. That portion of the cities which is marked by physical blight, continuing property and human deterioration, and myriads of problems of survival—the so-called "inner city" is even more elusive of future prediction and remedy. Theoretician and practitioner alike appear to be enmeshed in an endless web of conceptual gossamer, and palliative ministrations to a relative few targets within their purview.

The intent of this paper, however, is not to castigate but rather to challenge the energies of thought and action once more towards potential cure rather than endless remedies for symptoms. To accept the underlying assumptions of a cure, is to affirm the possibility that man has the intellectual ability and the will to make substantial and lasting improvements in the human condition, and that social structuring can exist not primarily to regulate man but to fulfill him.

Further, by way of introduction, the fact that a word has been coined as part of the title for this paper, is a means of elaborating the notion that from a practitioner view, knowledge must be functional or designed for operation. Hence, *functionality means a design for operation.

State of Theory

It might be more appropriate to develop here some of the dilemmas of theory for there are many theoretical approaches which purport to provide a basis for understanding the dynamics of the inner city. Some of these are analyses of poverty, causal factors and manifestations, racial and ethnic differences as sources of conflict and tensions, cultural delineations of the social structure, impact of predominate and subordinate cultures upon lifestyles, institutional arrangements for the accomodation of residents of inner city areas², politics and power as factors in decision-making, self-determination; the list could continue ad infinitum. However, it is within this amalgam of concepts that value conflicts and discontinuities reside. These theoretical contradictions give rise to what Warren (1971) has called the diagnostic paradigm. He further suggests that of two predominant paradigms which are utilized, the first which places the explanation for the individual's social condition upon that individual's own characteristics and adjustment to the social arrangements of the societal conditions around him is most often applied. He concludes that the supporting-belief value system for this model is well elaborated, and that this accounts for the wide utility of

of that conceptual framework. The second paradigm which analyzes the social system and the social structure is not equally elaborated in a system of beliefs and values, hence, is less frequently used and does not lead to prognostications about changes which must be made in the social structure and institutional arrangements. The same view has been well articulated by Ryan (1971) in his "blaming the victim" analogy.

Thus the practitioner who wishes to apply scientific knowledge is presented with an array of concepts ranging from the earliest Biblical treatise on the eternal presence of the poor to the other polar position that if given opportunity persons can enter the democratic stream and articulate their needs and desires thereby instituting a change of conditions for improved living.

Many authors have in various ways promulgated the views that are associated with the use of a diagnostic paradigm of the type that stresses individual deficiency and individual triumph. The literature is replete with individual literary testimonials which lead towards the conclusion that given time and sufficient opportunity, most inner city residents can break out of their entrapment of poverty and social deprivation. To mention a few: Claude Brown received wide accolades for his autobiographical Manchild in the Promised Land, and he was neither the first nor the last to be acclaimed for "telling it like it is". Ethel Waters, a great entertainer, provided material for her life story, His Eye is On the Sparrow. For nearly a decade, there was a steady flow of this type of "confession" in literature that while the society had cheated these authors of their birthright, they had through sheer diligence, and repeated storming of the doors of opportunity risen above the hobbling circumstances which threatened to bind them. At this point it will have become apparent that much of the theory also has a distinct racial link, and the social message literature of the time both shapes and reflects the prevailing views about the causes of man's problem. To be Black and poor have become synonymous. What becomes obscured, then, is the fact that thousands of poor are non-Black, and poverty when numbered in the millions has no color bounds.

It is premature, however, to leave the arena of scientific theory as advanced by social scientists. The delineation of social systems theory³ helped in a shift towards emphasis of a functioning system as valid only when all subsystems are "go". The interratedness of the problems with dysfunctional aspects of the system are all too apparent. Social psychologists like Kenneth Clark wrote positions which led to the U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1954 to desegregate the public schools, and in his book, Dark Getto, Clark gives ample emphasis to the view that the conditions of a ghetto, inner city living, are not created by those who reside within.⁴ It is also a matter of paramount importance

to note that in the recent reversal of the desegregation position which was legitimated by law twenty years ago, there is abundant evidence that the systems of beliefs and values did not achieve a state of change as mandated by the law.

Theories of social change have always been concerned with politics and the social order. Few of them, however, have been revolutionary statements for change; if they are revolutionary they die of suppression or "benign neglect." Consequently, much of the theoretical conceptual material has emphasized an evolutionary character of politics with more and more persons from the lower echelons of society achieving the impossible dream of being elected to high political office. When this political evolution comes to the inner city, the expectations of residents are raised significantly. The little man catches a bit of the dream, campaigns for his preferred office-seeker, and upbraids his non-voting neighbors whose ideology dictates that they should refrain from suffrage in a system which they deem to be non-relevant. Once elected, the candidate-office holder, finds to his dismay that he cannot do any of the acts which he pledged and sincerely desired to promulgate in terms of social change. His constituency becomes quickly disillusioned with their impostor, and his political demise begins. If he is a Black Mayor of an American city, of which office holders there are nearly three hundred, the mayor acts boldly, keeps up a steady campaign against the forces which seek to constrain him, and perhaps carries on his own private war with his mutinous police department. If the official is a Congress person, he appears somewhat more likely to be allowed to function in concerted efforts with his Congressional colleagues, and in caucus may become quite astute at working to gain the support for legislation which affects the life of cities.

Theoretically, a political scientist such as Charles Hamilton writes () that the inner city is merely a series of conduits through which economic resources are permitted to channel to give the illusion that residents have some clout and control over their own destiny. As the co-author with Stokely Carmichael of the first in depths analysis of Black Power, Hamilton has subsequently fed into the theoretical stream much information about the linkage between economics and power, and has some well-worded notes of caution for those who espouse black capitalism as a means of advancing beyond the restraints of poverty and subjugation.

Those who are afflicted by the accompanying maladies of social oppression need services of various kinds. Primarily, these services have been social services delivered by private and public agencies. They have been social welfare instruments which means a very different kind of conceptual base and delivery than a social security or social insurance conceptualization. In reflecting back to the times of the '30's and the year 1935 as the beginning of a social security program

on the American scene, it is interesting that the inception of those services pointed towards a preventive guaranteed minimal standard of living for all citizens. However, with the passing of the Great Depression, other realities took precedence, and more and more the social services of the nation were geared to those with critical needs. Hence, the individual who achieves help must also achieve some form of client status and present himself as needing something that self-sufficient persons are not ordinarily expected to require.

At the same time the theoretical underpinnings hinged upon the self, self-mastery, individual achievement, and group participations with one's fellows, geared to promote consensus and harmony. So marked was the emphasis for a time upon agreement and consensus for action that the discontinuities of conflict on an international scale were totally inconsistent with the peace-and-harmony-at-all-costs views which were being embraced within communities. The loss of awareness of the creative possibilities inherent in conflict, and the absence of strategies for resolving tensions on a rational basis led to climactical expressions of human feelings through explosive riots and rebellion against the systems.

To recapitulate, various theories, models, and constructs aim to enlighten other theorists, as well as practitioners about conditions of core cities. These core areas are called by many terms—the inner city, the central city, the ghetto, "old" city and so on. However, the gaps in knowledge, the different underlying assumptions about man, and the lack of clear definition of the nature of the problems themselves leave abundant room for further study, more sensitive research, and partnership in the research enterprise.

Concerns of Practice

In the last ten years or less, an array of practitioners have crossed the threshold of intervention into inner city concerns. Disenchantment with professionalism which bore marked detachment from the lifestyles and crises of persons affected, caused widespread reaction from the "client" population. That reaction is evident even in the attempt at designating consumers of services proffered by less odious labels. Whatever the appellation given, the ranks of persons experiencing dysjuncture with the social system has steadily increased, and the most obvious concern is that the inner city has not shown improvement per in the material indicators of housing, business, employment, recreational outlet and others that are used to determine the positiveness of life quality. A generalization which might prove valid with the combined researches available is that the "inner city" is not a place, geographically, or a timespan in the development of urbanism;

it is rather an institutionalized set of values and beliefs which keep society adversely stratified, and prevent modifications of any scope in the social structuring or resources available for persons to achieve a reasonable standard of life. The quality of life does not significantly and progressively improve for inner city dwellers. Drawing again from Warren's study of Model Cities programs, it was determined that those programs like other thrusts before addressed a segment of the population most amenable to change from deviance to conformity, and produced "graduates" with greater skills in confrontation, but with no real innovative alternatives to the existing systems.

Practitioners found themselves hopelessly buffeted between the two sides: those with power, and those without.¹⁰ The great expectations that marked the post-riots period dried up into frustration and rage at a service delivery network which was inadequately prescribed, underfunded, unevenly administrated, and had the same basic flaws of scientific fallacies as had characterized the earlier applied diagnostic paradigm."

Poverty funds that seemed to abound went in all directions, sometimes with excessively high administrative costs, other times into consumer-directed service delivery systems that replicated most of the errors of the developing profession of social work in its earlier stages. Despite some impressive successes, which might well have been serendipitous because of their spirit of adventure, studies of outcomes available to the field, and these are limited evaluative efforts, show that some drug addicts were helped by former drug addicts, some welfare recipients left the welfare rolls with the help of some other welfare helpers, and a goodly number of community programs made people bolder in articulating their concerns and approaching sources of help.

Without documenting these views singularly, it can be offered that student research in some schools of social work tend to support these² assertions. To be more specific, one graduate student social worker¹ who conducted a survey of agency services available to minority group residents in one model neighborhood area in a Connecticut city found that despite the geographical presence of social service installations aimed to conduct "outreach" services, there did not appear to be significant increase in services. Either no representation or underrepresentation characterized the Boards of Directors of most of the ongoing established social services agencies. Hence, by inference, the poverty programs were not a proving ground for movement into responsibility of continuing private agency programs.

Further, there was no substantial increase in the use of those services available to consumers, and no clearcut indication of better understanding of the potential help available through social service delivery.

It is particularly important to interpret these findings not as the foes of social work have sought to interpret—failure of social work as a profession, but rather as evidence that social services are the institutionalized arrangements of a sanctioning society which imposes considerable restraints upon the directions in which services can develop. When seed money for experimentation and innovation dried up prematurely, the ability to define the problem, address the problem, evaluate results, and feedback the experience was just beginning to take hold.

Practitioners must answer accountably to consumers, to entrepreneurs, to sources of power and control at the top of the economic bracket. It is an uneasy stewardship. The consumer experiences his uncertain job security, or fluctuating welfare grant, the funding body examines intangible results to find ways of slicing scarce resources, the social worker pledges advocacy to the client with an uneasy knowledge that institutional change is bigger than any avenues open—it is the whole ball of wax. Perceptive students clamor for the reinstatement of social reform and visionary leadership. Martin Luther King, Walter Reuther, and Cesar Chavez stride through the pages of history, and symbolically only a Chavez is left, weakened, numbed, and dismembered by the fray. Social work has its heroes too, and the martyrdom of a Goodman and Schwerner in Mississippi during the civil rights demonstrations or the tenacious leadership of a Carl Stokes, past mayor of a large city with roots in social work do not go unheralded.

Meanwhile, in more practical terms a faculty team picks up the work begun by the student and continues to research for Community Knowledge of Existing Resources and How the Community Defines the Adequacy of Social Agencies as a Forecast for Developing a New Plan or Service. (Battle et al, 1973)¹³

A review of social work and social science literature reveals that professional workers are greatly concerned with the inadequacy of services, the imposition of "colonialism" upon inner city¹⁴ residents, and the imposition of incompatible values upon reluctant subjects. Dick Gregory, the tragi-comedian, puts it thus: "... you make me learn a different culture along with how to survive the rats and the roaches..."¹⁵

In a summary comment of this section of the paper, which barely touches upon the complexity of concerns stemming from practice, the writer must venture an opinion based upon recent contact with practitioners from the international scene;¹⁶ the human problems which are herein explicated and inferred are universal problems, and sociology

of ghettoization does not confine itself within national boundaries. Hence, the approach to scientific inquiry, and the dissemination and application of knowledge must be as universal, granted of course the applied form is appropriate to the cultural patterns of the countries in which the knowledge is used. A moot point though it may seem, there have been some devastating examples of the importation of ethnocentric modes of intervention.

Setting Directions

In presenting future agenda, the challenge lies not so much in finding directions as setting out in those directions which we as a group of scientists of inquiry and application wish to go. By this time, it should be apparent that this paper espouses an irrevocable commitment to a partnership enterprise, whether one wishes to call it interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or otherwise. The research enterprise must always address itself to inquiry which has no immediate application, and in the interest of pure science which extends the basic knowledge about man. At the same time, however, it is the firm position of this paper that the times require an ongoing action-oriented research which can partialize a problem, posit a solution, try a series of interventions, and give evaluative feedback of results sufficiently soon to enable a change of direction as indicated. While there may seem to be certain inconsistency between this conclusion and the earlier assertions that social restructuring has not been a part of the commitment of the society, nevertheless, the position taken is that to achieve functionality or the design for operation required by the focus of this paper—the inner city—there must be movement towards developing knowledge about how institutional arrangements come to be, and how systems can be altered to provide more effective results. Before we can formulate the answers we must raise the questions.

A partnership of inquiry could set up fewer dichotomies of persons, and could move forward with the goodwill of those whom it seeks to serve. Permit me to quote, somewhat out of context, but for added enlightenment it is hoped: Dr. James A. Goodman, of the National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A. Chairman of one of the Commissions at the recent meeting of the International Conference of Social Welfare stated that

As many people as possible should be encouraged to participate (in research) according to their abilities.

The research carried out will depend on its context. Academic versus governmental auspice seems to indicate that academic tends to be too rigid and non-functional for social planners.

The task does not end with the report of the research findings; there should be a simplified summary of its conclusions, possible use and implementation.

He further stated that

an undigested voluminous quantity of research material exists in the world. There should be informed cooperation of people in the research that is going on.

There should be a quest for explication of the value system underlying the research. The elimination of poverty is a primary goal in human development, and cannot be achieved by economics alone. There must be movement towards the achievement of social goals.

The social researcher and economic planner must not be divorced from each other. There is a dearth of reliable information for planning and coordination of research between international bodies.

Research in social development has a low priority in different countries.

In conclusion, the sociology of the inner city requires the utmost of informed understanding by social scientists of every persuasion if the problems of poverty, racism, and social handicap are to be effectively eliminated. We have, in this author's opinion been too piecemeal, too particularized, and grossly undercommitted to any major societal change.

Notes

1. See, for example, Charles A. Valentine, Culture and Poverty, as a critique deals with the incongruities that arise out of different theoretical perspectives on poverty. The writings on poverty and cities is of course as inexhaustible list.
2. The Negro and the City, edited by Richard B. Sherman contains some of this information.
3. Talcott Parsons and Charles B. Loomis are two well known theoreticians of social systems theory. Loomis' specificity appeals to the writer of this paper.
4. Valentine's comments on Kenneth Clark's contribution to changing the traditional thinking, arising from E. Franklin Frazier's work, bear on this point.
5. The term benign neglect is most often attributed to Daniel Moynihan per his memo to President Richard Nixon suggesting that a possible response to civil rights demands of Black people might take that form. The American free press, during the Watergate investigations, reported that Howard Hughes had used the term prior to Moynihan's memo when directing his employees to take certain repressive measures to stem the tide of Black demands in the state of Nevada.
6. Some well-known religious sects such as the Black Muslims take this position.
7. Abraham Maslow's theory is an example, as well as the widely used work of Erikson and others.
8. Grace Coyle as a revered author of social work literature carries something of this message in the flavor of democratic participation in the society as an ideal for the individual. She is, of course, consistent with the hope and idealism of the era.
9. Read the several works and reports of riots in major American cities, notably Watts, Newark and Detroit.
10. A research study by Helene Levens of the University of Wisconsin was useful in synthesizing these ideas.
11. Some of the sociologists who understood the possible helplessness of the practitioner in the absence of systems change wrote about this. For example, Hyman Rodman's short paper in New Perspectives on Poverty, p.171.

Footnotes cont'd

12. An unpublished student thesis at the University of Connecticut.
13. Faculty research at the University of Connecticut by Rufus Battle, Jr., Ivor J. Echols, and Johnese Howard. Final report in preparation.
14. See Blauner in Bibliography.
15. See Gregory in Bibliography.
16. The author attended the XVII International Conference on Social Welfare, held in Nairobi, Kenya, July 14 to 20, 1974 in which many of the same practical concerns were discussed.

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Bloch, "The White Worker and the Negro Client in Psychotherapy", Social Work, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1968, pg. 36.

(in the same as above)

"Reactions of Normal Children to Retardates in Integrated Groups" pg. 75 and "Comments on Currents: Up the Down Escalator With Welfare; Black Power and Community Theory; Another Myth?" pg.121.

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HORATIO ALGER: THE PERSISTENCE OF A GHETTO SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTION

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I was born, raised and graduated from high school in Watts ...Watts like other black ghettos across the country is for ambitious youths, a transient status....In one sense, I was the archetype of the ghetto child who through hard work and initiative, was pulling himself toward a better life. I was the example, the exception. It was my life that was held up to Watts youth to emulate