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The Sociology of Knowledge of William J. Wilson: Placing The Truly Disadvantaged in its Sociohistorical Context

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In this paper I will do the following: first, set forth an introductory statement designed to place Wilson's work in some philosophical-theoretical perspective; then, I will identify and describe what I consider to be three distinct, yet overlapping, phases or central themes in Wilson's work; third, I will discuss how he treats Black families and discuss some features of his policy recommendations.

By 1988, it was clear to almost all social scientists and a large number of policy makers and ordinary citizens as well, that William J. Wilson was an eminent Black scholar. His four books, all published by established publishing houses, have been well received. His latest two have been awarded numerous prizes. He is greatly appreciated, admired, and in great demand as a speaker and consultant by scholarly, public policy, and public forums in general. He has served as departmental chair and continues to serve as distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago. In addition, he has been awarded one of the McArthur Foundation Fellowships. And to crown his professional achievements as a sociologist, he has been elected president of the American Sociological Association, becoming the first Black sociologist so honored since E. Franklin Frazier was so honored more than 30 years ago.

Such eminence, seems a long way, indeed, from Wilson's humble origins some 53 years ago in a low-income family in

the small, rural community of Derry Township some 40 miles east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father, who was a laborer in the coal mines died when Wilson was 12. He was brought up by his mother, alone who supported him and his five other siblings by working as a maid, a trajectory so common in the Black experience of a generation ago. Despite her efforts at working, the family for a time needed the assistance of the public welfare system. Later, the Black church, a historically Black college, and his service in the U.S. Army would provide major opportunity screens and support structures for his upward mobility, as they have for thousands of young Black men.

Wilson's academic career began at the small historically Black Wilberforce University with the financial assistance of a Black church. At Wilberforce, Wilson was surrounded by the Black intellectual tradition. Wilberforce was the launching pad for another distinguished Black sociologist, W.E.B. DuBois. Indeed, Wilberforce gave DuBois his first teaching position, and it was the setting where DuBois first developed and practiced his revolutionary ideas about the new science of sociology. And, it was his burning desire to follow this new discipline that led him to the University of Pennsylvania and to his monumental work, *The Philadelphia Negro*, which still stands as a beacon of Black scholarship.

When Bill Wilson entered Wilberforce, he would not have been accepted at most of the nation's white colleges, including many of those who would bestow lavish honors on him today. By the time he earned his Masters degree at Bowling Green State University in 1961, and Ph.D. in Sociology from Washington State University in 1966, he was prepared for his rapid rise to the top of his profession. At that time, Washington State University was one of the few major universities to welcome Black graduate students, and until recently it had produced more Black doctorates in sociology than any other. Among these are Anna Grant and James Blackwell. He needed only the opportunity and the support structures provided by the University of Massachusetts and the University of Chicago. Wilson's performance as a sociologist during the past 20 years has been so phenomenal and his transition from the Black

world to the white world so complete that he has been quoted as saying that while he experienced racial discrimination during his early years, he cannot recall experiencing a single major incident of overt racial discrimination since he entered graduate school in the early 1960s. There are not many Black people of any social class or occupation who can make that statement. Wilson, therefore, is among the "truly advantaged" (Pear, 1987; Greenstein, October 25, 1988). Thus, for the past 20 years, Wilson has been wholeheartedly accepted in and surrounded by white upper-middle-class society, a situation far different from that of the vast majority of Blacks of any social class.

Wilson and the Sociology of Knowledge

The argument being advanced in this paper is that Wilson's scholarship, his ideas, his theories, the subject matter he studies, and his conclusions are all influenced to some extent, not only by his brilliant and well-trained mind, but by his experience as well, including his position and changing position in racially-stratified and race-conscious America. His scholarship is thus, in part, the product of his remarkable intellect, his African heritage, his Afro-American experience, and his American experience.

Now the question is what is the relative influence of his African heritage and his American experience on his scholarship. It might be said that as one observes the maturation of Wilson as a scholar over the years, one notes a certain 'declining significance of the African heritage'. Wilson writes more and more as an American sociologist, discarding much of the African-American experience, culture, and insight, so visible in his early works.

Even so, however, Wilson's America is not everybody's America. He is a Black American and, thus, has been socialized in both the Black world and the white world. His experience is colored by that fact; it affects him. And, it especially affects others who view him. For as a Black scholar in America, he is both the man in the academy and the man in the mirror. And both these identities fuse into a whole that is much more complex than either the one or the other.

There is still further cultural and intellectual complexity to

William J. Wilson that might be helpful in putting his works in context. He is not an ordinary American sociologist; he is a Black middle class American. You might not suspect it from his recent writings, particularly given the terrible things he says about the Black middle class. But, alas, he is one of us. His education, occupation, and income all place him distinctly ahead of most Americans in status, standing, and opportunities. Wilson is both Black and white in experience, and in both working class and middle class. He is, therefore, a much better sociologist than most of his colleagues, in part, because he writes out of a much richer experience than they can bring to their work, particularly their efforts to understand race relations in America.

Thus, while society has been changing for the better, he has broken through barriers of class and race and stands today at the pinnacle of the opportunity structure in society. Yet, he brings with him something of all his salient experience and, thus, the complexity. Not many people can write a book which is at once so powerful, so insightful, and so controversial, that it could be denounced by white conservatives, white liberals, and Black liberals, all the while vying with each other to claim him and give him awards and have him address their forums. All of which makes Wilson one of the more powerful voices and pens in American social-science and social-policy analysis writing today.

But most people, including most of his colleagues at the University of Chicago, probably do not see all this complexity. Some may tend to see Wilson simply as a Black man. Others may see him simply as not a Black man. But, few are likely to see him as both Black and white. And few will see him as working class and upper-middle class. For Americans in general have difficulty viewing such complexities. It is more common and, perhaps, more comfortable to view a person as either one thing or another. That is quintessentially an American-European intellectual tendency, owing perhaps to our Greek heritage. A glass is either half empty or half full. Wilson is either a Black scholar or not a Black scholar. A person is either influenced by his or her class or race. In African and Afro-American thought, we know that reality is often more complex

than that and that a glass may be half full and half empty both at the same time; and so with most things including class and race. It is a complexity which Wilson recognized in his earlier works more than his latter works; and that is, in part, a function of his complex experience and his changing position in the changing American social structure. It is this evolution of Wilson's central ideas as expressed in his scholarship to which I now turn.

The Three Phases of William J. Wilson

There are, then, three distinct phases reflected in Wilson's scholarship. Phase I, I call the race conscious phase. It is most graphically represented by two books published in 1973. One is a book Wilson coedited with two other scholars titled *Through Different Eyes: Black and White Perspectives on American Race Relations*, published by Oxford University Press. The second book published the same year is *Power, Racism, and Privilege: Race Relations in Theoretical and Sociohistorical Perspectives*, published by the Free Press.

The second phase of Wilson's work, which I call the class conscious phase is represented by his prize winning book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, first published in 1978 by the University of Chicago Press.

The third phase, which I call the synthesis, is represented most dramatically by his new book, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, published in 1987 by the University of Chicago Press.

Phase I: Race Consciousness

In Phase I of Wilson's scholarship, produced primarily between 1965 and 1969 when he was assistant professor and associate professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, race consciousness played an important part in his work. This was the height of the civil rights movement which would touch all institutions of higher education and most disciplines. Moreover, the inner-city uprisings of 1967 to 1969 and the student revolts of 1968 to 1970 all had their impact on Wilson, and this impact was reflected in his scholarship.

During this period, Wilson the rapidly rising young

scholar, made original contributions to social science and the effort of social science to understand and explain how a democratic society found itself in the midst of these explosive movements for social change. This was reflected in the two books referred to above and in a number of articles including the following: "Race Relations Models and Ghetto Behavior" (Rose, 1972) and "The Quest for a Meaningful Black Experience on White Campuses" (*Massachusetts Review*, 1969).

Wilson dealt with all these themes of racial conflict and Black activism in his book *Power, Racism and Privilege.* In the process he combined his penchant for original theoretical propositions with careful analysis of empirical observation to make a number of contributions to knowledge. He clarified our understanding of power relations between groups, of competition for scarce resources, of cultural pluralism and most especially of racism in its individual, collective and institutional forms.

A good example of this occurs toward the end of the volume when he summarizes his general perspective as follows:

> Furthermore, as I have indicated, racial intolerance tends to be greater in periods of economic decline, particularly for whites unable to advance themselves and forced by economic strains to compete more heavily with minority groups. Accordingly, not only is it possible that the gains experienced by middle and upper-income blacks could decline, but it is also possible that the deteriorating circumstances of many lower class blacks could worsen, further widening the economic schism. (Wilson, 1973, pp. 150–151)

Published in 1973 and written at least a year earlier, such insight was to prove prophetic a decade later.

Wilson also contributed to our understanding of race conflict, power imbalance, racial solidarity, the legitimate aspirations of Black people and the meaning of the civil rights and Black power movements of the 1960s in the following theoretical speculation.

> We have seen throughout this volume that race relations are extremely variable, shifting back and forth from periods of accommodation to periods of overt conflict. Until factors that produce

racial conflict are eliminated (such as differential power, racism, strong sense of group position, and intergroup competition for scarce resources), this pattern will continue to persist. (Wilson, 1973, p. 151)

Still another contribution of this volume and of Wilson's work in Phase I was his connection of institutional racism and political oppression in the United States and in South Africa. This theme would be missing from phases II and III of Wilson's work.

The second major work of Wilson during Phase I was a book he coedited with two other social scientists, Peter I. Rose and Stanley Rothman. The book *Through Different Eyes: Black and White Perspectives on American Race Relations* was published the same year as Wilson's own book, in 1973.

Wilson made at least three major contributions to this book and to our knowledge of race relations, institutional racism, and the struggle for social justice. First, he took the leadership in selecting the other eight Black social scientists who contributed articles to the book. At the same time, he approved the selection of the 12 white social scientists who participated. By these selections, particularly of the Black scholars, Wilson made a distinct contribution. By the selection of the subject matter and the authors, the editors explicitly recognized the primacy of racial conflict, racial dominance, and racial oppression as central features of American life. This theme would not be quite so prominent in the later phases of Wilson's work.

In selecting the Black authors, Wilson chose some of the brightest young talent then available. They included Joyce Ladner, writing on the urban poor; Johnetta B. Cole, writing on the Black middle class; Roy S. Bryce-Laporte, on Black immigrants; Edgar Epps on Black integrationists; J. Herman Blake, on Black nationalists; Chuck Stone on Black politicians; Sethard Fisher on Black professors; and Cleveland Donald, Jr. on Black students. As we shall see, none of these scholars would figure prominently and positively in the later stages of Wilson's work, in part, perhaps, because all of them continued to write about the institutional racism and the powerful entrenchment of political and economic power in the hands of whites with the

Black minority structurally subordinated to these forces. While these are themes they shared with Wilson in Phase I of his work, he would shift to a different focus, namely the ascendancy of social class over race and racism.

Still another and most important contribution Wilson makes to this volume is his own essay, which appears as an epilogue, "The Significance of Social and Racial Prisms" (Rose, Rothman & Wilson, 1973). This essay is, in part, a condensation of Wilson's ideas expressed more fully in his own book, *Power, Racism, and Privilege: Race Relations in Theoretical and Sociohistorical Perspectives*. This one essay is worth the price of the whole book. It is nothing short of brilliant, insightful, and incisive. It is also the essence of vintage Wilson of the first Phase.

Early on he reminds us, as did several of the other authors in this volume, that race and class are very much imbedded in the American social structure, impacting on the ideas and the wellbeing of Black and white Americans and their respective views of each other and relationships between them. Delving into the complexity of these interrelationships he observes as follows: "The crucial underlying assumption of these propositions is that racial groups, like other social groups, engage in a constant competitive struggle for control of scarce resources" (Rose, Rothman & Wilson, 1973), p. 396). Then he continues, "White gains from black subordination is the historic pattern of race relations" (Rose, Rothman & Wilson, 1973, p. 396). This insight too would be muted in the later phases of Wilson's work.

A theme that would run through each of the three phases is the dialectical relationship between race and class bias as they emanate from the social structure. While in later phases the relative emphasis and his conception of the relative dominance of these forces would shift, one can find the rudiments of this dialectic spelled out in this brief essay. He concludes as follows:

> Thus we have seen throughout this volume that images of American race relations are influenced and shaped not only by race but also by social, economic, political, and historical situations. Although people tend to view racial problems through particular

sociocultural prisms, a common underlying variable ultimately determines whether their racial attitudes will be hostile, friendly or indifferent—namely, a belief that in-group claims to certain rights and privileges have been (or will be) jeopardized or threatened by the special actions of outgroup racial members. (Rose, Rothman & Wilson, 1973, p. 409)

It would be difficult to find a more insightful explanation of white resistance to housing for Black families in formerly white neighborhoods, as this came to public attention in 1988 in Yonkers, New York and other places. Thus, whoever it was that persuaded the Governor of New York to describe this situation as a conflict of class and not race had certainly not read or had forgotten Wilson's Phase I. Such resistance operates at the highest social-class level as well as in the middle class and among the poor. It is seen in white universities where Black faculty are frozen out of tenured positions and in Black universities where Black faculty are becoming an endangered species. It is seen in professional athletics where blacks are frozen out of the front office and in the inner city where Blacks are frozen out of good jobs, and in social welfare agencies where Black culture, ideas, and leadership are often subordinated to whites. Which is why even in 1988 while Wilson has deemphasized racism, in the experience of most Black Americans it is still a common reality. In a recent study, we found that more importantly successful efforts to change the status quo will always be resisted by a variety of means, legal and translegal, by intellectual and political persuasion, and especially by economic political power. Resistance to the status quo, thus must also turn to a variety of strategies, all designed to amass and use legitimate power to disturb the imbalance of power relations. From this perspective, it is clear that race relations will continue for some time to follow the ebbs and flows, seen so clearly and described so incisively in Phase I of Wilson's work. As we shall see presently, while not denying the existence of these factors, Wilson would emphasize nonracial factors, impersonal forces, and the ascendancy of class over race and racism as the central foci of Phase II of his work.

In Phase I, Wilson called on his experience as a Black American to help clarify the nature of American race relations. He

focused on the structure of power and privilege, which rested
so heavily in the hands of white-dominated society, norms,
and institutions. In the process he would clarify for us the true
nature of racism in its individual, collective, and institutional
forms. During this first phase of his career, he focused his
considerable talent, intellect, and imagination on breaking
down the walls of racial oppression. He approached this from
his own experience as an African American. He, thus, stood
boldly before the temple of racism and called for its disman-
tling. He was our Joshua at the Battle of Jericho. He was our
Jack Johnson, striking a mortal blow to the idea of white
supremacy. He did it with ideas, words, and remarkably per-
suasive analyses. In Phase I of his work, he was our modern
W.E.B. DuBois, telling us and the world in prose almost as
eloquent as the master, himself, that the problem of the twen-
tieth century is the problem of the color line. In Phase II he
would have other priorities. He would sing a different tune.

Phase II: Class Consciousness

Where Bill Wilson's scholarly focus in Phase I had been on
institutional racism and its structural correlates, his focus in
Phase II would shift to social class and its structural correlates.
While both race and class were viewed as important societal
factors, and while both race bias and class bias would be seen
as induced by the malfunctioning of society, the class factors
would be seen as paramount, in part, because of the progress
which had been made in race relations.

In Phase I, Wilson had written of the 1960s Black struggle
as follows: "The recent surge of Black protest has presented a
series of challenges to white prerogatives. Blacks have not only
revolted against labor exploitation but also have confronted
whites in areas where the latter had almost exclusive control
(e.g. places of residence, upper status jobs, higher education,
politics). Racial tension and hostility has spread, therefore, into
institutions occupied by whites who, in the past, could smugly
sit back and blame racial problems on lower-class ignorance or
on southern racism. Disillusionment and hostility have, in
turn, increased among Blacks as they attempt to overcome new
obstacles to racial equality erected by the very groups once

defining themselves as either liberal or tolerant toward racial differences." This emphasis would be absent from Phase II.

In Phase I, Wilson showed appreciation for the positive role of the Black middle class. "The rise of the black middle class in America is directly associated with the sustained, disciplined protests during the middle 1950s and early 1960s. In fact, with a few notable exceptions such as the Marcus Garvey movement of the 1920s and the ghetto revolts of the 1960s, it has been the black middle class and black intelligentsia who have most frequently been associated with black protest throughout the period of competitive race relations in America" (Wilson, 1973, p. 196). In Phase II he would have a different assessment of the role of the Black middle class, suggesting a certain responsibility for the rise of the Black underclass.

The centerpiece of Wilson's Phase II scholarship is his prize winning book: *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1978. By now Wilson was Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago.

The Chicago experience. The University of Chicago had begun in keeping with the spirit of the times to recruit Black faculty members and administrators. Among these were John Hope Franklin in history, Edgar Epps in education, Walter Walker in social welfare, and Eddie Williams in public affairs. It takes nothing away from the outstanding qualifications of these Black scholars to say that their race was viewed positively during the late 1960s and early 1970s, in part, because of the changes brought by the civil rights movement, and that they, despite their qualifications, would probably not have been appointed ten years earlier or ten years later. It speaks instead of institutional racism in which the University of Chicago, like most other universities, was involved. It is a situation which would have been seen quite clearly by Wilson in Phase I of his scholarship.

The movement to Chicago, even though at the same rank he held at Massachusetts, was clearly an elevation for Wilson. It provided him social, economic, intellectual, and even political resources to support his work, which surpassed even the generous supportive climate at Massachusetts. As a conse-

quence, his scholarship flourished. Because of his talents, leadership skills, and willingness to work hard, he was soon elevated further by his colleagues at the University of Chicago. In rapid fire order he was elevated to full Professor in 1975, Chairman of the Sociology Department in 1981, and Lucy Flower Distinguished Service Professor of Sociology in 1984. Thus, in the short span of some 25 years since his graduation from college, he had moved through the Army experience (1958–1960) through graduate school and into the top echelon of his profession.

The central thesis of this book and this phase of Wilson's scholarship is that so much progress has occurred in race relations and in the elevation of Blacks that race and racism are no longer the primary obstacles to their well-being. We now enter the era of class consciousness in Wilson's scholarship. For him, class has overtaken race as a barrier to further Black progress.

This sharp departure in his thinking is reflected in the opening paragraph of the preface to his new book. "This book," he says, ". . . is a rather significant departure from that of my previous book, *Power, Racism and Privilege*, in which I paid little attention to the role of class in understanding issues of race" (Wilson, 1978, p. ix) (which is not quite accurate, he did indeed pay considerable attention to class as we have shown above, but he thought race was more significant of the two). Wilson continues, "I now feel that many important features of black and white relations in America are not captured when the issue is defined as majority versus minority and that preoccupation with race and racial conflict obscures fundamental problems that derive from the intersection of class and race" (Wilson, 1978, p. ix). In my view Wilson had seen clearly and written perceptively about the intersection of class and race in Phase I, even as he noted that race was paramount.

It is the ascendancy of class over race that is the true reflection of Wilson's new views: "Race relations in America have undergone fundamental changes in recent years, so much so that now the life chances of individual blacks have more to do with their economic class position than with their day to day encounters with whites" (Wilson, 1978, p. 1).

In other words, for Wilson in Phase II, class and classism

have overtaken race and racism in holding Black people unequal with whites. Specifically, he argued that "In the economic sphere, class has become more important than race in determining black access to privileges and power" (Wilson, 1978, p. 2).

Thus, ten full years before Jesse Jackson would campaign for president in 1988 by urging Blacks and whites to move beyond the racial battleground of the past to the economic common ground of the future, Wilson would declare that the battle had already been won. To many critical observers, this position seemed more theoretical and possibly ideological than factual. Neither Wilson's data base in his book nor the prevailing findings of other studies would support such an abrupt shift in the factors influencing the well-being of Black Americans over so short a time. Particularly is this so during the period between 1973 when he published his first book and 1978 when his second book was published. This was a relatively quiet period in racial progress. By 1978 two years into the Carter presidency, two years after the Watergate political upheaval, and three or so years after the end of the Vietnam war, a period of quietude had already settled over the land. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s had come to an end. The Black power movement which succeeded it had given way to a period of sustained and quiet cultural nationalism. The Black student movement of the late 1960s after making enormous progress in opening up institutions of higher learning had begun to lose its potency. The Great Society programs representing the most massive social reforms affecting Blacks since the New Deal, had begun to lose its steam. As a consequence of all this, by 1978, the progress that had been made during the 1960s was in jeopardy.

This is the political, economic, and social climate within which Wilson issued his Phase II argument, that the progress made by Blacks over the past few years was so substantial and seemingly secure, that he discerned it a certain "declining significance of race," such that social class had become more important in determining the well-being of Black Americans. Many Black scholars and other observers, considered this observation more doctrine than science; more theory than real-

ity; more political than scholarly. And in any event, it seemed to play into the hands of the neo-conservative forces. Thus the Kerner Commission report, which Wilson had mentioned with such favor in his 1973 book, and which he gave scant attention in his 1978 book (and would not mention at all in his Phase III) seemed to many Black scholars to be as accurate in 1978 as it had been a decade earlier in ascribing much of the misery of Black Americans to the deeply-ingrained, often unconscious practices of institutional racism. Wilson would see it differently by 1978. Many observers felt that he had it right the first time.

Benign neglect. It may be of little consequence to poor Black inner-city dwellers to tell them that they are stuck at the bottom of life's resources not because of their race but their class position. Apart from the tautology involved, this insight could hardly make them feel better. But it is of greater consequence for the society-at-large and for social change and social policy to adopt such a view. For if the poor Blacks are being oppressed because of their class, then the solution is clear. Let them improve their class position by going to school, learning skills, improving their personal habits, and getting good jobs. Then, they will be accepted into the mainstream which is waiting for them with open, unbiased arms. The focus becomes "victim help thyself." And the failure to do so is the fault of the victim. Society can afford to engage in "benign neglect," as Moynihan recommended when he served in the Nixon administration.

If, on the other hand, contrary to Wilson's thesis in Phase II, the problems experienced by poor Blacks and other Blacks as well, stem in large measure from their subordinate position as Blacks in a white-dominated society, and is owing in some substantial measure to the structure of privilege and power in the hands of whites, as Wilson argued so persuasively in Phase I, then the alternate solution is also clear. Change the society because people cannot be expected to change their race. But changing the society requires disturbing the status quo. It means disturbing the balance of power. It might even mean sharing some of the privileges of the more privileged with the less privileged. Little wonder, then, that Wilson's thesis in Phase II of his work, the theory that race and racism have been supplanted by class and classism, struck

such a responsive cord among defenders of the status quo. This result is certainly not what Wilson intended. He has expressed his agony that conservatives would have embraced him and his theories in Phase II and that liberals and Black leaders and scholars would be so critical. He was no doubt following the leading of his own mind as influenced, in part, by his own experience. But we know now, that even the best theories, like other human inventions, may have unintended consequences, some of which may be manifest and some latent; some positive and some negative for the understanding and advancing the well-being of disadvantaged minorities.

Phase III: Synthesis

If in Phase I Wilson went overboard in crediting racial subordination for the plight of Black Americans; and if in Phase II he went overboard in claiming that class had overtaken race in the struggle for racial equality, then in Phase III, he attempts to arrive at a synthesis, stating quite clearly that both race and class are continuing phenomena, which serve as barriers to racial equality in America.

Phase III of Wilson's work is represented most clearly by his book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1987. It came out at a time when neo-conservatism was at its height and when Wilson was a national celebrity made famous by his book *The Declining Significance of Race* and his controversial thesis that class had overtaken racial discrimination in the well-being of Black Americans. It was a thesis eagerly embraced by neo-conservatives and criticized by Black scholars. Wilson says that he wrote this book in reaction to the criticism he received over his 1978 book, *The Declining Significance of Race*. He was distressed that critics of that book overlooked his assertion that both race and class were continuing phenomena and focused instead on his discussions of class. He wanted to correct that perceived imbalance in emphasis in the new book. He was also unhappy that critics focused on his discussion of the Black middle class, which he described as having made such substantial progress that race and racism were no longer the principle barriers to their further development, and ignored his discussions of the problems faced by

the growing numbers of poor Blacks. Wilson also reacted to the criticism that he set-forth no solutions to the problems faced by Blacks in his 1978 book, giving the impression that there was no need for solutions, since the problems had subsided to such great extent. Still it must be said that the 1978 book was well received by audiences of all political spectrums, and among its many awards, was the most prestigious award given by the American Sociological Association. Even so, Wilson felt the need to develop a synthesis of his views on race and class in his new book, thus we have titled Part III of Wilson's work Synthesis.

In his own words Wilson set forth the aims of this new work:

> During the controversy over *The Declining Significance of Race*, I committed myself to doing two things: (1) I would address the problems of the Ghetto underclass in a comprehensive analysis; and (2) I would spell out, in considerable detail, the policy implications of my work. . . . The first commitment grew out of my personal and academic reaction to the early critics' almost total preoccupation with my arguments concerning the black middle class . . . (instead of) . . . my analysis of the underclass in *The Declining Significance of Race*.

The manner in which he approached both these objectives, including especially the language he uses and his criticisms of others who take a different approach, and what Troy Duster has called the "non-secutuers" spread generously throughout the book have also invited considerable criticism as did his 1978 book.

The focus of Wilson's book and his major work during Phase III is on what he terms "the black ghetto underclass." His aim in the book, he said was (1) to challenge liberal orthodoxy in analyzing inner-city problems; discuss in candid terms the social pathologies of the inner city; establish a case for moving beyond race-specific policies to ameliorate inner-city social conditions to policies that address the broader problems of societal organization . . . and (establish) a public-policy agenda designed to improve the life chances of truly disadvantaged groups such as the ghetto underclass by emphasizing programs to which the more advantaged groups of all races can positively relate" (Wilson, 1987, p. viii).

Wilson's underclass. He defines the underclass as persons who live in neighborhoods "populated almost exclusively by the most disadvantaged segments of the black urban community, that heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals who are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system. Included in this group are individuals who lack training and skills, and either experience long-term unemployment, or are not members of the labor force; individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency. These are the populations to which I refer when I speak of the underclass" (Wilson, 1987, p. 8).

The wide range of types of people and behavior included in this definition suggests that Wilson has not been any more successful than other advocates of the underclass concept in isolating a specific social phenomenon to which it refers. Operational definitions are also fraught with difficulty. If one asks how is underclass different from poverty, the answer is that it includes poverty. If it is asked how does it differ from unemployment, the answer is that it includes unemployment. If the question is how does underclass differ from long-term welfare recipients, single-parent families, teen pregnancy, and so forth, the answer is that it includes all those. And now street crime has been added to the definition. This label, thus, hardly advances our knowledge or understanding about the lives of poor residents of the inner cities. In his actual research, much more than his central thesis or rhetoric, Wilson does indeed advance our understanding of inner-city problems.

Using census data for Chicago for both 1970 and 1980 Wilson establishes that there has been a phenomenal growth and spread of "poverty areas" during that decade. He also shows a heavy and increasing concentration of poor people in these poverty areas, with fewer and fewer poor people living in non-poverty areas. Indeed, Wilson's data show a substantial increase in the concentration of poor whites in poverty areas, but he does not deal much with explanations of white poverty. For despite his philosophical and theoretical admonitions against "race specific" approaches, he concentrates almost wholly on the Black poor in these inner-city areas and sets forth his explanation of how they got that way.

In order to qualify as ghetto underclass in Wilson's Phase III period, persons need to be Black and live in neighborhoods where at least 20% of the people are below the poverty level. Even when Wilson divides ghetto underclass areas into three categories to reflect the varying degrees of concentration of poor people, neither of his three degrees of poverty areas requires a majority of poor people. Thus, for him, poverty areas include any and all neighborhoods with 20% or more of poor inhabitants. Mild poverty areas are those with between 20 and 29% poor people; moderate poverty areas are those with between 30 and 39% poor people; and extreme poverty areas are those with 40% or more poor people. Thus, even his most extreme poverty areas do not require a majority of the people to be poor. In other words, the very definition of a ghetto underclass neighborhood requires that only 20% of the people in the neighborhood be poor. Then, Wilson proceeds to treat the whole neighborhood and all the people in it as though they are poor, or unemployed, or on welfare, or engage in street crime. While there is undoubtedly plenty of these behaviors in neighborhoods where 20% or more of the people are poor, it hardly advances the cause of scientific specificity, to set-forth so loose a definition of this very popular concept. Moreover, if only 20% of the people are poor, then it is possible that up to 80% of the people in some ghetto underclass neighborhood are not even poor. The recognition of this reality casts considerable doubt on Wilson's repeated treatment of these areas as if all or almost all the middle class and "stable working class Blacks" have left these areas. While he provides no data to support this assertion, he repeats it throughout the book, and the vanishing of the Black middle- and working-class families from the inner cities becomes a major explanatory factor in his theory as to why the conditions have worsened in the inner city.

What this demonstrates, strikingly, is that the so-called ghetto underclass neighborhoods are not peopled by all or even a majority of poor people. Some people live there not because they are poor but because they are Black. What his data also show is that not all or even a majority of middle-class and working-class Black families have left the inner city, while

it is true that a majority of white middle-class families have deserted the inner cities. Both these facts call into question the central explanatory thesis of Wilson's Phase III scholarship, namely that it is not so much racism that causes the problems of the inner city, but cleavages among Black people themselves, especially between the Black middle class and the Black underclass.

Another tenet of wilson's thesis holds up more strongly and makes an important contribution to knowledge. That is his thesis that "impersonal forces" of the economy technology and the larger shift from industrial to service economy are major causes of the worsening conditions of Black inner city dwellers. Even on this tenet, however, it is difficult to see that these are "race neutral" forces, since their consequences fall most adversely on Black people.

Wilson shows data from the U.S. Census for 1980 which shows that fully 68% of white poor lived outside poverty areas, in the nation's five largest cities while only 15% of Black poor and 20% of Hispanic poor lived outside poverty areas. This would appear to be a striking example of the triumph of race over class. For while all these persons are poor, the white poor get preferential treatment by being more readily accepted outside poverty areas than the Black poor or the Hispanic poor.

The heart of Wilson's contribution to knowledge in Phase III, is his discussion of the rapid increase in poverty in the nation's five largest cities between 1970 and 1980 by some 22% and the even more rapid increase in the population living in poverty areas. "Furthermore the population living in poverty areas grew by 40% overall, by 69% in high-poverty areas, (i.e., areas with a poverty rate of at least 30%) and by a staggering 161% in extreme-poverty areas (i.e., areas with a poverty rate of at least 40%)" (Wilson, 1987, p. 46).

Blacks as main cause of the underclass. Then we come to Wilson's amazing explanation of this concentration of poor and nonpoor Black people in these poverty areas:

> "The extraordinary increase in both the poor and nonpoor populations in the extreme-poverty areas between 1970 and 1980 *was due mainly to changes in the demographic characteristics of the black population*" (Wilson, 1987, p. 46).

Again while noting that the white population in extreme poverty areas in these five largest cities also increased substantially, by 24%, because these increases were so much smaller than the Black population increases, he felt no need to explain this white increase in poverty. It is the same mistake Moynihan made in 1965 when he found that the single parent rate among white families was so much lower than among Black families that there was no need to explain the white rate. The white rate, whatever it was, was considered normal as long as it was substantially lower than the Black rate. The Black rate was, thus, deviant and needed an explanation unique to Black people. Two decades later the phenomenal increase in single-parent families among whites caused Moynihan to change his explanation that single-parent families constituted a Black family characteristic. One hopes that Wilson will learn this too, particularly since he considers Moynihan one of his intellectual mentors.

Our own view, as we have noted elsewhere, is that it is not likely that the problem of concentration of low-income Blacks in inner cities and the problems they experience can be explained by "the demographic characteristics of the black population," as Wilson argues. The explanation lies elsewhere, and lies outside the inner city and outside the Black population altogether. In our view, there are much more powerful social, economic, and technological forces at work which offer a better explanation. Indeed, the major factors pushing Blacks into poverty, into inner cities, and into what Wilson calls the "tangle of pathology", again borrowing very controversial terminology employed by Moynihan in 1965, are the same forces causing these problems among low- and moderate-income whites. They impact on Blacks more adversely because Blacks are more vulnerable, being less powerful, and being subjected to the added burden of racial subordination in addition to their class subordination, which in theory poor blacks share with poor whites. In our view, this helps to explain the growing poverty among whites and the increase in the white population in poverty areas in recent years by a phenomenal 24%.

Wilson's argument that Black flight from the inner city is the primary cause of the concentration of low-income blacks there and the attendant social problems is repeated throughout

this book (Wilson, 1987) and is a hallmark of vintage Wilson phase III.

There are a number of problems with Wilson's formulation. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the thesis that the exodus of the Black middle class from the inner city is a proximate cause of the worsening of conditions there, overlooks at least two other social forces much more powerful than the small trickle of Black middle class, which left the inner city long before the Black middle class did. These are the white middle class which began to leave the inner city in massive numbers in the 1950s after World War II and continued into the 1960s, the very period Wilson notes in his analysis. They left because of massive government support to build the suburbs. The suburbs were the haven of white flight. They were not open to Blacks—middle class or otherwise. If this was not an example of the working of institutional racism, even if unintended, it would be difficult to find such. The second force which left the inner city beginning in the 1960s and the 1970s and has continued into the 1980s is industry. As industry has moved out of the inner city into the suburbs, into other parts of the country (i.e., the sunbelt) and to overseas locations of cheap labor, the inner cities have become impoverished. Again the Black middle class was not responsible for this industrial relocation. And again while such relocation may not carry a racial label or even racial intent, they carry a distinct racial effect. Nor were they carried out without substantial government subsidy. Blacks suffer more, in part because they are confined to the inner cities because of discriminatory housing patterns and, in part, because of discriminatory low wages.

Wilson's penchant for blaming Black people, particularly Black middle and working class people for the problems of the Black poor, seems hardly distinct from the eagerness of conservatives to blame those who are most victimized by societal forces for the conditions they and their fellows suffer. Thus in Phase III, Wilson has not developed a synthesis of his first two phases. He has continued to move in the direction a conservative ideological interpretation, seeking to fortify his criticism of liberals and blacks who propose race specific solutions to the problems Black people face.

Perhaps Wilson's greatest contribution to knowledge in

Phase III is his elaboration of a thesis advanced by others that the increase in single-parent families among the Black population is influenced directly by the increase in the economic deprivation of Black men. As early as 1940 the Black sociologist Oliver Cox pointed up the impact of the relative shortage of black men on the marriage rate and single-parent rate in the Black community. Another Black sociologist Jacqueline J. Jackson, expanded on this observation in 1967 in a celebrated article in *Black Scholar* magazine titled "But Where Are The Men." Even Moynihan noted in his 1965 study that the rise in Black single-parent families between 1940 and 1960 followed almost exactly the rise in unemployment among Black men. The taking up where Moynihan left off, Tom Joe has shown that the combination of official unemployment and Black men out of work for other reasons help to explain almost directly the incidence of single-parent families in the Black community from 1960 to the present time. An even more innovative approach to this problem has been developed by two other Black social scientists, Joseph Scott and James Stewart with their concept, "The institutional decimation of the American Black male."

Wilson is, thus, continuing a stream of analysis offered by a number of scholars prior to him. He makes an important contribution, however, by creating what he terms a "Male Marriageability Index," which measures the proportion of Black men between the ages 25 and 45 who are in the community and steadily employed and single, as compared with the number of Black females who are single. He finds a wide disparity suggesting that there are not nearly enough eligible Black males available for the numbers of eligible black females of marriageable age.

There are a number of problems with Wilson's index as Bonnie Dill and others have pointed out. Even so, however, it is an important contribution by crystallizing some important data.

Wilson notes that "in the 1960s scholars readily attributed black family deterioration to the problems of male joblessness." This has not been the case during the past ten to fifteen years. During this period, welfare has come to be seen as the major

source of family instability. During the same period some attention has been paid to changing social and cultural norms regarding early sexuality as a factor in marital instability. After examining all these factors, Wilson concludes that the focus should again shift to joblessness especially among Blacks. While I do not agree with some of his observations, such as that among whites, it is working wives that explains family instability more than joblessness of men, his analysis, reading of other studies, and conclusions about the impact of Black male joblessness on family structure are impressive. It is unfortunate, however, that he sees this matter in such "race specific" terms (Wilson, 1987, p. 99). A number of studies have shown that joblessness and economic deprivation among whites also have devastating effects on family stability.

He is also perceptive in showing that the decrease in job opportunities for Black men is greatest in those regions adversely affected by the shift from manufacturing jobs to low-wage service jobs. Wilson, thus, makes an important contribution not only to our understanding of changes in Black family structure, but to the necessary public policy to correct this situation (Wilson, 1987, p. 106).

Toward the end of this book, Wilson has come finally to agree that jobs for Black women, especially good jobs with good pay, along with good jobs for Black men will also enhance family stability, though he gives short shift to jobs for women throughout most of his book, and his work in Phase III. He has thus, belatedly realized the correctness of the finding by Robert Hill more than five years before, that "Black women are poor not so much because they do not have husbands as because they do not have good jobs." As some of Wilson's critics about his marriageability index have observed, it is incorrect to suggest that Black women are just a husband away from poverty. Poverty is an economic condition produced by the absence of wealth, not the absence of husbands. If husbands are unemployed, and cannot work, for whatever reason, their capacity to produce wealth is much more sharply curtailed than their capacity to produce children. Single-parent families in the Black community, as elsewhere, grow as much out of the social

structure as out of the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. One would expect this basic sociological insight to receive more respect in a treatise by so prominent a sociologist.

Policy Recommendations

Wilson's recommendation for public policies to stem the erosion of the quality of life in the inner cities, contained in the 30 pages of his chapters 5 and 6 and recapitulated in his summary chapter 7, fall far short of his aims in writing this book.

In his two policy chapters he seems more interested in taking pot shots at those who differ with his thesis and those whom he faults for pursuing "race-specific policies" and "race relations strategies," that he misses an opportunity to set-forth the coherent program for reforming the conditions of inner-city Black families that he promised. His obsession with avoiding the stark reality of race mars considerably his ability to set-forth coherent policies.

This policy section is the most disappointing and most sketchily put together section of this short book. Even those who agree with Wilson philosophically and those who applaud his analysis of the problem have faulted him for the inadequacy of his policy formulations.

Perhaps in Phase IV of Wilson's work, which hopefully will emerge from the massive research program he is now undertaking to examine the problems of low-income Black, white, and Hispanic families in Chicago will enable him to arrive at the true synthesis which eludes him in this Phase III of his work.

What then, does Wilson have to say about public policies to rescue low-income Black families and individuals from their confinement and growth in the inner cities.

First, in keeping with his emphasis on jobs, he recommends a macroeconomic restructuring of the national economy to create a tight labor market and full employment so that there would be jobs available for men and women of all races and of all social classes. Second, such reform should be accompanied by manpower training programs to prepare the unskilled members with low education and loss of motivation

for the new jobs that would be created, presumably the private industry. Just how this is to be done, Wilson does not say. He does say that he doubts that either the Republican or Democratic parties are likely to undertake such a policy. ". . . it will require a radicalism that neither Democratic nor Republican parties have as yet been realistic enough to propose" (Wilson, 1987, p. 139). Since Wilson has described himself as a social democrat, perhaps he means to urge a third party as the solution to Black problems in the inner city.

Third, he proposes a national subsidized program of child care so that working parents will have this available at a cost they can afford without remaining or falling into poverty. Fourth, recognizing that some adults will not be able to work for various reasons he proposes that the current welfare program be strengthened, with AFDC benefits adjusted for inflation. Fifth, he proposes a program of child support, whereby the state would collect from absent fathers and in the absence of their ability to pay would provide a children's allowance for all needy children. Sixth, he advocates a European-style child-support program providing an allowance for all children of all socioeconomic levels. He suggests that high-income families would pay for this service through higher taxes.

He reasons that all these programs should be available to all families without regard to race, socioeconomic status, or need so that the more privileged members of society would also benefit and, therefore, provide their support to get such programs enacted.

Still, he says that after all the above actions there would need to be some targeted programs and even some race specific programs and means tested programs especially for low-income families (Wilson, 1987, p. 154). He does not say why this should be necessary after arguing the opposite throughout Phase III of his scholarship. These would be considered in his scheme "offshoots of and indeed secondary to the universal programs" (Wilson, 1987, p. 154). Perhaps this suggests some version of trickle-down welfare reform, where the dominant group benefits more and offshoot benefits are provided as a secondary service to the poor and racial minorities. His essential purpose he argues, which he calls his hidden agenda,

". . . is to improve the life chances of truly disadvantaged groups such as the ghetto underclass by emphasizing programs to which the more advantaged groups of all races and class backgrounds can positively relate" (Wilson, 1987, p. 155).

There are a number of problems with this program of reform recommended by Wilson. First, it is difficult to see how it is related to his analysis of the ghetto underclass and the explanation for how it came to be as it is today. Nothing in his proposal would return the Black middle class and working class that have left the inner city. He does not even propose Enterprise Zones, which a number of conservative republicans have endorsed. And, he is opposed to set-asides for minority businesses or other government help for minority businesses on the grounds that they are "race specific." Indeed, he is generally opposed to affirmative action and to race specific legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Open Housing Act of 1968, to the War on Poverty, and other Great Society Programs of the 1960s, which is no doubt why he has been embraced so warmly by conservatists and supporters of the racial status quo. Wilson's rationale, however, is different from those of George Murray and George Guilder and the Black Conservatives. He does not believe that these programs cause poverty or welfare dependency, or family disintegration. He is opposed to them, in part, because they become easy targets for the opposition of others, and because they benefit the Black middle classes at the expense of the poor. "The problems of the truly disadvantaged," he argues, "may require nonracial solutions such as full employment, balanced economic growth, and manpower training and education."

The problem with this way of thinking is that here Wilson falls into the familiar American way of either/or thinking which he avoided so studiously in Phase I. There he saw more of the complexity of things, that both full employment and affirmative action may be necessary to correct the historic and contemporary subordination of the Black poor. It may not be necessary to choose either one or the other.

Moreover, Wilson is just plain wrong when he asserts that only middle-class Blacks benefit from race specific programs,

affirmative action, and the war on poverty. The fact is that low-income Blacks also benefitted. As Troy Duster has pointed out many of the jobs opened up in police departments, fire departments, and other public services have been filled by low-income Black persons. Moreover, low-income whites and especially middle-income whites also benefit from affirmative action and race-specific policies.

Thus, when the Black Mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson, supported the building of the Atlanta Airport only if it included set-asides for Black businesses and affirmative action goals for minority workers, his actions benefitted both Black and white. The fact that now 25 percent of the small businesses run out of the Atalnta Airport are Black owned and that a third of the employees are Black still leaves plenty of opportunity for expanded business ownership and employments for whites. Similar programs have been launched in a number of cities with Black mayors.

And in the field of higher education, when the Black student movement of which Wilson is aware, demanded open admissions in the 1960s and other minority students did the same, the results have been expanded places in college for white students as well, and expanded job opportunities for middle class white professionals as well as for Blacks. It is, thus, a mistake to think or assert that race-specific programs benefit only middle-income Blacks.

Certainly the Great Society programs, including the war on poverty, brought benefits to whites as well as to Blacks and not all the blacks who benefitted were middle class. It is true that these government programs did provide for the phenomenal expansion of the Black middle class. It is difficult to see that this was done at the expense of the poor. The hundreds of thousands of Blacks moved out of poverty between 1960 and 1975 and the even larger numbers of whites who were moved out of poverty cannot be fairly said to have been middle class. It is faulty reasoning to suggest that if programs move people out of the lower class into the working class, or into the middle class in one or two generations, that this is an expansion of and benefit to the middle class at the expense of the poor. In such assertions ideology seems to triumph over experience.

Another major failure of Wilson's program of reform is that it has no place for black economic advancement beyond employment. He even scoffs at the "Black solidarity movement" and the idea of "Black control of institutions serving the black community," and sees no need for Black entrepreneurship. In Wilson's America of Phase III, these matters would be left to white people. This is a curious kind of "nonracial solution."

As a sometimes member of the Black solidarity movement, I don't recall that anyone has ever advocated that Black ownership of a piece of the American economic and social structure was the sole answer to Black problems. But it is difficult to see how one can make a case against Black ownership and control in a multiracial society. Again it is not a matter of Black ownership and control or white ownership and control, or Asian ownership and control but shared and equitable distribution of these resources which a truly democratic society demands. Enlightened public policy of whatever political persuasion should not confine Black people to the role of employees of others. Moreover, the history and contemporary status of the Black community suggest that there is room for ownership and control, without discriminating against others. My own experience, observations, and current research suggest that the Black Church, for example, which is owned and controlled by Black people generally, makes a positive contribution not only to the spiritual well-being of large numbers of Blacks but to their social, political, economic, and psychological well-being as well (Billingsley, 1988-A). Wilson makes no room in his program of reform for Black pride, but the Black church, and other Black-owned institutions make a major contribution to Black uplift by the instillation of racial pride, surely an important commodity for any people and especially for one which has undergone such historic subordination.

Bart Landry has made a careful data based dispassionate assessment that it was both economic growth and affirmative action programs that account for the upward mobility of Blacks during the 1960s. He points out that economic growth in the 1950s without affirmative action did not sustain such Black progress as did the 1960s; and that affirmative action without

economic growth in the 1970s also did not sustain Black progress (Landry, 1988). Wilson surely must have read Landry's work but apparently does not find it persuasive or compatible with his thesis.

Institutional Racism

One searches Wilson's Phase III in vain for the kind of trenchant analysis of institutional racism found in vintage Wilson Phase I. Wilson's analysis and policy formulations in Phase III take no account of institutional racism. Wilson seems so intent on denying the relevance of race that he takes sharp issue with his democratic socialist colleague Michael Harrington, whom he says he admires, in Harrington's correct and perceptive argument that institutional racism still exists. Harrington has observed, moreover, as Robert Hill has that such racism need not be intentional and need not be tied to the beliefs of particular individuals. Thus, according to Harrington there is an "economic structure of racism that will persist even if every white who hates blacks goes through a total conversion because there is an "occupational hierarchy rooted in history and institutionalized in the labor market" (Wilson, 1987).

Taking sharp issue with this view, Wilson states that the problem with this argument is that "complex problems in the American and worldwide economies that ostensibly *have little or nothing to do with race*, problems that fall heavily on much of the black population but require solutions that confront the broader issues of economic organization, are not made more understandable by associating them directly or indirectly with racism. Indeed, because this term is used so indiscriminately, it weakens the argument against racial problems and strengthens conservative arguments making them seem fresher" (Wilson, 1987, p. 12).

Wilson continues to tongue-lash Harrington, who was professor of Economics at the City University of New York and the father of the War on Poverty for "talking vaguely about an economic structure of racism" (Wilson, 1987, p. 12). In dismissing the economic analysis of the economist Michael Harrington, who has devoted considerable time studying poverty, and adopting instead the economic analysis of Glen Loury, the

Black conservative Harvard economist, Wilson betrays a curious allegiance to his color-blind perspective at the expense of analytic clarity.

Again, Wilson is wrong in his assumption that it is necessary to deny the existence of institutional racism to advance social reform that commands the support of a majority of the public. It has been done at several points in history including the period of the 1960s. It requires forthright leadership on the part of intellectuals and policy makers no less than civil rights leaders. Troy Duster who finds many commendable features of Wilson's work, including especially his call for macroeconomic changes in the structure of society, also holds that Wilson overdoes his denial of the relevance of race in America. "Since Wilson did not intend to write a book about institutional racism", Duster argues, "he can hardly be faulted for not doing so. But there is a danger that his stance, being so committed to non-race specific polcies, will deflect, not complement, the growing sophistication of those who have argued that institutional racism is such a deeply embedded feature of American society that 'macro solutions' cannot address it" (*Contemporary Sociology*, May 1988, p. 289).

Nowhere, however, in his analysis or policy recommendations does Wilson set-forth a coherent political philosophy. Many of Wilson's ideas, criticisms, and recommendations are so comfortable for conservatives, that they have applauded him. And while Wilson goes to great pains to disassociate himself from Black conservatives, including Tom Sowell and Walter Williams—while embracing Glen Loury, another Black conservative—many of his ideas have been embraced by white conservatives.

Moreover, though Wilson describes himself as a social democrat, his policy recommendations do not seem particularly radical. Indeed, his insistence on providing equal benefits for the haves and the have nots, borders on pandering to the middle class which is rather trendy just now among both conservatives and liberals whom Wilson denounces throughout his book.

My own view is that justice would be better served if we could pursue the hard job of helping to empower the poor, so

that they could demand or negotiate with the American established society more effectively on their own behalf; and at the same time teach the middle class some values—basic democratic values, such as equality, fraternity, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Other Scholars on Poverty

A number of other scholars have recently put forth more compelling policy recommendations to deal with the problem of poverty. Among these are David T. Ellwood and Lisbeth Schorr.

In his book *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family*, David T. Ellwood pulls together some analyses and observations he has made over the past few years, including some very fine work he has done in collaboration with Mary Jo Bane, who served for a time as Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Department of Welfare. Both are now on the faculty of the Harvard University Kennedy School.

With essentially the same concern as Wilson, namely, how to understand and cure poverty, Ellwood casts a somewhat broader net than Wilson's more narrow focus on the Black inner-city poor in northern cities. Reminding us that the celebrated inner-city poor comprises less than 10% of all poor people in the nation, he seeks also to examine and prepare policies for two other categories of the poor, namely the working poor, two-parent families, and families headed by single females. Most of the poor are white and most of them are not on welfare. Indeed, one-half of all poor children in the nation are in two-parent families. What they share in common is that they have been abandoned by the larger society and by the fathers of their children. In every category of poverty, however, Blacks suffer more than their white counterparts.

By showing us the facts and the faces of poverty among Black and white, married and unmarried parents, working and nonworking poor, new and old poor, Ellwood enables us to see the problem much more clearly than Wilson's color-blind analysis, which, nevertheless, focuses exclusively on the inner-city Black poor with no meaningful attachment to the work force. Thus, while Wilson spends inordinate effort on trying

to get inner-city Blacks into the work force, he does not give proper attention to the facts that most poor Blacks are already in the work force, and that has not cured their poverty. Moreover, if all the Black middle-class and working-class families who have left the inner city were to move back, it would not appreciably affect the poverty rate of other inner-city dwellers.

Ellwood helps us to see that the poverty problem is so pervasive that it must be viewed and corrected at the societal level. It is a view also taken by Wilson, but his concentration in his analysis on the inner-city Black poor mitigates against his theoretical perspective.

Another approach to the amelioration of poverty is advanced by Lisbeth B. Schorr (Schorr, 1988). Schorr also addresses a wide range of the poor, broader than Wilson but not as comprehensive as Ellwood. The strength of her book is its focus on policy and program options which have already been demonstrated as effective in breaking the cycle of poverty. While Wilson's policy recommendations are general and theoretical, Schorr bases her recommendations on practical interventions which have already worked, for Black, Hispanic and other minority poor. Among these are head-start-type programs, with three year olds which involve their parents in a comprehensive health, education and cultural enrichment experience; prenatal care for pregnant mothers; school-based comprehensive adolescent health-care programs; home-visiting programs with at-risk parents and children; elementary school reforms which involve all elements of the child's learning environment in a positive reinforcement of learning styles and abilities; and many others.

What Schorr succeeds in pointing out without being racially exclusive is that the cultural element in policy rather than Wilson's color-blind approach, offers a more powerful basis for success. Clearly, then, on the basis of this analysis of successful programs, what we need in part is more cultural sensitivity, not less.

Wade Nobles has found in studying the drug problem in inner-city Oakland California that cultural sensitivity is strikingly absent from drug programs and other programs designed to help poor Black families, and from the helping agencies

alike. He argues for a more effective race- and cultural-specific approach rather than less (Nobles).

It may be, then, that Wilson will yet train his brilliant mind and agile pen on the complex of problems which face the inner-city Black poor in a manner that will recognize all of the complex factors which hold them down, including large scale impersonal forces and small scale personal forces in which both race and class interact with other forces including gender, age, and sexual orientation to serve as barriers to social justice. His new and massive research program in Chicago seems to provide that opportunity. Perhaps this will usher in Phase IV of his work which will more nearly approach the synthesis which he and we seek.

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