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Editors' Remarks

Michael Whitlock,
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The new political environment that leads us into the 21st Century undoubtedly presents black communities with a set of challenges unique, but yet in some aspects the same as our past. While affirmative action and slowly shifting attitudes towards race and class have created the biggest middle class in history within the black community, our community still occupies a substantial portion of the underclass, and the problems – from AIDS to substandard public education to teenage pregnancy – that come along with it.

The economic and social strides made within the black community during the latter half of this century have been a mixed blessing. While many black and African Americans have fared very well, many have been left far behind. In response, we must now become aware of new challenges by Congress and state legislatures around the country to cut the gains that affirmative action, congressional districting, and other social programs, to name a few, have provided for black communities. Welfare reform is just one of these challenges. It affects both the least powerful and the least wealthy of us, and as such it deserves more than just our casual attention.

In keeping with welfare reform's move from political debate to implementation, we offer the following articles on the subject in the hope that this issue helps to create meaningful discourse and debate about this most important topic. Now that it is law, what elements still need reform? What are solutions and opportunities to address those problems? As the articles in this issue suggest, many of the academics and practitioners are debating these topics themselves. However, amongst all of our contributors, one main theme abounds: black communities must prepare for "intellectual battle" to oppose those elements that would work to set back hard-fought progress.

Hillard Pouncy and Jeff Johnson suggest additional ways that welfare reform can be detrimental to low-income families beyond the simple loss of benefits. They explore how strict child support enforcement policies and the targeting of fathers under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act potentially can lead to mistrust between fathers and the nonprofit agencies that work to solidify family ties. They recommend a partnership between child support enforcement agencies and community-based organizations that emphasizes both mutual support and a firm understanding of each other's goals.

Susan Gooden uses experiential data from welfare recipients in Virginia to examine the issue of differential treatment by caseworkers toward white and black welfare recipients. She finds that black respondents reported significantly less discretionary transportation assistance than white recipients, and that they receive less caseworker support in increasing their formal education than their white coun-

terparts. While her results are not necessarily generalizable to the state's welfare caseload (due to sample size), she underscores the critical element that differential treatment further hinders the ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

In the new political environment that accompanies welfare reform, we should learn, as Peter Ukpokodu suggests in his commentary, to become less reliant upon the government. He advocates for moral, economic and residential strategies to move further toward such independence. We can use the economic and social power advantages of the black middle and upper class, as well as the black institutions that have withstood through the years, to create our own solutions to the daunting problems within welfare reform. Dale Alston and Shelia Coates argue that a drive to activism within black communities is necessary to adapt to the current political climate. We are at crossroads, they say, and we must be prepared to offer quick, decisive political action in response to challenges such as welfare reform.

Percy Hintzen argues that the current political environment is one where mainstream America seeks to absolve itself from any moral and ethical responsibility for the conditions of African Americans. In order to adapt to such a system, black communities need a system of mass involvement, organized through functioning entities such as churches and community organizations. These efforts must be combined with efforts to combat crime and violence and to rebuild black communities from within.

Morris Jeff presents the position of the National Association of Black Social Workers on welfare reform. According to Jeff, the current support and advocacy for workfare is incongruent with the current trends in the economic system. The trend toward work, instead of a more progressive client-centered services module, does not match the reality of downsizing in the private sector. He calls on the private sector to fulfill a mission of social responsibility, in addition to its mission to achieve profits. He also outlines the Association's strategy to establish a new service delivery and training system to help increase self-sufficiency in black communities through parent training and teen pregnancy counseling, as well as training in administration, case management, supervision and client services.

Finally, Lewis Diuguid comments on the media's responsibility in chronicling the rollback of public support for the poor. In the past, he writes, the media has been content to focus on suburban excess or the pathos of the urban poor. Instead, he argues, the challenge for the media is to undertake efforts to "wander into the true-grit places of our changing society to accurately show how people are affected by government policy."

Recognizing that the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* is a collective effort, we would like to thank the students, faculty and practitioners of public policy – both at Harvard and nationally – who supported our efforts and gave us advice whenever we needed it. Without their enduring support, tireless help, and probing intellectual inquiries, this product would not be possible.

Developing Creative Ways to Address the Needs of Fathers and Fragile Families: A View from the Field

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Abstract

This article explores how child support enforcement provisions within the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) can affect “fragile families” -- families composed of a child (or children) born out of wedlock and its young, low-skilled biological parents. It first elaborates on how practitioners and state child support enforcement (CSE) agencies and community-based organizations feel about PRWORA’s child support enforcement goals. It then reports on innovations that men’s and family services practitioners have been developed over the past twenty years that pave the way for the PRWORA creative alternative we have in mind. Finally it outlines terms for a creative partnership between child support enforcement agencies and community-based nonprofits.

In the long, rancorous debate leading up to welfare reform - the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) - Congress and the Clinton Administration agreed early on that stiffer child support enforcement would be a critical part of the new law.¹ Both agreed that noncustodial parents - mostly fathers - should pay a larger share of the nation’s welfare bill, and both wanted to encourage responsible parenthood. The result was a bill that contains over fifty changes to the nation’s child support enforcement system.² One far-reaching change requires states eventually to raise their paternity establishment percentage to 90%.³ Another stipulates that mothers who refuse to cooperate in identifying the fathers of their children can lose 25% or more of their benefit.⁴

It is not so clear that PRWORA’s child support enforcement goals are realistic, given how many low-income fathers of children on welfare are too poor to pay child support. A third of the nation’s noncustodial fathers - usually the fathers of children on welfare - have such low incomes that they qualify for food stamps.⁵ Many of these low-income fathers are young - 40% are under 34 - and have a limited

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education - 43% did not finish high school. They are racially diverse - 45% of the fathers are white, and another 37% are black⁶ - but most have no access to employment and training services. Only 27% have full-time, full-year jobs. Interestingly, 29% of low-income, noncustodial fathers - a percentage close to the number who have full time jobs - pay child support anyway. These men - and in some cases women - are the main targets of PRWORA's enhanced child support enforcement goals. If they complied fully with PRWORA's paternity establishment and child support provisions, they would contribute a \$17 billion reimbursement to the nation's welfare costs.

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If all present circumstances were to remain the same, PRWORA's child support enforcement provisions would pull more low-income fathers into its tougher child support enforcement net without providing the services necessary to help low-skilled, untrained, nonworking fathers find the training and jobs with which to pay their child support bill.

tougher child support enforcement net without providing the services necessary to help low-skilled, untrained, nonworking fathers find the training and jobs with which to pay their child support bill. And by requiring the mothers to cooperate in establishing paternity, PRWORA has adverse effects on them as well. That is, formalizing relationships

between unwed mothers and fathers, and in doing so increasing the contact between them is likely to create tension between them over paternity establishment and child support enforcement and heighten domestic violence.

To explore how child support enforcement links the destinies of low-income fathers with their children and the mothers of those children, Ron Mincy of the Ford Foundation coined the expression "fragile families" - families composed of a child (or children) born out of wedlock and its young, low-skilled biological parents, who do not legitimize the birth by marrying or establishing legal paternity. Work by Mary Achatz and Crystal A. MacAllum suggests that during a pregnancy and from six months to three years after the birth, poor young men and women who receive help and support can become responsible parents. In some cases⁷, if the systemic barriers to their family formation are lifted, both may become self-sufficient team parents, and some couples will marry.⁸ The problem is that the longer intervention is delayed, the less likely it is to be successful. Although PRWORA's child support provisions are unrealistic, if they were implemented creatively, the act's adverse impact on fragile families could be turned into positive benefits for fragile families.

To help PRWORA administer to fragile families - that is, turn fragile families into a unit of intervention - state-level child support agencies and nonprofit organizations serving low-income noncustodial fathers and their families will have to assume new roles. Child support agencies might be required, for example, to

provide social services, such as employment and family counseling to both parents. For their part, local nonprofit organizations might be required to assist in establishing paternity and collecting child support, thus forestalling mothers being penalized for noncooperation. Since the former roles are inconsistent with the mission and history of state child support agencies and the latter roles are inconsistent with the mission and history of many family services nonprofit groups, a creative alternative is needed.

This paper details one such creative alternative. It first elaborates on how practitioners and state child support enforcement (CSE) agencies and community-based organizations feel about PRWORA's child support enforcement goals. It then reports on innovations that men's and family services practitioners have been developed over the past twenty years that pave the way for the PRWORA creative alternative we have in mind.⁹ Finally it outlines terms for a creative partnership between child support enforcement agencies and community-based nonprofit groups for strengthening fragile families.

The discussion is based on the experiences over the past twenty years of CSE agencies and the work of more than 700 nonprofit and community-based organizations that have been working with disadvantaged fathers and fragile families. Many of these nonprofits and community-based organizations (CBOs) make up the National Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF), a Washington, DC, umbrella group that since 1994 has coordinated an emerging men's and fragile families service infrastructure.¹⁰ NPNFF includes several types of groups: (1) local men's services branches of well known national organizations like the Urban League and 100 Black Men of America; (2) independent men's and family services programs operating out of churches or local nonprofit groups; (3) local programs currently or formerly affiliated with three large social welfare demonstrations focusing on low-income fathers (The Ford Foundation's Teen Father Collaboration, the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project, and Parent's Fair Share, all sponsored by both private foundations and the federal government); and (4) publicly funded local social service programs. Finally, the creative partnership model discussed here is based on a multi-site demonstration being developed by the Partners for Fragile Families.¹¹

Three Illustrations of the PRWORA Child Support Enforcement Problem

I. In a recent survey by the National Center for Children in Poverty on how states plan to respond to PRWORA's strengthened child support provisions, 34 states reported they have already taken steps or plan to enhance paternity establishment and increase child support collections.¹² New Jersey and Massachusetts, for example, established in-hospital voluntary paternity establishment programs that allowed them to meet interim national paternity establishment goals.¹³ However, a preliminary assessment suggests that their efforts are mainly effective with fathers who already have income.¹⁴ Most state CSE agency officials believe that to comply fully with PRWORA's 90% paternity

establishment rule state child support enforcement agencies will have to deal with the 33% of noncustodial fathers who are too poor to pay child support.¹⁵

To help disadvantaged fathers become financially able to pay child support, child support enforcement agencies will need to provide assistance to these fathers so that they can increase their earnings and meet their child support obligations. Also, PRWORA permits states to service “fragile families”¹⁶ by providing benefits and removing penalties if the parents marry or become “team parents.” Over 25 states report that they already have, or plan, services designed to increase noncustodial parent earnings;¹⁷ however, reports on troubled efforts in New Jersey and California suggest it will take much more than legislative will to increase compliance with PRWORA’s child support enforcement and paternity establishment demands. Even in cases where child support enforcement agencies want to find and service “underground” fathers, most are not equipped for that mission.¹⁸

II. At the August 1997 National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF) regional conference in Atlanta, the men’s and family services providers in attendance expressed concern about PRWORA’s impact upon their mission. They too expect PRWORA to induce CSE agencies to go after disadvantaged noncustodial parents, and they believe that the state agencies will then ask groups like themselves to encourage clients to establish paternity voluntarily as a way to reach underground fathers. Such an effort, they fear, will bring with it requests to enforce child support orders. Furthermore, hosting voluntary paternity establishment efforts will cost them the trust of their clients and thus deprive them of the cornerstone of their efforts to provide social services to noncustodial fathers.

Interestingly, an informal poll at the conference revealed that although NPNFF delegates pay careful attention to welfare reform, 50% of them had a poor grasp of how child support enforcement agencies really work or inflated the risks to their organizations of working with CSE agencies. Their perceptions of child support enforcement were often based on anecdotes from the street about cases that had gone into default -- the horror stories.

Even when delegates understand that working with CSE agencies can be constructive for their clients, many are quick to point out that they do not have the budget or training to take on voluntary paternity establishment. There is a dearth of knowledge among community-based responsible fatherhood programs (CBRFPs) -- a specific type of men’s services program that focuses on getting low-income noncustodial fathers involved with their children -- and community-based organizations in general about child support enforcement and how to help their clients manage risks associated with establishing paternity. Those risks include exposure to child support accruals and arrearage. So, although many private community-based fatherhood programs fear what PRWORA may do to their clients, they are not yet equipped philosophically, psychologically or economically to respond.

In this respect, state CSE agencies and many community-based men's services programs have something in common: PRWORA challenges each group's traditional mission. State CSE agencies are, after all, enforcement agencies, and they see in PRWORA a risk that they may be required to take on social service functions. Men's service groups see in PRWORA a risk that they may be required to take on enforcement roles, or worse, that their clients may come to see them as enforcers.

III. Finally, while state CSE agencies and men's services programs may be pessimistic about the prospects for child support enforcement and their role in it, at least they anticipate problems with PRWORA. Second chance employment and training programs, like the STRIVE¹⁹ program in Boston, that include low-income noncustodial fathers among their clients are likely to be surprised by an unexpected PRWORA impact. PRWORA increases the chances that, when noncustodial fathers complete a training program and are placed in jobs, either their child support obligations will emerge, or, if they already have child support obligations, the obligations will follow them to work with adverse consequences. Boston STRIVE, like most employment and training programs serving disadvantaged men and women, is not equipped to provide family services to help these men negotiate with CSE agencies, nor is Boston STRIVE equipped to advise them on paternity establishment decisions. Rather than take on new PRWORA related roles, employment and training programs may avoid taking on noncustodial fathers if they can. To gauge how much of a problem this might be for employment and training agencies, PFF project staff asked Boston STRIVE how many of its clients were fathers. STRIVE staff found that 50% of its male clients were dads. This was volunteered information, so it is likely that the real percentage is higher. The long reach of PRWORA may in some cases hamper the effectiveness of job training programs like Boston STRIVE.

In developing the Partnership for Fragile Families, NPCL and the Ford Foundation advocate a creative partnership in which CSE agencies, community-based men's and family services groups, and employment and training services programs collaborate and complement each other, farming out the carrot and stick roles PRWORA provides. CSE agencies would retain their traditional stick roles of enforcement, monitoring and policing PRWORA's many sanctions. However, they would contribute certain new carrots - modifying child support orders so that they do not kick in until young fathers have jobs, etc. For their part, community-based men's and family services groups would gain new funds with which to work with fragile families. In return, they would take on certain new sticks -- encouraging paternity establishment and securing child support payments. They would, however, be assured of risk management for their clients.

Finally, employment and training service programs would also secure funds for training and employment for their clients. However, they would have to take on noncustodial fathers rather than avoid them. In return they would gain the support of men's services programs for counseling as problems related to enforcement,

garnishment and family conflict emerged. Although PRWORA makes this idea of a creative partnership timely and useful, the ideas behind such a partnership have been incubating over twenty years as the result of innovations that early practitioners in this field developed. Before providing more details on this partnership, we review five key innovations that underpin the program's ideas.

Background to the Creative Partnership: Five Key Policy Innovations

I. Fathers Matter. Between 1979 and 1982, as part of activities linked to a planning grant from the Ford Foundation and its partners, researchers at the Bank Street School of Education in New York searched for programs for teenage fathers that could match services provided to teenage welfare mothers in ongoing demonstrations involving five to eight sites.

Practitioners reported that the children of low-income teenage mothers were born healthier when the father was involved with the mother during pregnancy and that children remained healthier when fathers remained involved with their children after the pregnancy. Although it was unclear whether the reasons were economic, emotional, etc., father involvement seemed critical.

The Bank Street team then outlined a demonstration to explore what services to teenaged fathers could get them involved during pregnancy and then keep them involved with their children and the mother of their children. The planning grant identified support group services and cognitive therapy as key strategies. It helped fathers learn to talk and think their way through the multiple problems and barriers keeping them from becoming involved in the lives of their children. The program did not include finding the fathers jobs or job training nor did it eliminate other legal and systemic barriers between fathers and children or fathers and mothers.

II. Focusing on Disadvantaged Teen Fathers. The outcome of that planning grant was the Teen Fathers Collaboration (TFC), funded by a collaboration between the Ford Foundation and eight community foundations, operated by the Bank Street School of Education in eight sites between 1983 and 1985. TFC helped teenage fathers contribute to their children's social, emotional and financial well-being. In doing so, it contributed two innovations: disadvantaged noncustodial fathers should be a unit of policy intervention, and disadvantaged, noncustodial fathers require comprehensive services. The Collaboration and programs like it discovered that the young, unwed father problem was at the nexus of problems affecting low-income communities. The jobless young men going to prison on drug charges with addiction problems were also likely to be in a fatherhood intervention program.

The TFC program was based on a body of research on absent fathers summarized by Joelle Hevesi Sander and Jacqueline Rosen:

The lack of services for teenage fathers is particularly distressing in light of studies suggesting that an adolescent father's involvement in his partner's pregnancy increases the young mother's sense of

confidence in her nurturing skills, heightens her sense of security after delivery and raises the father's self-esteem. Moreover, research also indicates that children from homes in which the father is absent score lower on measures of trust, self-esteem and socialization than do children who live with their fathers, a finding that underscores the need to help fathers remain involved in their children's lives whenever appropriate. Several other studies have shown that although inner-city teenage men generally have few economic resources, many contribute financially to support the children they have fathered.²⁰

Typically the sites provided classes in parent, training in vocational and job placement skills, tutoring and educational assistance, individual and group counseling and family planning services. The program used the counseling model of the Cleveland program and tested the effect of various types of counseling on responsible fatherhood.

Practitioners learned from the three-year demonstration that the program's vital element was the support of the agency administrator who hired and supervised staff and fund-raising. He or she had to integrate the teenage father project into a larger program and direct the program to serve young men.

The program could not answer the follow-up question: how should one coordinate and deliver those comprehensive services?

III. Comprehensive Multiple Programming. The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project (YUFP), operated by Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia at six sites with funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and several foundations, sought to find answers to the question raised by the TFC on how to deliver comprehensive services to disadvantaged fathers. Its six sites²¹ -- Racine, Wisconsin; Cleveland; Philadelphia; Fresno, California; Annapolis, Maryland; and St. Petersburg, Florida -- all had education, employment, case management, and fatherhood development components, as well as access to long-term follow-up services. Some sites also had a legal services component. Ideally, its sites assisted a teen father with his high school equivalency degree (GED), helped him find or train for a job, counseled him on parent and provided him with a case manager who secured a network of support services for him, including access to legal services.²²

Help with substance abuse problems and legal issues were the two biggest support service needs. At the Cleveland site, for example, the director was an attorney who believed so strongly in the provision of legal services that his staff often provided help to young fathers pro bono. This led to the accidental discovery of just how crucial legal aid was to low-income noncustodial fathers, whose troubles with the law ranged from traffic tickets to drug busts.

In one typical case, a young man who had just been released from prison told an interviewer that when his girlfriend got pregnant, he had no job and wanted to

support the child. “ So I got into selling drugs to support the kid.” This connection between selling drugs and being a responsible father is one we would hardly expect. Yet in the YUFP program his pattern was not unusual. In an even more typical case, a young man developed a substance abuse problem after he began selling drugs for income. YUFP programs tried to provide help for his addiction and his legal problems. Then, they worked on personal development issues in the program’s peer support groups. Later, if they could, they helped him find a job or a job training program and work toward his GED.

In this respect, the program solved the problem of how to deliver the comprehensive services that the Teen Father Collaborative identified. After going through the peer support sessions and the program’s curricular exercises, many young men reported a heightened sense of awareness of their responsibilities as fathers and expressed an increased desire to fulfill their duty to their sons and daughters.

Despite their success with the comprehensive model, the sites rarely had the cooperation of local child support enforcement agencies.²³ When they sought order modifications for their clients such as delay of order start dates, order suspension, setting of minimum orders, or the substitution of in-kind support, they usually failed. CSE staff were often unaware of a young father’s genuine personal development needs and often responded that the guy was just trying to get out of his responsibilities. At the Fresno site, YUFP staff did eventually secure good cooperation for child support order modifications, but the typical experience was such low cooperation that YUFP sites were usually reluctant to encourage the young, unwed fathers to establish paternity and expose themselves to the risks of support order arrearage.

YUFP sites usually relied upon their Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds to provide employment placement and training services. However, JTPA eligibility rules posed severe barriers for YUFP clients. For example, young, unwed fathers who lived with their mothers sometimes could not qualify for JTPA funds. In some cases, the young man’s personal income was low enough to qualify for funds, but his mother’s household income may have been too high. In others, clients were below the education levels required by JTPA.

The collective wisdom practitioners gathered from programs like YUFP up to the early 1990s could be summarized as follows: (1) YUFP and programs like it revealed multiple barriers between disadvantaged fathers and their involvement with their children, and (2) the experiences of these early fatherhood programs led researchers to recognize differences among the noncustodial father population by age, income and other attributes.²⁴ Clearly, for example, the teenaged, never-married YUFP dads were different from the older, divorced dads CSE usually handled, even though CSE agencies were originally created to secure funds from never married fathers of children on welfare.²⁵ Not appreciating diversity presented a major barrier to the comprehensive service strategy’s effectiveness with multiple-problem dads.

IV. Finding Answers for the Child Support Enforcement Problem. The Parent's Fair Share (PFS) demonstration operated between 1988 to 1996, originally at nine sites under the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). It was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Labor and several foundations. Its target population was broader than that of the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Program. YUFP targeted young fathers between the ages of 16 and 25. PFS worked with noncustodial parents (mostly fathers, but 5% were women) over 18. Approximately two-thirds of the pilot program participants were 26 or older²⁶ and all its participants already had child support orders.

The PFS demonstration selected sites that would provide noncustodial parents with many of the same services previously provided by YUFP -- counseling, peer support, a parent curriculum, job training, etc. But the PFS sites also had something YUFP sites rarely had. PFS sites had agreements with local CSE agencies and courts that gave noncustodial fathers in violation of their child support order the option either to pay up, get a job, or participate in the program. Not surprisingly, as MDRC's evaluations of the program point out, the program had a strong "smoke out" impact -- fathers with hidden incomes paid up when given those choices. The average PFS father was mainly interested in paying up, not in services that would reattach him to his family.

Parent's Fair Share also differed from YUFP in that it had access to federal employment and training funding, specifically JOBS (Jobs Opportunities Basic Skills) funds. PFS sites could arrange waivers that would permit state agencies to use JOBS funds for noncustodial fathers with state agencies that provided JOBS funds to noncustodial parents. This meant, conceptually, at least that PFS could deliver on its employment and training promises to clients who entered its comprehensive services program.

Also, because PFS began with participants who already had child support orders, it could explore some issues that few noncustodial fatherhood programs could not. Where YUFP and other early fatherhood program staff often believed they would get their clients in trouble by encouraging them to establish paternity and comply with child support orders, Parent's Fair Share staff could make agreements with CSE on behalf of their clients. They could get orders frozen or modified. As a result, PFS staff could explore with clients how to "manage the risks" -- negotiate the risks of arrearage -- associated with paternity establishment.

There is also some evidence that under certain circumstances when PFS did help disadvantaged fathers become involved with their children, they entered the job market at wages below salaries they previously had spurned. "Practitioners tell us that when you have a low-income person who is disconnected from the labor market, the best way to give him a reason to get engaged in it is to make him responsible for his family".²⁷

PFS demonstrated that entanglements with the child support system can be

managed without fatal harm to noncustodial fathers, even for disadvantaged dads. However, PFS has not been able to convince other practitioners that collaboration with CSE agencies need not cost a community-based organization the trust of its clients.

V. Making the Fragile Family the Unit of Intervention. Ethnographic research on young, unwed, noncustodial, disadvantaged fathers confirms that some fathers fit the “bad” stereotype of sexual predators who “knowingly, even purposefully, father a child and then refuse to take any responsibility for the child’s financial and social support.”²⁸ In most cases, however, “the lives of many unwed fathers reflect the same pathos, confusion and ‘trying to do the right thing’ seen in lives of many young unwed mothers.”²⁹ Federal policy analyst Linda Mellgren summarized the findings of that body of research: “The Young Unwed Fathers Project found that many young men don’t walk away: some are pushed away, some are never asked to be involved, and some are not given the help they need to become responsible parents.”³⁰

Since the mid-1990s, an entire network of community-based organizations has emerged that attempts to remove the systemic barriers to family formation between young, low-income never-married couples and help such couples become responsible team parents, or marry. After YUFP ended, Public/Private Ventures

continued workshops from 1991 to 1996, that introduced a variety of CBOs to YUFP’s augmented fatherhood curriculum. The workshops even included a section that filled CBOs in on the realities of child support enforcement. Eventually, the Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) began

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administering those workshops to CBOs and CSE agencies across the country and is only one link in a larger network of organizations that knit together groups serving low-income noncustodial fathers and their fragile families.

Healthy Start programs are a good example of increased interest in the fragile family paradigm. Healthy Start demonstrations began in the early 1990s to offer maternal and child health programs with funds from the Healthy Start Division of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources Services Administration. Since 1994 as many as six Healthy Start programs have begun offering a men’s services component.

The Baltimore Healthy Start Men’s Service Program operated by Joseph Jones added a men’s service component and it has the capacity to make fragile families the unit of policy intervention. It offers all the comprehensive services that YUFP and PFS offered, but it has made the goal of mothers and fathers becoming team parents more prominent and it emphasizes paternity establishment and child

support. That chapter also has a job and job training component supported by HUD funds that provide jobs in lead abatement projects. The chapter's problems illustrate problems future programs are likely to face. Funds do not provide enough jobs for everyone in the program who is ready to work.

When practitioners speak of systemic barriers to family formation that is best illustrated by an incident captured for a video slated for broadcast on PBS. The video showed what happened after a noncustodial young father had established paternity and made efforts to pay child support in the Baltimore Healthy Start men's services program. He and his girlfriend had begun to consider marriage. The camera follows them to a lawyer's office where they have gone to get legal advice on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage. The lawyer tells them that because his fiancée is on welfare, they will lose her benefits if they marry and form a family. The lawyer explains that they can either marry and reduce their combined income or remain unmarried and have a higher income. The couple concluded that they could not yet afford to be a conventional family.

For reasons like these, as the NPNFF regional conference illustrated, most practitioners - even some of those who have attended PFF workshops - are still unsure of the prospects of partnering with CSE agencies and encouraging their clients to establish paternity and pay child support. Yet the services that the community-based organizations can provide for fragile families are vital if young unwed fathers and mothers are to survive the demands PRWORA's implementation will place on them.

Assembling a Creative Partnership

At a recent skills' building workshop in Denver, PFF hosted a three-day session between community-based organizations and child support enforcement officials. They jointly focused on joint strategies to help young, low-income fathers play responsible, involved, nurturing roles in the lives of their children. The participants shared their personal and professional experiences pertaining to fatherhood -- as sons and daughters, parents, service providers or child support staff. In short, they replicated the experience of many young unwed fathers in fatherhood development courses.

Unlike the CBOs and CSE agency heads discussed at the beginning of this paper, who have deep concerns about the impact of welfare reform on disadvantaged fathers and even deeper concerns about collaborating with each other, the CBOs and CSE agency staffs who met at the Denver workshop saw the value of a creative partnership that would serve disadvantaged fathers and fragile families. The question is how to bottle what began there.

PFF is in the early stages of launching a demonstration to do just that. The demonstration will help determine the feasibility of partnerships that address the needs of young (aged 18 to 25) unwed, low-income parents. The sites to be selected must address six key program elements outlined below:

1. CBOs and CSE agency staff must be willing to work together and be informed about each other. In effect, local community organizations and local CSE agency staff must duplicate what happened in Denver. Each must replace its fears and concerns with real information about what the other does and needs. Above all, they must keep in mind how their efforts affect disadvantaged fathers and fragile families. Their overarching goals should be to increase the number of disadvantaged fathers who establish paternity and to strengthen fragile families so that both parents are available to meet the full range of their children's needs. With those common goals, the two groups should then determine what interests they share and, between them, what comprehensive services they can deliver.

2. CSE agencies must subcontract part of their paternity establishment program to community-based organizations so that they may establish voluntary paternity establishment sites. The CSE agency must fund its CBO partner for these voluntary paternity establishment services. This moves the partnership out of what practitioners call the demonstration box. The partnership would thus be able sustain itself with funds from "hard" sources.

3. CSE agencies must also demonstrate a capacity to modify child support orders. Typically, they might grant disadvantaged, noncustodial fathers a year's delay in their orders to give the father time to secure training and a job. Then the orders might be gradually increased (or reduced) to match the young father's changing circumstances.

4. For their part of the child support enforcement element of the partnership, CBOs must teach young fathers parent skills and responsible fatherhood. The responsible fatherhood development mission requires that young fathers:

- establish a functioning relationship with the child's mother, where appropriate;
- become involved in their child(ren)'s life;
- accept legal responsibility for their child(ren) - specifically, establish paternity;
- and accept financial responsibility for their child(ren) - once they find jobs, they should begin to pay child support.

5. The CBOs need assurance on behalf of their clients that its partnership with the CSE agency will not be breached. For example, once the father lands a job, CSE will not immediately garnishee his checks, or if he loses a job CSE will not demand full arrearage, revoke his driver's license, or otherwise treat him as a "deadbeat dad" when he may, in fact, still be very much a "turnip."³¹ This is the crux of the partnership: working with each young father on a case by case basis.

6. The CBOs must use the revenue they earn from operating voluntary paternity establishment sites plus other public and private support to finance comprehensive services to fragile families. These services should include help to fragile families for managing tension and the risk of domestic violence. Also, CBOs should have access to funds provided in PRWORA to increase the access and

visitation of noncustodial fathers to their children.

7. CBOs and employment and training programs, like Boston STRIVE, must also collaborate with each other - providing social service and employment training networks for each other. Such networks will provide the comprehensive services fragile families require. This is particularly important because the lessons of earlier programs suggest that cooperative networks stretch the limited funds that any one family support program can command.

Partnerships have to see themselves in dynamic, system-building terms. In the 54 jurisdictions in which PRWORA operates - the 50 states plus four territories or special districts - many do not have CBOs that are set up to work with disadvantaged fathers. So in most cases, inexperienced CSE agencies will partner either with inexperienced CBOs or with local affiliates of such national groups as the Urban League, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza and community action agencies. In a few cases, very strong CSE agencies are interested in partnerships, but they do not have strong CBO partners. In other cases, the CBOs are strong, but the CSE agencies are reluctant or inexperienced. Finally, there are cases like Illinois, where both the CBO and state CSE partner are strong.

As outlined, these creative partnerships reflect a vision the deputy director of the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), Judge Grey David Ross, has for eventually turning the Office of Child Support Enforcement into, simply, an Office for Children that would preside over a series of collaborative partnerships involving child-support agencies, welfare agencies, community-based responsible fatherhood programs and employment and training programs like STRIVE.

Closing Considerations

In its August 24, 1997, issue, the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* featured a story on welfare reform's impact in Wisconsin ("It Takes a Village to Reform Welfare"). It included a literal picture of welfare reform with a front cover portrait of a welfare recipient, Opal Caples, and some of the people who brought welfare reform to Wisconsin. Those in the picture included an employment counselor, a woman's shelter director, a conservative policy expert, a Milwaukee mayoral aide and the state's governor, Tommy Thompson. The article detailed her job training and workplace experiences, her hopes for her daughters, and her odyssey onto the welfare rolls. It also detailed how Wisconsin created the nation's "first and best-run" welfare reform laboratory. Deep into the long article there was a passing mention of the children's father, her husband. She and he had married after high school when both had jobs. After three children, he quit his job and the marriage for "the flash of a drug hustler's life" and a pregnant girlfriend. She tells the reporter, "he don't call them [the children], he don't see them, he don't buy them nothing." The article never mentions the father again, nor does it explain how he evades the stringent requirements discussed above under federal and Wisconsin requirements that he provide child support or risk jail.

Jason DeParle, the article's author, has said in interviews that he selected

Opal Caples because her story was complex and illustrated both the possibilities and disappointments of welfare reform. She could find jobs but could not keep them. She welcomed the challenge of welfare reform, but her life may illustrate why welfare reform may fail. And, unlike most long-term welfare recipients who do not receive child support, she is married, educated and over 30. In fact, one of the few demographics she shares with most below poverty, mothers who do not receive child support is her race -- she is black. The only real welfare stereotype in DeParle's article is the father. He is presented, without challenge, as a deadbeat father of children on welfare -- "he don't call them, he don't see them, he don't buy them nothing." And, perhaps, in his case he has earned the label.

In this article we give attention to the more typical, low-income, noncustodial father. Many of these men are young and some leading men's services practitioners now note that under some circumstances, welfare reform in combination with the nation's stronger community-based responsible fatherhood programs may induce more of these young, unwed, low-income fathers to become involved in the lives of their children, become more involved with the mother of their children, establish paternity of their children and pay child support: the opposite of the Opal Caples' case.

The only real welfare stereotype in DeParle's article is the father. He is presented, without challenge, as a deadbeat father of children on welfare -- "he don't call them, he don't see them, he don't buy them nothing."

Leaders from child support enforcement agencies, community-based responsible fatherhood programs and second-chance employment and training programs tell us that they see

long- and short-term problems for their organizations and their ability to respond to PRWORA's demands on disadvantaged fathers, innovations made by practitioners in the field over the past thirty years may be harnessed to create creative partnerships that strengthen fragile families and help disadvantaged, young, unwed parents provide for their children.

This paper outlined the connection between those incremental steps and a new social welfare vision and how that vision builds on at least five innovations within the fatherhood and families field. Those innovations include: 1) fathers matter in the lives of children; 2) disadvantaged fathers should be the focus of policy; 3) disadvantaged fathers have multiple problems requiring comprehensive services; 4) programs can encourage paternity establishment and help disadvantaged fathers manage the risks of paternity establishment; and 5) programs serving disadvantaged fathers can strengthen fragile families.

CSE agencies and CBOs can respond to PRWORA and capture the field's innovations with partnerships that meet the following criteria: 1) CBOs and CSE agencies must share a willingness to learn about the other's mission and needs; 2) CSE agencies must finance CBO-operated paternity establishment programs; 3)

CSE agencies must also be able to modify child support orders to protect disadvantaged fathers and fragile families during spells of joblessness; 4) CBOs must require responsible behavior; 5) the partnership must provide access to a network of employment and training providers; and 6) the partnership must show a capacity for growth.

The goal of these creative partnerships is to build positive relationships between unwed, disadvantaged parents, so that both mothers and fathers can begin to meet the full range of their children's needs. Ultimately this partnership contributes to a vision of how the nation may reshape its strategy for serving the children of its poorest citizens. It is a partnership based on creating self-sufficiency in both parents.

At one level PRWORA gives CBOs and CSE agencies an opportunity to pursue a new social welfare vision for young, unwed, low-income couples in which both can become self-sufficient parents, earners and nurturers for their children. Where possible and appropriate, the two can even overcome present-day barriers to team parent, and even marriage, if that is what both want. This new social welfare vision is what policy analysts term a nonincremental or radical policy change.

Notes

1. David T. Ellwood, "Welfare Reform as I Knew It," *The American Prospect*, (May-June 1966), 22-29
2. Elaine Sorenson and Robert Lerman, "Welfare Reform and Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers: New Constraints and Opportunities." November 1997. Paper prepared for the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.
3. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 Title 3 (E).
4. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Title 1 (408, J).
5. Sorenson and Lerman, "Welfare Reform."
6. Ibid.
7. Mary Achatz and Crystal A. MacAllum, "Young Unwed Fathers: Report from the Field," Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, 1994. Key Findings of The National Center for Fathers and Families.
8. Ibid.
9. Ronald B. Mincy and Hillard Pouncy. "Paternalism, Child Support Enforcement, and Fragile Families." *The New Paternalism*, ed. Lawrence M. Mead (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).
10. See *The Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative*, Ford Foundation. (New York, 1997) for a list and description of other groups involved in this effort.
11. The National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community

Leadership (NPCL) headed by Dr. Jeffery Johnson is the administrative agency over both groups.

12. Their specific activities include: 1) revoking licenses of fathers in default to force compliance; 2) increasing in-hospital paternity establishment efforts and 3) enhancing child support collection through special outreach efforts to mothers through Head Start and health clinics. From Jane Knitzer and Stanley Bernard in collaboration with Eric Brenner and Vivian L. Gadsden. *Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood*. (New York: National Center for Children and Poverty, Columbia School of Public Health, 1997).

13. Robert G. Williams, Jane C. Venohr, Dawn Baxter, and Lisa Fitzgerald. "Massachusetts Paternity Acknowledge Program: Implementation Analysis and Program Results." (Boston, Mass: Child Support Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 1995.)

14. Policy Studies, Inc., "Voluntary Paternity Acknowledge Program Results—Fact Sheet" (Denver, CO: 1997). Jane C. Venohr, Robert G. Williams, and Dawn Baxter, "Results from the Massachusetts Paternity Acknowledge Program: Final Quarterly Report," a report from Policy Studies, Inc., for the Child Support Enforcement Division, Massachusetts Department of Revenue (Cambridge, MA: 1996); Robert G. Williams, Jane C. Venohr, Dawn Baxter, and Liza Fitzgerald, "Massachusetts Paternity Acknowledge Program: Implementation Analysis and Program Results," a report from Policy Studies, Inc., for the Child Support Enforcement Division, Massachusetts Department of Revenue (1995).

15. Figures based on Ronald B. Mincy and Elaine Sorenson. "Deadbeats and Turnips in Child Support Reform," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (Winter 1998).

16. *Map and Track*.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Mincy and Pouncy, "Paternalism, Child Support Enforcement and Fragile Families." Irwin Garfinkel, *Assuring Child Support* (New York: Russell Sage, 1992)

19. STRIVE is a well regarded national program that has been unusually effective at helping low-income people get back in the labor market with a unique soft-skills program.

20. Joelle Hevesi Sander and Jacqueline L. Rosen. "Teenage Fathers: Working with the Neglected Partner in Adolescent Childbearing." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19, (May/June 1987): 107-110. The authors summarize the work of R. D. Parke, et al.; R. Pannor, et al; E. Wattenberg; F. Earls and M. D. Siegal; F. Furstenberg; R. L. Barret and B.E. Robinson; H. Gerschenson and M. L. Sullivan.

21The sites were Children First, Racine, Wisconsin; Cleveland Works, Cleveland; Philadelphia Children's Network, Philadelphia; Parent Opportunities Program (POP), Fresno, California; Young Father's Program, Annapolis, Maryland; and Jump Start, St. Petersburg, Florida.

22. Mincy and Pouncy discuss these demos and their discussion emphasizes the goals of policy makers in YUPP and PFS. Their discussion neglects the goals that CBOs themselves want to achieve.

23. Material based on interviews with Nigel Vann, program officer at P/PV and director of Partnership Development at NPCL.

24. Ronald B. Mincy and Elaine Sorenson, "Child Support Reform: Moving the Debate Beyond Deadbeat Dads" (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1995).

25. Irwin Garfinkel. *Assuring Child Support* (New York: Russell Sage, 1992). Ronald B. Mincy and Hillard Pouncy. "Paternalism, Child Support Enforcement and Fragile Families."

26. Dan Bloom and Kay Sherwood. 1994. *Matching Opportunities to Obligations: Lessons for Child Support Reform from the Parent's Fair Share Pilot Phase*. New York: MDRC. p. 53.

27. Melissa Healy. "City Making Active Effort to Reengage Its Absentee Fathers." *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1997.

28. Linda M. Mellgren. "Creating Federal Leadership in Research and Policy Development." In *Young Unwed Fathers*, ed. Robert I. Lerman and Theodora J. Ooms. (Philadelphia, PA; Temple University Press, 1993). p. 195.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. See also Barbara C. Cleveland, "Unwed Fathers and Paternity Establishment." in *BFSO Ordered*. Edited by Judith L. Rubin. Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, April-May, 1995.

31. From Mincy and Sorenson, " Ronald B. Mincy and Elaine Sorenson, "Child Support Reform: Moving the Debate Beyond Deadbeat Dads."

All Things Not Being Equal: Differences in Caseworker Support Toward Black and White Welfare Clients

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Abstract

In the current era of time-limited welfare assistance, caseworker support can significantly impact a client's likelihood of achieving economic self-sufficiency. This article examines whether black and white welfare clients receive similar support from caseworkers as they attempt to become economically self-sufficient. Black welfare recipients report significantly less discretionary transportation assistance and receive less caseworker support in increasing their formal education than their white counterparts. These findings suggest there may be important differences in the discretionary treatment black and white welfare clients receive from caseworkers.

The current welfare reform environment emphasizes economic self-sufficiency through immediate employment or "Work First". This important policy shift changes the focus to program outcomes and gives program process dimensions less emphasis. But, these process issues still warrant attention. There is an inherent, but unsubstantiated assumption that welfare recipients receive similar support from actors within public agencies, most notably, caseworkers in local departments of social services, as they seek economic self-sufficiency.

This article examines differences in discretionary support black and white welfare recipients receive from caseworkers. Interaction with social services caseworkers is an important component of a recipient's program environment and can create differences in program outcomes. The central question of this article is: Do black and white welfare clients receive similar support from caseworkers as they attempt to become self-sufficient? Learning more about the relationships between clients and caseworkers can yield important insights for achieving self-sufficiency for welfare clients under the federal welfare program Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) established through the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).

Importance of Caseworker Support

Case management is a key component of any welfare reform plan. An analysis of clients' experiences with their case managers facilitates better understanding of the nature of a program's "treatment" in practice. Case managers become the agents of the policymakers and give a program model its concrete meaning. They operationalize the relationship between the client and the program by applying, in specific situations, legislative and regulatory directives about who must participate, in what activities they should participate, and what support ser-

vices they should receive (Doolittle and Riccio, 1992). How case managers complete these tasks will have a great effect on the program outcomes experienced by their clients. In delivering policy, public service workers or “street level bureaucrats” have substantial discretion in their work. They are entrusted to make decisions about people that affect their life chances (Lipsky, 1980). In this case, these chances involve the likelihood of self-sufficiency.

Formal definitions of human services case management typically identify four core functions:

1. Assessing a client’s service needs and setting goals
2. Developing an action plan to reach these goals
3. Arranging and coordinating the services to carry out the plan and
4. Monitoring the use of those services and assessing the continuing appropriateness of the plan (Doolittle and Riccio, 1992).

According to Doolittle and Riccio (1992), “How these functions are put into practice tends to vary widely across social service programs, reflecting their different goals, philosophies, resources, target populations, service options, and other conditions”(p. 314). Based on the history of welfare policy in the United States, one of these “other conditions” is race (Quadagno, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Wier, Orloff and Skocpol, 1987).

Previous research suggests that race affects the interaction between social workers and their clients. Davis and Proctor (1989) found that most white social workers prefer to work with white clients and are likely to bring preconceived ideas and attitudes about minorities to their practice. Clearly, such practices can have an impact on which clients get access to discretionary funds and services; whether or not a client is encouraged by her caseworker to increase her education; and/or whether a client normally finds out about job openings from her caseworker.

This research uses the following five indicators to assess the degree to which black and white welfare clients are treated similarly by their caseworkers. These areas all involve caseworker discretion.

1. Client notification of potential employment opportunities by caseworkers
2. Caseworker encouragement to increase client’s educational level
3. Caseworker assistance in locating child care
4. Caseworker assistance with client’s transportation barriers
5. Caseworker/agency fairness toward black and white welfare clients

Virginia’s Welfare Reform Efforts

Virginia’s major welfare reform program, the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW), which began on a quarterly phase-in basis on July 1, 1995. Prior to the passage of PRWORA, many states opted to design and implement innovative programs by receiving waivers to the then-federal Aid to Families

with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Under the terms of PRWORA, states with waivers may elect to continue their approved programs. Although VIEW was enacted through a state waiver prior to passage of PRWORA, it meets the primary policy requirements under TANF, and continues to operate throughout the state.

VIEW requires program participants to work within 90 days of receipt of welfare benefits. Participants are required to work in either private, unsubsidized employment, private subsidized employment or in community-based work. VIEW also establishes a two-year time limit for cash assistance benefits (with one additional year of transitional benefits); and a work activity requirement that requires all able-bodied parents to sign an agreement of personal responsibility and to participate in work and job preparation activities.

Preliminary analysis of Virginia's welfare reform efforts report mixed results: Caseloads are declining dramatically and far more welfare recipients are employed. Nationally, welfare caseloads have declined an average of 26 percent between January 1993, and June 1997 ("Welfare Reform: Where Virginia Stands, 1997, p. 3). Virginia's 37 percent decline was greater than 32 other states. However, most welfare recipients are working at positions with insufficient wages to rise out of poverty. There appears to be an important disconnect between ending welfare dependency and achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Methodology

Data were obtained from Virginia's VIEW program. The following limitations were placed on data collection by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS): only two counties from the first phase-in district could be selected for study; the request for participation must be sent directly from VDSS with an accompanying cover letter from the Commissioner (in order to assure project legitimacy and to maintain client confidentiality until the client returned a signed privacy release form); and only one mailing could be sent (due to the amount of agency time involved in identifying individuals and completing the mailing).

Working within these constraints, the two counties (Culpeper and Fauquier) with the largest number of VIEW participants were selected. This region is part of Economic Development District (EDD) 7. In comparison with other economic development districts in Virginia, EDD 7 has a lower unemployment rate (3.9%), a lower crime rate and a stable work economy. Also, this district received significant financial resources as start-up funds which were not available to districts that implemented VIEW later.

Letters inviting clients to participate in this study were mailed to all female VIEW participants over the age of 21 ($n=140$). From this mailing, 41% of the total population responded ($n=57$). Approximately 23% of this remaining population ($n=13$) could not be contacted because they did not have a telephone, the telephone was disconnected or there was no answer following seven attempts to contact. (While about 96% of U.S. residents have telephone service, this percentage is sig-

nificantly lower for welfare recipients. Local agencies in Virginia use the mail for official contact with a client and phone numbers are not a required entry in the state's database.) An additional 10% (n=5) declined participation in the study. From this mailing, 39 respondents were interviewed for a response rate of 28 percent.

The sample size limits the ability of these results to be generalized to larger populations. Due to the aforementioned data conditions, the findings are suggestive information about this VIEW population and caseworkers. This study is most appropriately viewed as a pilot project which makes an important contribution in an area in which minimal information is available: It directly addresses the incidence of racial disparities in treatment by caseworkers for welfare recipients in a modern welfare policy environment of time-limited benefits.

In January or February 1996, each participant was interviewed individually using a semi-structured questionnaire that contained questions regarding client experiences with caseworkers. The questionnaire also contained a demographic and background section. A particular strength of this study was the use of individual interviews. Unlike focus groups, individual interviews allowed each respondent to express herself without the influence of group dynamics. Each respondent answered all of the questions and provided rich in-depth answers. At the conclusion of the interview each respondent received a \$10 appreciation fee for involvement in this study. To increase the validity of these client interviews, interviews were conducted with VIEW administrators at the local departments of social services in both counties. Based on the experiences reported by VIEW participants, a topics list for use in the interviews with local department of social services personnel was constructed.

This research design allows the examination of normal routines found in the welfare recipient's natural setting (Caudle, 1994). This can help explain why similarly situated individuals experience different programmatic outcomes. Without analyzing the process by which a program is implemented, we cannot determine which aspect of the program had an effect which may be observed. This can help explain why similarly situated individuals have different outcomes compared to others.

We know that implementation is a critical juncture between the best-laid plans of program developers and the "gang aft agley" of operation. [The]... pressures that beset the local program and the responses necessary for survival and support all alter and reshape the original concept (Weiss, 1972, p. 96-7). Without a process analysis, there is a danger of attributing causal influence to structural aspects of a program that may not have those effects. This can result in incomplete and invalid conclusions. In this case, failure to examine differences in client support from caseworkers fosters the assumption that welfare clients are receiving similar institutional support as they attempt to become economically self-sufficient. When program outcomes are reported, a level institutional playing field is

assumed.

Sample Characteristics

Fifty-six percent (N=22) of the respondents were black and forty-four percent (N=17) were white. Both groups were similar in age, length of time on welfare, and number of children. White respondents were slightly older (36-40 years) than the black respondents (31-35 years). All respondents were between the ages of 21 and 40. For both groups, the average reported length on welfare was 1-2 years and the average number of children was two.

The black respondents had higher levels of education than the whites. Sixty percent of the sample (68% of the blacks and 53% of the whites) have a high school education/GED or above.

Findings: Welfare Clients Experiences with Caseworkers

1. Frequency of client notification of potential jobs by caseworkers.

If black and white clients are treated similarly by their program caseworkers, there should be no difference in the frequency in which clients are notified of potential job opportunities by their caseworkers. Respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of their VIEW caseworker in notification of potential jobs. Black and white respondents reported different levels of helpfulness, although the differences are not statistically significant. A majority (59%) of all white respondents rated their caseworkers as “often” or “sometimes” helpful. Only 36% of the black respondents gave their caseworkers similar rankings. In fact, 23% of all black respondents indicated that their VIEW worker was “never helpful” in notifying them of potential jobs.

“She’s nice enough but not helpful. She doesn’t talk to me about job opportunities. She wants to talk to me about general stuff, like facials. I want to talk to her about a job.”

Interview #3 -- “She’s nice enough but not helpful. She doesn’t talk to me about job opportunities. She wants to talk to me about general stuff, like facials. I want to talk to her about a job.”

2. Degree of Caseworker Emphasis on Education.

VIEW, like PRWORA, stresses immediate job placement or “Work First.” Traditional education and training support, such as GED completion, is very limited under TANF. Vocational educational training cannot exceed 12 months for any individual and three other job related activities – job skills training directly related to employment, education directly related to employment and secondary school or

GED programs cannot generally count toward meeting the first 20 hours of work participation. Hence, we would not expect either group to be encouraged to pursue their education. Although it is well documented that earnings are positively impacted by increased education, if VIEW caseworkers are implementing the program similarly for black and white participants, then both groups, regardless of educational level, should be encouraged to pursue immediate employment.

Black and white respondents reported very different experiences. White respondents (41%) indicated that their VIEW caseworker was encouraging them to increase their educational status, especially those who do not have a high school diploma.

Interview #24 -- They encouraged me to get my GED. I've been in school since October, working on the GED [VIEW was implemented in July]. I hope to graduate in the spring. My worker kept telling me, 'You're smarter than you think.' She really convinced me that I could do it. . . No one has said to me 'have you found a job?' They just give me encouragement and say 'you can do this.'

Interview #31 -- They keep encouraging me to get my GED. I've tried it but the literature is too hard. They need to stop bothering me about it.

None of the black respondents indicated that their VIEW worker encouraged them to pursue or complete an education.

Interview #23 -- They talk to you any kind of way. They say "Go get a job." I told them that I only had two parts left on my GED and I wanted to finish, they said "That's not what this program is about".

3. Degree of Caseworker Assistance in Locating Child Care.

Locating child care is a pre-requisite for many welfare mothers entry into the work force. Caseworkers are instrumental in providing solutions to child care problems. Under VIEW program guidelines, local departments of social services provide child care assistance to program participants if such assistance enables the participant to work. If black and white VIEW participants are treated similarly, then they should report similar degrees of assistance for locating child care. Most respondents in this sample expressed that they needed minimal assistance from social services in finding child care. Only 12% of the white respondents and 14% of the black respondents stated that they sought assistance from DSS in locating child care. All of these women indicated that DSS maintains a list of child care providers in the area. The remaining respondents, both black and white, said they did not need assistance from DSS due to the age of their children; because a relative provided child care or they had secured child care arrangements prior to their enrollment in VIEW.

4. Degree of Caseworker Assistance with Transportation.

Transportation issues are consistently identified as barriers to welfare recipients' self-sufficiency. VIEW provides transportation assistance to program participants if such assistance enables the individual to work. If black and white VIEW participants are treated similarly, then they should report similar transportation assistance by their caseworkers.

Over 66% of the respondents (68% of the blacks and 65% of the whites) indicated that they have transportation barriers. These barriers include lack of a driver's license, vehicle or gas resources. Also, some participants have a car which is currently inoperable due to needed car repairs. All of the respondents reported that DSS provides gas vouchers to assist with transportation.

Forty-seven percent of the white respondents, however, reported that their VIEW worker expressed a willingness to provide additional transportation assistance including helping them obtain a driver's license, a vehicle or vehicle repairs.

Interview #13 -- I have to take a cab now because I don't have a car or a driver's license. My worker said that DSS can pay for the driver's license, and may be able to get me a cheap car afterward. The driver's education course for adults is on Saturday. She's been very helpful.

Interview #37 -- I own my car but I need a brake job. I contacted DSS about my car. She told me she will try to come up with some money to get it fixed.

None of the black respondents reported any offers of transportation assistance beyond the issuance of gas vouchers, although they expressed similar transportation needs as the white respondents.

Interview #25 -- DSS gives me money for gas. I have a car and a job but it needs about \$300 worth of work so I can't use it. I asked DSS if they had any funds for car repairs but she said I should try to use the gas vouchers to take a cab or ride with a friend until I save enough money to get my car fixed.

Interview #28 -- They [DSS] keep asking me when will I get a car? I told them I've got to pay rent, utilities, and other bills first. She seemed to understand but said she couldn't do anything about it.

5. Reported agency fairness toward black and white clients

Respondents were asked whether they felt black and whites were treated fairly by their local department of social services. Most of the white respondents (53%) and many of the black respondents (41%) felt that blacks and whites are both treated fairly. Twenty-nine percent of the white respondents and 14% of the black respondents indicated that they did not know. Eighteen percent of the white respondents and 45% of the black respondents said black clients were not treated fairly by DSS.

Interview #33 -- I don't think they treated people fairly in a resume workshop I went to through DSS. All of the people conducting the workshop seemed a lot more responsive to whites.

Interview #12 -- I came in and didn't have my kids birth certificate and I couldn't get food stamps until I brought them in. Then, a white co-worker and I were talking one day about a lot of different issues surrounding welfare and I found out that she was able to get signed up for benefits without the birth certificate.

Table 1: VIEW Participants' Experiences with Caseworkers (Percent responding yes)

Indicator	Black (N=22)	White(N=17)	X²	p-value
Caseworker helpful in notification of jobs	36	59	1.946	.1629
Caseworker encourages/supports increased education	0	41	11.04	<.0001
Caseworker willing to provide discretionary transportation assistance	0	47	13.02	<.0001
Caseworkers/DSS treat black and white clients fairly	41	53	.5586	.4548

Department of Social Services' Response

In order to triangulate the data and increase this study's validity, VIEW personnel from Fauquier and Culpeper's local department of social services were interviewed using a topics list generated from the participant interviews. These topics included the agency's racial demographics; reported negative treatment of clients by agency staff; and transportation assistance.

The Agency's racial demographic is one of the indicators used to assess an organization's ability to service its clientele is its staffing pattern. Staffing pattern refers to the racial composition of an organization's employees and its association to its clientele (Sanders, 1973). The Culpeper Department of Social Services has two black agency employees out of a staff of thirty-five, which is about 6%. The remaining employees are white. In comparison, 52% of the county's welfare clients are black. Neither of the agency's two black employees work directly with the VIEW program, although one is a caseworker. An administrator at the Culpeper agency indicated that it is difficult to retain black caseworkers: "Black caseworkers don't stay for over 2 years. They get a better job offer in Northern Virginia making \$5,000 more a year. I don't blame them for leaving. We just hired a community person—hopefully, she will stay."

In Fauquier county, about 17% (five) of the agency's thirty employees are black. The remaining employees are white. In comparison, 39% of the county's

welfare clients are black. One of the agency's five black employees works directly with the VIEW program as a caseworker. Personnel from the Fauquier agency felt that professionalism is their main concern. "Race [of the caseworker] doesn't make a difference. We all operate at a professional level and work very well together. It doesn't benefit the client one way or the other."

Negative Treatment of Clients by Agency Staff

Many black respondents and some white respondents reported blacks were not treated fairly by their Department of Social Services. Personnel from the Culpeper agency felt that a number of recipients (both black and white) complain of negative treatment from the agency.

I believe that some of all of our clients [black and white] may receive bad treatment. What is the source of that? They [agency staff] don't realize how they treat them [clients]. The reception area is the worse because it's just so busy down there. The solution is to have everyone think more about what they are doing. As a matter of fact we had our last staff meeting outside [in another location] of the DSS building. We brought it all out—the problems and the complaints. Some of our clients already have an attitude before they even see us. We worked on some strategies. The bottom line is we all must watch what we're doing and what we're saying. We have to have a more customer-oriented approach. We're working on that, we are getting better.

Personnel from the Fauquier agency felt that their agency's emphasize on professionalism alleviated those concerns: "We try very hard to maintain a professional environment and treat all our clients in a professional manner. I am not aware that any clients are systematically treated in an unfair manner."

Transportation Assistance

Each agency was asked to explain any additional transportation assistance that was available to VIEW participants and the criteria for receipt. Culpeper personnel indicated that the agency did not directly purchase vehicles, but vehicles are sometimes donated. In that case, "we will give away the vehicle that private people donate to one of our clients who really needs it."

Fauquier personnel indicated that their agency can purchase inexpensive vehicles from the agency's discretionary funds. "On a discretionary basis we can make car repairs or purchase cheap vehicles. Unfortunately, our customer's needs exceed our supply. Sometimes people in the area will donate a vehicle. Transportation is a problem—we do what we can do to help them out."

Discussion of Findings

Black welfare recipients report significantly less discretionary transportation assistance and receive less caseworker support in increasing their formal education than their white counterparts. Also, fewer black welfare recipients receive notification of potential jobs from their caseworker and are less likely to feel that

caseworkers treat black and white clients fairly, although these patterns are not statistically significant.

The finding that many black and white welfare recipients perceive caseworkers as treating all clients fairly when in fact patterns of differential treatment exist, suggests covert, discretionary differences which are not easy to detect. These differences can have a significant impact on economic self-sufficiency outcomes. For example, having a personal vehicle (as opposed to only gas vouchers) allows a client to geographically broaden her search for employment and have fewer work shift restrictions. This is especially true in rural areas, such as Culpeper and Fauquier counties, where public transportation is virtually non-existent. Likewise, as with other job seekers, a welfare recipient's search for employment is affected by the strength of her personal network or social capital. Caseworker notification of potential or current job openings is a valuable asset, especially for members of the welfare population, who are less likely to possess strong network resources.

The differences in caseworker emphasis on education is particularly interesting. One of the main criticisms of TANF is its lack of emphasis on education. Much research on the dynamics of welfare and work have found that women with higher levels of education were more likely to leave welfare for work than were women with lower levels of education (O'Neill, et.al., 1987; Blank 1986; Bane and Ellwood, 1983). The findings of this research suggest caseworkers encourage education investment among white welfare recipients, but not black welfare recipients.

Taken together, white welfare recipients benefit considerably from the discretionary actions of their caseworkers. If differences in caseworker discretion are not addressed in the early stages of welfare reform, differences in job placement, wages and job retention among black and white welfare clients may be incorrectly attributed to differences in work ethic, personal motivation or attitude.

Comprehensive examination of racial outcomes of welfare reform initiatives should be a standard component of any welfare reform program design, implementation and evaluation. Elimination of racial preference should be a primary, emphasized goal of any welfare reform program. To facilitate this, federal audits (similar to those used to detect housing discrimination) should be conducted to obtain internal racial disparity data. These audits could be used to show whether specific caseworker discretionary practices systematically favor a particular racial group. If such practices exist, they should not be tolerated.

In the absence of federal pressure, states and localities should commit to eliminating racial disparities in treatment. Directors in local departments of social services should track tangible discretionary assistance (e.g. transportation, education) by race to determine if these funds are disproportionately allocated.

In an era of time-limited welfare assistance, caseworker discretion can significantly impact a client's likelihood of economic self-sufficiency. Federal and state policymakers, as well as local Department of Social Services directors should

have a moral and legal obligation to ensure that caseworker discretion does not result in systematic racial bias.

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Welfare Reform and the Black Community: Reasserting Communal Solidarity Through Moral, Economic and Residential Strategies

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The African world that gave Hillary Rodham Clinton the communal wisdom “It takes a village to raise a child” is also home to a richer, more encompassing philosophy of social relationship and corporate nature of existence: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”¹ In that kind of communal existence, the success, pride, and happiness of an individual are viewed as the achievement of all; conversely, the failure, shame, and agony of one reverberate in the communal psyche.

I have witnessed aspects of this communal feeling of shared existence in the African-American community, especially in moments of agony and intense sorrow. Such a feeling may manifest itself in tears and dirges as in a funeral, or in a conflagratory retaliatory confrontation with the perceived author of a painful experience, as in the Rodney King/Los Angeles incident, in which the innocent could become the victim. Welfare reform could initially generate painful situations for the affected poor. This is where communal consciousness and solidarity among African Americans must reassert themselves, not in violence and threats but in determination to help the affected African Americans succeed.

Welfare reform is certainly one of the most radical acts to affect African Americans in recent history, but it could very well be turned around to be of positive value. It could be a step towards total liberation, for as long the African American depends on governmental alms-giving for economic survival (s)he is not truly liberated. Severance from this long dependency on the state will not be easy, but African-American religious bodies, sports figures, performing stars, musicians and business persons could ease the way towards total liberation. However, the African-American welfare recipient must first go through a rite of passage for psychological rejuvenation. Thus I propose three kinds of strategies for African-American communities: moral, economic and residential (although they are not mutually exclusive).

Moral Strategy

The black churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples of African traditional religion must lead the way in establishing a rite of passage for welfare recipients. Again, I borrow this from continental African practices. It is recognized that as people grow old and attain new status in life, they experience some transitional

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disturbance psychologically and socially. To cushion the trauma such individuals go through because of the new experience—otherwise it could create social problems for the individual and the community—and to teach discipline and responsibility, elders sanctify rites that are created to assist people to have control over their lives. Such ceremonies are spread out in some societies over years, so that a sense of bonding, of community is created and people learn about sex, the role of sexuality in life, family responsibilities as a parent, endurance, and professional and social responsibilities. This is where it is ingrained in the participants that they exist because of the community and the community exists because of them. I believe that religious bodies in the black communities should assume the role of performing rites of passage as a way of addressing welfare reform. They will thus instill in the less privileged a sense of belonging, purpose, responsibility, and love in a world that is becoming increasingly individualistic and morally bankrupt. It is worth remembering that one of the propositions advanced by people to end the AFDC (Aid to Families and Dependent Children) is the call to end benefits for women who have more children while on welfare.² To do that is to control the reproductive rights of the poor, and of the black community whose population is already dwindling. But the black community must demonstrate a sense of moral and economic responsibility. To this end, the observation of C. Eric Lincoln, as to the importance of religious bodies, especially the black church is quite apt:

[The Black church is] the spiritual and cultural heartbeat of black America...[It] is the womb and mother of the black experience...For most of its life the black church has been the soul of black experience, the real seat of its government, the purveyor of identity, the center of its social life, its primary philanthropy (by far!), its political forum...for more than 100 years the black church was the black bank, burial society, insurance agency, school and schoolhouse, park and recreation facility, conservatory, auditorium, etc. Today, as various social services (always so tentatively and so grudgingly extended to blacks) are being canceled or withdrawn, the traditional efforts of the church to take care of its own have been revived and accelerated, calling new attention to its historic role, and its potential role.³

Black communities should thus consider investing more money, time, trust and responsibility in its religious bodies so they can carry out in a better and more efficient manner than the government, the reclaiming of welfare recipients to a more productive life. As liberation theologians have reminded us, the challenge of our age is not simply to proclaim “God the Father” but how to show to the poor that they too are the “children of God.”⁴

Economic Strategy

Black communities must also consider mobilizing the wellspring of good

will towards the less fortunate that exists in large measures among Americans. Not only must the stereotypical misperceptions about AFDC, and the vote-seeking tactics employed by office seekers who play on voters fears be countered by black intellectuals in every available forum, but the economic success of the more privileged black performing stars, athletes and business persons must be tapped to aid the black communities.

It must be recalled that the welfare-to-work program relies not only on job training but on the availability of permanent jobs to absorb those who successfully go through the various job trainings. The Michael Jordans, the Shaquille O'Neals, the Akeem Olajuwons and numerous million-dollar sports figures; the Oprah Winfreys, the Whoopi Goldbergs, the Eddie Murphys, the Bill Cosbys and many performing artists; the Whitney Houstons, the Michael Jacksons, the Paula Abduls, the Mariah Careys, the Quincy Joneses and the galaxy of musicians—all these must be reminded that the moral obligation of a common people with a common destiny dictates that they establish huge businesses to employ blacks and the less fortunate in America. They must prevail on their equally rich and powerful caucasians—the Ted Turners, the Bill Gateses, the Steven Spielbergs, the numerous sports, music and Hollywood stars—to financially support the noble task of giving economic liberty to the wretched ones in America.

They are capable of forming chains of businesses all over the country, and they have the means to take a risk on our unfortunate brothers and sisters. Kwesi Mfume, NAACP President, could call these millionaires to a summit on how to pull their resources together to establish powerful black businesses. In a country where there is still unemployment and where subtle discriminatory practices exist in labor, the welfare reform is capable of unleashing massive unemployment and social unrest. Successful blacks should come out openly to help make the transition less traumatic and disastrous to the black community. But to prevent the welfare cycle from claiming younger ones into its fold in the future, some grassroots moral and economic education of black youths at an early age is of vital importance. A continuous rite of passage to help children learn moral, economic, and sociopolitical responsibilities to themselves, their families, the black community and the nation must be started at an early age. Children from welfare homes must be shown that there is an alternative to welfare and that they do not have to be like their welfare parents. Without despising their parents, they must be shown the immediate root of their poverty and slowly led away from it. In a mentorship strategy similar to the "Big Brother/Big Sister" program, all post-secondary educated people of all races should voluntarily go to welfare houses and reach the younger minds, teach them and rescue them from making the moral and economic mistakes of their parents.

Residential Strategy

African-American communities must begin a strategy similar to Habitat for Humanity to build apartment complexes directed towards people going through

the welfare reform. Where Habitat for Humanity, for example, builds mostly individual family houses on a non-profit basis, African Americans and their neighbors in various cities must pull together voluntarily their expertise in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical engineering and general construction work to erect simple inexpensive buildings to rent out to graduates of the welfare reform system. Americans, I have said, are a very generous people. The basic materials— wood, nails, concrete, roof shingles, and metals—for such buildings could come from individual donors, charitable organizations, hardware stores, construction industries, Foundations and philanthropists. Here again, religious bodies and social clubs should readily offer their invaluable service at reaching people and seeking leaders for such projects. Community radio and television stations and newspapers should help spread the word. Providing affordable housing for people is going to be very crucial in the years to come. Under a new program by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a “moving to work” demonstration project in eighteen housing authorities will put tenants out of public housing. Currently, HUD provides rental assistance according to one’s income, and a tenant without an income is not required to pay for housing. Under the new program, not only is free public housing abrogated but tenants will pay a lot more to keep their apartments. In Lawrence, Kansas, for example, monthly rents set by the Lawrence Housing Authority (LHA) under HUD’s approval will make a one-bedroom apartment increase from \$150 to \$350; two-bedroom from \$180 to \$400; three-bedroom from \$230 to \$450 and four-bedroom from \$280 to \$480. “Everything we’ve done is a motivation for people to go to work...That is what this is all about,” says Barbara Huppee, LHA executive director. There will be “no more free rides.”⁵

I fear that there will be a wave of homelessness when this policy is fully employed. These rents are exorbitant for people just re-entering the work force after a period of dependency. When unemployment or underemployment matches homelessness there could be some form of social unrest or insecurity, neither of which is the intended result of welfare reform. An apartment building strategy of non-profit, low-rent drive a la Habitat for Humanity which is orchestrated by African-American communities could prove the difference between despair and hope, between relapsing into dependent, abject poverty and pulling oneself out of the mire to contribute meaningfully to the national economy. The collective determination, resources, and resourcefulness of African Americans in cooperation with the larger community of which they are a part could make the suggested low-income apartment housing successful. Welfare recipients or those in the welfare reform must be gradually made to accept responsibility by working and paying for where they live but it must not be the exorbitant rent being paid or being suggested.

Notes

1. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), p.106.

2. Mimi Abramovitz, *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996), p.10.
3. "News and Views," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No.12 (Summer 1996), p.17.
4. Peter Ukpokodu, "Liberation Theology," *Survey of Social Science: Sociology*, ed. Frank N. Magill (Pasadena: Salem Press, 1994), p.1085.
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Strategies for Addressing Welfare Reform

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The political climate of late 1990s is one that is overrun with selfishness and where denial seems to be a mainstay. Those in our national legislative bodies choose to operate under the premise that the American culture has progressed to a utopia-like democracy -- where opportunities in education, employment and fortune-building abound for everyone, and that all one has to do is apply one's self and play by the rules to become a welcomed and contributing part of the system. That's not a bad scenario for which to strive, but their methods and their motives leave a great deal to be considered. In a nutshell, they suggest that the safety net is being reeled in.

As in nature, when the climate changes, the inhabitants must adapt. When examining the issues involving welfare reform, black communities need adaptation on a number of levels. We must establish and recognize *basic* goals and work vigorously to achieve them. The minimal standard of living should yield: (1) safe living environments (housing, food, adequate healthcare, and clothing); (2) informed, educated, trained, employable individuals; (3) productive, healthy learning environments for children, where high school graduation is the norm; (4) access to strong, solid educational institutions; and (5) reductions and elimination of unplanned pregnancies, especially to those that are not self-sufficient (i.e. unwed teens).

Reaching these standards requires a concerted *drive to activism* in black communities. The effects of welfare reform will have dire consequences for those who fail to adapt and take action; but the fallout will be even stronger in the black communities. We can not assume a posture of benign neglect in any segment of our communities. To achieve the goals, those who can assist should assist; those that need assistance should seek and accept it. For those willing to assist, there is much to be done on a number of fronts:

Protect and improve the living environments

Because more people will be entering the work environment vis-à-vis welfare to work, the educational, recruitment and hiring practices in the marketplace must have the added incentive that affirmative action statutes provide. We must win the affirmative action battle. We are at a crossroads with individual states putting affirmative action on the voting blocks. Black communities must be ready to take quick and decisive action when their states' versions of "Proposition 209" come to a vote.

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On the national level H.R. 1909, otherwise known as the Canady bill (sponsored by Charles Canady, Republican Representative from Florida) is moving through Congress. This bill must be defeated. And it can be done by placing heavy, sustained, *coordinated* pressure on our representatives to vote against it.

Black communities also must focus on improving public education. One of the strongest factors determining whether one becomes a welfare recipient is the completion of a high school education: A child's education and his/her experience with school will determine whether or not he/she completes, at minimum, a high school education. We must demonstrate to local elected officials and our national representatives that strong, progressive public school systems are vital. This will require that parents and grandparents know and stay abreast of the plans and movements of their school boards. Success stories within the school system need to be publicized. Parents must re-double the time and attention that they spend with their children on school-related areas: children's behavior in school, their academic progress, and their involvement in being a school citizen. We must do everything necessary to ensure that every child has a fighting chance of avoiding the need to enter the welfare roles. They must understand that the new version of the safety net will let them fall flat.

Educate and inform ourselves and others around us

We must know the agenda of the conservative, regressive activist community. This community of lawmakers and influencers of power is fully empowered and has the wherewithal to affect changes that serve their purposes. They are aggressive and they have no compunction about misusing or abusing words phraseology to camouflage their activities. They've adopted this tactic to throw 'smoke screens' in front of their activities so that the casual observer might view their activities as good, fair-minded political activity or legislation.

For example, Rep. Charles Canady (R-Florida) has coined the aforementioned H.R. 1909 anti-affirmative action bill *The Civil Rights Act of 1997*; welfare reform legislation was called *The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* as it made its way through Congress. The *American Civil Rights Coalition* and the *American Civil Rights Institute* are organizations whose primary purposes are to fight affirmative action and roll back any and all progress that has been made to promoting equal opportunity in education and in the workplace.

We cannot passively sit by while legislators and organizations who misuse language advance their agendas and their self-serving causes. Welfare-to-work is upon us. If the workplace and academia are not primed, prepared and encouraged to recruit and hire women and minority candidates, how will former welfare recipients fare in their new roles as they seek employment or seek admission to educational institutions?

We also must ensure that accurate information about welfare reform is disseminated to those who are directly affected. Current welfare recipients and those who are potential welfare recipients must know what the 'real deal' is. Knowl-

edge really is power in this case. Knowing and *understanding* what is and is not available to them and their families will be critical for them to make decisions about their lives. Equally important is finding and highlighting the stories of those recipients who have successfully moved from welfare to work.

Academic education, sex education, esteem education are essential for preventing new generations of welfare recipients. Analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (available from the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C.) shows that lack of education and the presence of children prevent welfare mothers from working. It could be argued that the presence of children decrease the chances of a young woman completing her high school education. Teens and parents of teens have to know what is and isn't available to them in terms of assistance to them if more out-of-marriage/unplanned babies are created and what that means to them personally, to their families, and to their communities.

Outreach

As the opposition does, so must we. We must put *our* "spin" on the issues. When the conservative community misuses or co-opts phraseology, the misuse must be corrected. What's needed is a full-court press or a public relations blitz to keep the issues and the conflicts highlighted. Public relations activities include things we can all do, such as creating and completing petitions and delivering them to legislators, or phone calls, letters, e-mails to the offices of our elected officials. We can write "letters-to-the-editors" of "our" publications and, equally important, to "majority" or mainstream publications.

Welfare reform matters

Welfare reform is here. Without action, it could get worse. Protesting it and paying lipservice merely will leave us hoarse and frustrated. Intelligent, meaningful action and the spirit, energy, and commitment that is born when we decide to be *activists* will have more positive effects in black communities than anything else. Coordination and synchronization of our actions and initiatives are key to having any far-reaching effect.

Adapting to Segregation: African American Strategies in the Post-Welfare Environment

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The recent “welfare-reform” comes with particularly disastrous consequences for African Americans. This is not because African Americans are the major clients, in absolute terms, of what is considered to be “welfare” (white Americans are). Rather, it is because those African Americans who are dependent upon the welfare system happen to concentrate in poor inner-city and rural racially segregated communities. Thus, the consequences of reform will be felt as much at the level of the community, as they will be at the level of individuals and families.

It is clear that the welfare reform measure, even though “race neutral” emerges out of an environment where mainstream white America is seeking to absolve itself from any moral and ethical responsibility for the conditions of African Americans. White Americans, for the most part, are substituting “American” notions of merit and equality to argue for “equal treatment” for themselves. This is to combat what they see as a system of “reverse discrimination” in the form of “racial preferences.” This is clearly indicated in the significant and brutal attack on Affirmative Action. Merit and equality are the catchwords employed in this assault. African Americans are particularly vulnerable to these attacks.

White women, for example, have managed, using affirmative action, to ensconce themselves in significant numbers into all but the very highest echelons of society. This has facilitated, by and large, the insertion of issues of gender discrimination into the “normal” considerations of recruitment, hiring, and promotion and into the terms of conduct in the private and public sectors. Mexican Americans and Latinos have benefited from the growth in their numbers and their concentration in the South West. These, together, provide them with growing strategic clout. Asian Americans have managed to exploit their image as “model minority” and the extraordinary successes of the post-1965 migrants to create niches for themselves in small business, service activities, and in the “high-tech” sector of the economy.

The dispersion of African Americans throughout the United States in segregated communities is producing conditions of diminishing political clout. This is compounded by a relative decline in their numbers. Soon African Americans will be overtaken as the largest minority group by the Mexican American and Latino population. Occupationally, African Americans are not particularly ensconced in any niche, except, perhaps the very small numbers in professional sports and in the entertainment industry. All of this is complicated by intense segregation. This is

sustained by the deep and pervasive racism of the white population manifested in its strong aversion to association with African Americans. It becomes clear, if one looks at the patterns of race relations developing in the “integrated” communities and institutions, that absorption of African Americans into the mainstream is a myth. Rather, these communities and institutions are characterized by a segregated form of functional integration. African Americans find themselves shut out of the more familiar and informal networks of association in their racially “integrated” communities and workplaces. It is in these networks that the privilege of whiteness is activated. In the current climate, prospects for change are close to zero.

Thus, African Americans must face up to and accept the reality of de facto segregation. They must devise strategies around it in order to survive, prosper, and prevail. I have always been troubled by the neo-conservative implications of the philosophy of Louis Farrakan and the Nation of Islam. At the same time one cannot help but be impressed by the effectiveness of many of the programs and strategies adopted by the Nation. However limited, they have demonstrated their effectiveness in dealing, directly, with endemic problems that face African American communities. One may very well separate these examples from their philosophical underpinnings and use them strategically.

The problem facing African Americans is fundamentally at the level of the community, whether inner city or rural. The focus of any strategy must be the re-establishment of the security and stability in African American neighborhoods. The need to do so obtains at the physical, educational, social, cultural, and economic levels. A safe, secure, and stable physical environment is particularly important. This can come only with significant reductions in crime, drug abuse, and violence. A racist criminal justice system has effectively targeted African American communities as the location of criminal activity. African Americans need to employ their considerable local political clout to dictate the terms of intervention of the criminal justice system into their lives. In other words, the African American population needs to mobilize politically to demand and get equal justice. This is a political problem. African Americans must seek, also, to promote law abidingness and to reduce significantly violence and drug abuse in their respective communities. I believe that the example of the Nation of Islam is most appropriate. The reality of crime, violence, and drugs needs to be dealt with directly. They come with enormous direct and indirect costs, including opportunity costs, i.e. they eliminate opportunities that, otherwise, would be available. African Americans can ill afford these costs. They consume too many resources and preempt opportunity for development.

What is needed is a system of mass involvement, organized through functioning entities such as churches and community organizations. Such involvement must be preemptive and rehabilitative. At the same time, efforts to combat crime and violence need to work in tandem with a criminal justice system that is much more in tune with the realities of the community. The terms of intervention

of the latter are to be worked out collaboratively. A reduction in crime, violence, and drug abuse does not merely free up resources for alternative uses at all levels, but creates an environment where such resources can be productively invested at considerably lower costs. It serves, also, to attract persons with resources into the community who might otherwise choose to go elsewhere.

The second thrust of the black community should be on education. And here, the African American community must develop strategies to do more with less. Racial segregation and discrimination have created vast disparities in per capita spending on education between African American inner city school districts on the one hand and schools districts serving rich suburban neighborhoods on the other. Such disparities are bound to get worse. In response, African American school districts need to develop strategies whereby much of their funding goes directly into the actual provision of education. One way to do this is to reduce the costs of administration significantly. Another is to seek alternative uses for school resources. Adult education and community service activities may very well find a place in the school allowing a sharing of resources and budgets to their mutual benefit. Schools can be designed to serve multiple functions where the use of resources and space is maximized. The use of unpaid volunteer assistance from within and outside the community can enhance the ability to deliver a sound education with limited resources. Crime and violence within the schools need to be reduced and order and discipline promoted and maintained. This diminishes, proportionately, the need for, and hence the costs of security. The issue of safety and security plays a critical role in the ability to deliver a sound education in the most effective way. A safe and secure environment that is disciplined and ordered tends to attract a better caliber of teacher and helps in the recruitment of unpaid volunteers. An effective school system attracts families with higher incomes and more resources, not merely to the school but to the district at large.

African American communities need to seek ways to organize and attract financial, commercial, service, and manufacturing activities into their midst. Already, there seems to be a trend toward the development of church-based financial institutions and real estate investment in African American inner city neighborhoods. These activities need to be expanded beyond the churches. Credit unions, consumer, producer and service cooperatives, buying clubs and the like can become the basis for reducing the costs of credit, goods, and services in African American neighborhoods while providing jobs for residents. They can become, also, the basis for attracting business and customers from outside the community. They may make investment in real estate development attractive. Once again, however, the issue of safety and security plays a significant role. Investors and consumers alike are not likely to bring their businesses into areas where crime and violence are high, or perceived to be high. Residents are unlikely to develop a vested interest in the community under such conditions, leading to a very unstable population.

Important in all this is the willingness of the African American middle

class to relocate back into predominantly African American neighborhoods. And they will, if their concerns about crime, violence, security, and education can be assuaged. They bring with them precisely the type of resources, including income, education, and skills that are needed. Given their experiences in “integrated” communities, there seems to be a thrust by the African American middle class to develop carbon copies of the white suburbs in racial and class exclusive neighborhoods. And these communities are very viable. At the same time, there are benefits to living in the inner city. The latter offers the convenience of location and relatively low real estate prices. Such benefits must be seen to outweigh the costs. The latter must be reduced considerably.

While these proposals are not new, in the age of the “gilded ghetto” African American neighborhoods had a particular integrity. What they lacked was access to economic opportunity and economic resources. The quest is to restore their integrity under existing conditions of considerable middle class success. This may be the only viable response to the potentially devastating effects of welfare reform on African American communities, at least in the inner cities of the United States.

The National Association of Black Social Workers' Reflection on the New Welfare Reform Law

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James Baldwin was absolutely correct in reminding us that “history is not the past, history is the present, you and I are history, we carry our history, we live our history, we must change ourselves and our environment because we are history.”¹ Any discussion about the African American and social welfare in America is in fact a discourse on Americans’ racial history. It is a history America carries forward to the present that places an ominous foreboding halo over all that pertains to the African American. It is a history steeped in both disregard and disdain for the economic stake of African Americans surviving in America. It is a history of brutal chattel slavery, of Africans working as free laborers for 246 years, of their person being declared 3/5 human for political purposes, and of their having no rights that a white man had to respect. It is a history of Africans being emancipated from slavery with broken governmental promises and compromises, and the denial of reparation for the criminal inhumanity of slavery. It is a history of post-emancipation legal apartheid, of racial separation and segregation, of social, economic and political and educational disenfranchisement of Africans in America.² We are living in this history as it serves as a backdrop to all social policies pertaining to African Americans and their stay in America. So is it with the 1996 welfare reform law. It does not escape the history of separate and unequal.

History of Federal Welfare

The welfare system, as we know it today, has its origin in the Social Security Act of 1935. This Act, which was made law six years after the Great Depression of 1929, was a part of the Democrats’ New Deal package offered as a reformulation of American government’s long-standing history and practice of non-federal involvement in the social well-being of its citizens. Prior to this law, all social welfare programs and services were implemented on a state-by-state or private basis. In the African-American experience, government aid was not intended to be a reality. Hence, the African-American community instituted its own social aid societies.³ But in this epoch of the Great Depression, America was in a dire crisis, on the brink of a revolutionary breakdown, and needed reforms in the system to save herself from anarchy. Just as President Lincoln previously freed enslaved Africans in the hostile South to save the union, President Roosevelt and the U.S.

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Congress incorporated the African American as beneficiary of the Social Security law, not by intent or design, but to save the nation. Roosevelt's focus was not on liberating the African American from economic, social and political malaise. The crisis dictated that Roosevelt could not save the nation at that time without including all citizens, even the racially segregated African American in his New Deal.⁴

The Historical Plight of African Americans

Today, African Americans are disproportionately represented on welfare because they have been systematically deprived of viable economic options.⁵ They have been economically disenfranchised by the exclusionary practices of the private economic sector. Their constant presence as recipients on welfare is reflective of this residual history of private sector neglect and rejection. This disproportionate representation on welfare is a residual of the practice of trickle-down economics and trickle-down social thoughts and social policies.⁶ Moreover, during the epoch of legal segregation, African-American welfare recipients were denied welfare allowances equal to that of their white counterparts. African Americans, particularly in the South, were systematically denied opportunities and incentives that would uplift their economic status and allow self-sufficiency and permanent exit from the welfare rolls. This was not the case with their white counterparts who were constantly offered new opportunities even when the economy was depressed.⁷ The fact of the continued presence of white persons on welfare today is an indication that welfare is a dictate of infrastructure deficiencies in the economic system that excludes a given percentage of citizens, irrespective of race. It is not the result of personal habits and dispositions. Poverty is systemic. It is the historical residual of permanent, structured conditions in the economic infrastructure that guarantees disenfranchisement. History is not the past. History is the present.

NABSW's Mission

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) has a thirty-year history dedicated to liberating African Americans from the trough of the welfare system. This dedication is born of NABSW's awareness that welfare as we know it today is for African Americans a classical definition of a trough: "a feeding receptacle for the domesticated."⁸ Persons feeding from this trough are domesticated on dependency, the lowest level of human development and are often deprived of human dignity and void of human rights the bureaucrats must respect. For thirty years we have been advocating for major reforms in this system that would eliminate poverty as a reality and uplift those who are on public assistance. Now that a reform has occurred this is our analysis of it.

NABSW Position on Welfare Reform

The true reform today is that white America has changed her mind and her policy about African Americans and other poor persons benefitting from the public trough. Both the Democrats and Republicans agree that the poor African Ameri-

can recipient must be emancipated from the public sector as recipients and inserted into the private sector or public sector as a worker, even if the net payoff is not comparable. Workfare instead of welfare is now the common outcry. This advocacy for workfare is not congruent with the current trends in the economic system. The trend toward work, instead of a more progressive client centered services module, does not match the downsizing reality of the private corporate sector.

At a time in our history when educated, certified, experienced white male workers are being summarily expelled from the private economic sector, under the banner of “downsizing,” workfare is the new dictate for the poor uneducated, uncertified, inexperienced African-American welfare recipient. Work, at any cost is the outcry. For example, the new philosophy on which the Los Angeles, California Jobs-First GAIN program model is based is “Work at any cost.” The suggestion is that there is something inherently good about working, even if the pay is insufficient to cover the cost of living. This is the Jobs-First propaganda expressed by the Los Angeles staff to its participants:

- Work is valuable.
- You will be better off financially.
- As a working parent, you can be a working role model for your children.
- Being on welfare is bad for your self esteem.
- Any job is a good job.
- The best way to get a better job is to first get your foot in the door.
- Even a minimum wage job is better than none at all.
- You can get a job.
- With the proper attitude and job seeking skills, anyone can find a job in Los Angeles.
- Continued education may be valuable.
- You can get an education, but the best way is to get a job first, and then go to school in the evenings.
- If you go to school as part of GAIN, it will be short term, with the goal of getting you into a new job quickly.⁹

Single parenthood is on a rise in the middle classes, separation and divorce rates are on an increase, and 27 percent of the children in America are being raised by single parents without being exposed to poverty. Yet America’s welfare reform legislation is founded on the proposition that poor people are poor because they are not married, and are having too many babies too young.¹⁰ It is a fact that in today’s economy two income sources are better than one and that family income drastically decreases when separations and divorces transpire. But marital status changes do not necessarily cause poverty. Marital status changes in a person’s or family’s life may exacerbate poverty conditions. Joblessness and no or low incomes cause poverty.

At a time in history when Russia as a nation-state crumbled economically in spite of its culture of strong marriages, low out-of-wedlock birth rate and low teenage births, America was reforming its welfare based on the false premise that marriage is the source of a successful nation and out-of-wedlock births cause poverty and the need for welfare.¹¹ Russia failed as a nation because of deficits in the infrastructure of its economic system. In the same fashion, America has welfare problems because of deficits in its economic system.

Poverty and the African American Male

As it relates to the economic plight of African Americans, Wilson (1997) and Edelman (1987) are on target in their assertion that the poverty status of the African American community is due to the jobless conditions of the African-American male population. This plight needs to be placed as a top priority item in public policy agendas designed to enhance the status of families, "because the unmaritability of the Black male population is directly associated with the high percentages of out-of-wedlock births and female headed households.¹² The caveat is this symptom is not the cause, but a notation that there is a systemic breakdown, a trend that requires the mobilization of new economic constructs to balance the social, economic equation. Systemic responses are needed. Systemic safety net policies and resources are needed to undergird single parent households so as to guarantee a higher median standard of living for all persons who are either on or off welfare.

The campaign for welfare reform paints an unflattering portrait of the poor African-American welfare recipient. She is portrayed as a corrupted cheat who is young, single, unemployed, and refuses to work as she continues to promiscuously have more and more babies out of wedlock. Welfare has been painted and marketed as a "Black female thing" that had to be reformed. (Black in the distorted sense of it being evil and dominated by the presence of African Americans.) Thus, the attitude, orientation, personal disposition, and outlook of the African-American recipient have been more the central focal point of the welfare reform package than true economic reforms in the economic system of America that would systematically enfranchise the historically disenfranchised. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act should be named "From Welfare to Myth" because it is founded more in myth than fact. Farai Chideya elaborates on the "Myth of the Welfare Queen."

Just as Black men are stereotyped as criminals, Black Women in the American media are typecast as welfare mothers. America's newspapers are filled with images of slovenly, ne'er-do-well women and their multitudes of children-families who are nearly always African American. Yet this image is startlingly at odds with the majority of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), or welfare. Although the welfare crisis is very real, it is nothing like the social and financial Armageddon described by its critics. In fact,

most women who are forced to rely on for a time on welfare work for a living most of the time, and the AFDC program is less than 1 percent of the entire federal budget. The stereotype of the “welfare queen” has a clear racial component. Although, nearly all of the women pictured in stories on welfare are Black, Blacks and non-Hispanic whites constitute a virtually equal number of women receiving assistance. (When the figures are broken down by race alone and not ethnicity, as they are in many census listings, whites constitute the solid majority of those on welfare.)¹³

The Real Reform

As a result of this propaganda, the real reform that has occurred has escaped the scrutiny of the American public. The real reform is the new thrust to transfer the public welfare bureaucracy to the profit-centered, private corporate sector under the guise that this sector can now do what it has historically refused to do, enfranchise the disenfranchised. The real reform is the privatization of welfare. It is the transforming of public assistant recipients into profit making commodities, of using their economic condition to bail out the “war machine” corporate world, and transferring these military oligarchies into a “welfare profit making machine.” This can be achieved now that there are no more “communists” to fight.

It is our view that the historical Black cotton pickers of America are now the cotton being picked for profit. Now the likes of Lockheed, and General Electric, IBM, and Bank of America are a few of the new cotton pickers representing the new cotton gin. They are now accruing profits delivering welfare services instead of cranking out war machinery, materials, and services. This is the tragedy of the welfare reform law. It camouflages who is the true welfare recipient. A critical analysis of the the welfare reform law reveals that this law, instead of addressing changes in aid related to dependent children, really addresses specific policy issues pertaining to African Americans. It legislates black family issues of work, child support, child care, population growth and control, fertility control, and even child adoption transfer rules, without declaring its real hand that the reason we will not know welfare as we have known it is because it will be delivered by the private corporate sector.

This reform law does not address the issue of true economic reform, economic development and black empowerment. We have here a law of reform void of reformulation. The continued underdevelopment of the African-American welfare recipient is the independent variable in the reform equation. Only the *modus operandi* has changed. Before the reform law, the recipient was guaranteed entitlement to welfare, (i.e., well-being) by the federal government. This is no longer the case. Now the fifty states are the benefactors of that entitlement and the old recipient is now at the mercy of the state’s largess by virtue of the “block grant” scheme.¹⁴ Today, recipients must work without the proviso or guarantee of a wage standard, an income that would allow for them to work, live, survive and flourish beyond

poverty. Without the assurance of an entitlement and the specification of wages above the poverty rate, recipients are entering a quasi-slave era. This is a return to the old states rights model where the states used their sovereign rights to dehumanize and degrade African Americans at their whim. Proof of this disdain of recipients' future stakes is revealed in the current move by the conservative members of the GOP to exempt working welfare recipients from the protection of the federal government labor laws.¹⁵

African American citizens on welfare today are being treated like alien refugees in their own land. History has proven that each time America has nationalized a scheme to degrade and exclude, or at least forward policies not in the best interest of the African American, black ingenuity results, and new opportunities emerge.

Opportunities

The changes in welfare reform open the doors to new innovations, not only in the area of service delivery, but in new modes of networking among the recipients, government units, the corporate sector, the not-for-profit human services complex and the community at large.

It is known that African-American public assistance recipients will not move beyond poverty working for the sake of working, or working for minimum wages. Nor will they earn sufficient income to cover all of their basic needs moving from welfare to workfare. The lack of needed certification, experience, and education by some recipients make welfare to workfare, at least, a lateral transfer without net revenue gains for the recipients. Innovation is in order.

New forms of legitimate entrepreneurship are needed to address the certification, experience and education deficiency issues. There are lucrative business opportunities in local communities for entrepreneurs that do not require certification or specific education. At all times steadfastness, diligence, integrity, honesty and commitment are the needed qualities to make these businesses work.

The key to effective entrepreneurial success is staking out a business that serves an unmet need. For example, the New Orleans Welfare Rights Organization under the banner of "And Still I Rise" has designed several entrepreneurial businesses structured to liberate AFDC recipients from welfare rolls to self sufficiency. These businesses require training, but no certification. They range from Sister Car Wash units, Home Care Services, Horticulture Lawn Care, Telephone Marketing to Day Care Services.¹⁶ These initiatives are nascent efforts, too early to determine success, but are headed in the right direction.

Although the co-op concept is not new, the welfare reform law opens up the avenues to co-ops. Dr. Rodney Wead of St. Louis, Missouri is an expert on organizing the urban poor to develop co-ops in housing, food markets, and auto repair through the use of sweat equity. These entrepreneurial models not only lead to self-sufficiency, but encourage cooperation and collective problem solving. States now have the flexibility to elaborate and encourage such models. The banking

industries also have an opportunity to relax its standards and take greater risks to make entrepreneurship a reality.

Because the new reform now encourages innovative approaches, African-American professional organizations and their chapters and affiliates now have an opportunity to provide services and training on national, state and local levels. The National Association of Black Social Workers is establishing a new service delivery and training component to utilize its human services expertise to fulfill the requirements of the new welfare reform law in the areas of parent training, and teen pregnancy, as well as training in administration, case management, supervision and client services. This is a national initiative that will utilize strategically based local chapters. Other African American organizations should follow our lead.

The National Association of Black Psychologists is needed to join this effort to break the vicious psychological hold welfare has on the minds of its recipients. Black fraternities, and sororities are offered an opportunity here to work with economic and social responsibility issues and programs with disenfranchised men and women, respectively. Black trade unionists should now come forth to teach the art and science of their trades to underemployed and unemployed women and men. The black churches and other faith based organizations should now step forward and provide housing opportunities, parental training, day care services, pre-job and job training, all as a concerted effort to empower and liberate the powerless and oppressed.

States should be mindful of the roles they can play in empowering recipients to develop good work habits and skills performing jobs in the public sector. As suggested by Wilson (1997), these jobs can take on three forms: (1) public infrastructure maintenance jobs, (2) public service jobs for less skilled workers, and (3) WPA style jobs formerly created by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. African Americans need the continued involvement and influence of the federal and state governments. For as little as they have done over the years, they have far exceeded the efforts of the private sector.

In New Orleans, under the leadership of Mayor Marc H. Morial, a coalition of public, private, professional, community-based organizations and welfare recipient, was organized to address the anticipated problems of the new welfare reform law and to forge new innovative answers. Accepting the responsibility to solve the anticipated problem, this coalition, in its executive summary, acknowledged the following:

The involvement of the local governmental, business, civic, and religious organizations will be an important element in the expansion of employment opportunities for the disadvantaged. The creation of a partnership among these organizations can be one way of focusing effort on the growth of jobs for current welfare recipients. It will take a concerted community effort to focus available resources in such a manner that the opportunities for employment are maximized.¹⁷

It is essential that this concerted level be exerted on the national, as well as, state and local levels.

The doors of opportunity are wide open to the corporate private sector. With its emphasis on profit and de-emphasis on corporate, social responsibility, beyond profits, the private sector can use its genius and technical know how to develop those who it has historically disenfranchised. It is unfortunate that the private sector must be paid to clean up its own pollution. (Poverty is but one of the major pollutants of the private corporate sector). Nevertheless, tax credits are one of several incentives built into the new welfare reform law that the private sector can take advantage of to uplift the economic stature of welfare recipients. If each of the Fortune 500 corporations in America would encircle 5% of its workforce for public welfare recipient employment, the employment problem of public welfare recipient can be solved in a short span. This will minimally reduce profit margins, but add long term benefit to the nation's well being.

Finally, America has had many opportunities to enfranchise the African American communities in the past, but has opted for more superficial agendas. The 1996 welfare reform law proffers yet another opportunity for America to redeem herself. From all projections into the new millennium, this is the important time to take advantage of the opportunity to lift the perennial ceiling of policies and practices neglectful of the unique history and presence of African Americans, and open the doors of the coercive cave that has the African American community captured in perennial poverty and social ills. This uplifting will also free the nation of oppression, an oppression that has historically crippled and controlled this nation because of its race-based exclusionary policies and practices. Welfare reform, as we now know it, does not remotely approach full liberation, but it could be revised to make this a new reality. New visions and vistas are needed to achieve this outcome that will eventually save a people, and a nation.

Notes

1. Baldwin, James and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race*, New York: Delta Books, 1971, p. 188.

2. The uniqueness of African presence in America is a documented history of involuntary chattel slavery. In 1788 the 3/5 rule was established to take into account African presence in America. In 1857 the Supreme Court deliberated on the Dred Scott case and declared that Africans were not citizens of Americas and thus they had no rights. During the Reconstruction period between 1865 and 1877, discussions took place by so-called radical Republicans about proffering African Americans forty acres and a mule. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 validated, balanced and restricted the expansion of slavery in America. The Tilden/Hayes Compromise of 1876 resulted in the Union Army protection being removed from the South, spelling the end of the Reconstruction Era and the official onslaught of

white hostilities upon the emancipated African American in the South. In 1896, thirty-one years after the 13th Amendment was passed, the Supreme Court ruled legal racial separation and segregation under the banner of “separate but equal.” It lasted 58 years. It was never equal. Separation still prevails even though it is not the law.

3. Ross, Edyth (1978) elaborates on this subject in *Black Heritage in Social Welfare 1860-1930*.

4. Scheslinger, Sr. Arthur M. elaborates on American’s vulnerable revolution in *The Age Roosevelt, Crisis at the Old Order*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957.

5. Farai Chideya. *Don’t Believe the Hype*. New York: Plume, 1995. “The population of families on AFDC covers all races. Thirty-nine percent of the families receiving welfare are black, 38% are non-Hispanic white, 17% are Hispanic and 3 percent are Asian.” (p .37) African Americans comprise 12% of the national population. Their 38% representation constitutes more than three times their national presence.

6. During the epoch of “Separate but Equal” African Americans were supposed to have equal access to “appreciated values.” In practice this meant that for every new facility white America received, African Americans were to receive the same in form. Trickle down policy grants “appreciated value” to the white community and “depreciated value” to the African-American community. In practice this means new facilities for the white community are trickled down, i.e., handed down, to the African-American community in a depreciated, used state after the white community has had benefit of the appreciated state.

7 When I grew up in the racially segregated Lafitte Public Housing Project in New Orleans, LA between 1942 and 1952, there existed its white counterpoint, the Iberville Housing Project, for whites only. Today, both Lafitte and Iberville are occupied exclusively by African Americans. The poor white community was granted real estate options by both the private banking industry and governmental largess to own their homes in the private real estate sector during the 1950s and 60s. These options were not made available to poor African Americans. Public housing is now an exclusive black domain, with rare exception.

8 . Trough is defined by *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* as such (1981).

9. Weissman, Evan, *Changing to a Work First Strategy* (Report), Los Angeles: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1997, p.27.

10. Chideya (1995) provides these facts: “The average family on welfare consists of a woman and two children. Over 40% of families on AFDC have only one child as opposed to less than 4% with five or more children. Over 60% of children who receive welfare are five years old or less. Fifty-three percent of children on welfare come from families where the parents never married and 33% come from broken marriages. Over two-thirds of women on welfare are between the ages of twenty and thirty-four. Less than 9% are teenagers. Less than 2% are

under the age of 18. The average payment for a family of three was a mere \$388 per month or \$4,656 per year - less than half of the \$10,860 poverty level.” Pp.37-38.

¹¹ Introduction of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*, 1996.

¹² Julius, William Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 1996 and Marian Wright Edelman, *Families in Peril*, 1987. pp.14-15.

¹³ Op. Cit. pp.35

¹⁴ This is a return to the old Dixiecratic policy of “States Rights,” a policy that legislated the degradation of Black life in America.

¹⁵ *Times Picayune*. “Workfare Cease - Fine is Sought by GOP” Sept. 17, 1997. P. A9.

¹⁶ New Orleans Welfare Rights Organization is located at 3040 Bruxelles St., New Orleans, LA 70119. Their telephone number is (504) 944-1112.

¹⁷ Report of the Welfare Reform Committee: Mayor’s Task Force on Welfare Reform, New Orleans, June, 1997. p.2.

Commentary

Lewis Diuguid
The Kansas City Star

Some longtime friends invited me for a Thanksgiving dinner last year at an inner-city, mental health consumer drop-in center, so I went to enjoy their company and hospitality. African-American mental health consumers helped prepare and serve the food to a packed house of diverse people. The room teemed with many hearts of kindness.

But such touching, uplifting integrated scenes go largely unnoticed by the masses of “normal” people who turn up their noses and look the other way. The folks who frequent the drop-in center are impoverished and different, and such difference in the '90s is way past being “in.” The bright lights of TV news and newspapers often frame prettier stories in other places. But the media love focusing on sprawling suburban excess or the pathos of urban poverty, particularly when the faces bleed and they are black.

Much of the many truths in-between of people getting by go unnoticed and unreported. Such lazy journalism of incomplete and biased images adds to the fear, isolation and erosion of aid and compassion in America in which the least of us suffer the most. It supports the back peddling by politicians and the public, which came on our screen largely during Ronald Reagan’s actor-turned-president watch. It continued with President George Bush’s administration and accelerated with the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress. It turned into a thunderous washout with President Bill Clinton caving in on welfare reform.

What America faces now is an environmental disaster of people buried in the growing urban and rural silt of poverty. It shows up among mental health consumers who depend on public assistance to get by and among many people of color who have been trapped in generational cycles of being poor. A disproportionately large share of them are black because racism in this land of plenty limits their opportunity to escape the sludge of low-income jobs and then blames them for being ensnared.

America has gone crazy, focusing on outrageous greed instead of the destitute in need. I found that out over the last couple of years of continuing a project of putting on the 25-year-old Army surplus coat that I’ve had since college, a black knit cap and other faded work clothes. I lined up with other mostly African-American men and women long before dawn to try to be hired as a worker at a day-to-day, minimum-wage-paying labor pool. I didn’t get hired. There were too many people and too few jobs.

In this era of welfare reform, the lines outside such places, soup kitchens, food pantries and homeless shelters keep growing longer. These are Great Depression scenes that started showing up on our landscape in the 1980s. They’ve been

accepted and shuffled to the side as if it's the way things will always be.

I wrote about that, too, in a piece about the public's reaction to seeing me in my old Army coat and less than presentable clothes. What used to be casual wear in my college days, I quickly learned was threatening to people today. At a dozen different places in America's Heartland people either avoided me as if I had a disease or they stared with burning hate for me to go away. One woman at a shopping center parking lot grabbed her purse and sprinted to the mall when she saw me even though I did nothing to provoke her or anyone else I encountered in my urban and suburban sojourn into people's minds and hearts. Their mostly negative response after that column ran told me that they didn't want anyone pointing out their bad behavior in our fear-filled and less compassionate times. But I did in a follow-up column, letting the area know how we've changed.

The press must continue to chronicle how the lowering and elimination of the safety net strung during the Great Society is making all of us small. Damning others makes all of us vulnerable to a greater greed. Government data show that the median full-time male worker's earnings topped out in 1973. It's been falling ever since. Meanwhile, that sucking sound being heard is America's wealth being drawn into the jaws of the greediest few. In 1950, the top 1 percent of Americans owned 28 percent of the wealth. But now the top 1 percent has sopped up 38 percent of the country's wealth.

According to census data, the bottom 20 percent of Americans held on to 4 percent of the nation's wealth 30 years ago. But their grip has weakened to holding just 3.7 percent today. The middle class isn't doing much better. Thirty years ago, this satisfied section of 60 percent embraced 52.3 percent of the nation's wealth. That's down to 47.4 percent today. Sure we're living in an expanding economy. The Cold War and communism ended in 1991 with the collapse of the old Soviet Union. But so did the force that kept capitalism's burning global greed in check. The Soviets mockingly showed the flaws and all of the inequalities of our system to the world. Embarrassed, America worked hard to keep that mess cleaned up.

Civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 1960s capitalized on that other force, too. Americans fought for global freedom in two world wars, Korea and Vietnam yet people of color weren't free at home. It was a long stain of shame that America's communist nemesis loved to show. America's corresponding and sometimes greater feelings of global guilt helped to change this country and make it better. But it ended when the Soviet Union died and the rest of the world became drunk on America's brand of capitalism, inequality and greed.

It makes me worry more about whether the yearlong race initiative that Clinton launched in June is just a presidential smoke screen to cover up his empty 1996 campaign promise to fix the flaws in the welfare reform bill that he signed into law. If that was the design it seems to have worked masterfully. African-American and other journalists, pundits and commentators of color have blathered endlessly about the flaws in the race initiative, forgetting the people who have been dropped from food stamp, Medicare, Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Supplemental Security Income roles because the new law arbitrarily and capri-

ciously like an expensive sneaker commercial says just do it. It's not right. It's inhumane. It's insane.

An all-out Army Corps of Engineers effort has diverted the challenging voices abroad and at home just as if the conservative forces were rechanneling and redirecting the Mississippi and Missouri rivers to flow away from the towns that they feed with fresh water and toward a new, model cities of greed. It's no wonder that African Americans and other people of color are facing unprecedented roll-backs in affirmative action, voting rights, civil rights and tremendous reductions in the government helping the less fortunate get on their feet and become productive citizens.

I wondered when I broke bread on Thanksgiving with the people at the drop-in center how many of them won't make it through this new year. Many whom I had gotten to know over the years hadn't. Others mourned and protested their loss, but the instead of changing wrong-headed policies and programs that contributed to the human tragedies of the powerless and voiceless have accelerated. I also wonder like others at the drop-in center whether meager funds for such celebratory Thanksgiving get-togethers will be cut. After all what do poor folks have to celebrate and give thanks for? Our ruinous faith in social Darwinism grows, and they become more at risk than ever.

These folks are disappearing as public assistance rolls shrink. It enables the government and the greedy to call welfare reform a success, but the destitution is merely shifting and showing up in other places such as food pantries, soup kitchens and prisons, which each year serve record numbers of poor people. The courts and the country have turned against the poorest Americans without realizing that the "they" eventually could be "us" if the current gap in wealth continues to spread.

As a whole, blacks fare far worse than whites and so do many other people of color. As a black journalist, these trends in this era of welfare reform troubles me. They can only be reversed if the media wander into the true-grit places of our changing society to accurately show how people are affected by government policy. The global shame is good, but it lies in the press exposing the problems with the truth instead of contributing to the lies. If we become as content as purring house cats, willing to lap up whatever garbage the power elite throw to us, then the images we will project will be wrong and the public will be woefully misinformed. The greediest few will continue to get wealthier, our social problems, which include homelessness and racism, will grow more unmanageable, and our democracy without a hungry-for-the-truth free press will face its bleakest hour.

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