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Reaffirming America's Diversity

In spite of our nation's long experience with ethnic and racial diversity and the pride we express in it, we still have not succeeded in extending full access to the American dream for all segments of our society. Although we have made great progress, especially in this last half of the 20th century, achieving equal opportunity remains a major challenge for the future.

The United States is becoming more diverse with each passing year. The best available demographic data show that blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans now comprise approximately 25 percent of the nation's population, and these groups continue to grow, through births and immigration, much faster than the rest of the population. In the face of this rapid growth among people of color in our society, congressional action to exclude legal immigrants from our major social services is a dramatic example of the growing sentiment among some elements of society that diversity costs more than they are willing to pay. Even more disturbing are the mounting attacks on existing programs, such as affirmative action, that are designed to ensure equal opportunity.

This is the wrong direction for our nation. This is a time for bold vision and leadership. We should be reaffirming our commitment to genuine equal opportunity for all Americans and developing new strategies to achieve it. In that regard, let me suggest four broad, interrelated areas that merit consideration.

▲ **Political participation.** Over the past half century, the country has made considerable progress in extending political rights to previously marginalized groups. The real challenge of the future is how to turn these political gains into political clout to influence public policy decisions that affect the nature and distribution of opportunities.

▲ **Economic advancement.** While there have been impressive gains in the number of people of color who have joined the ranks of the middle class, distressingly large segments of minority populations remain trapped in poverty. The challenge we face is to identify ways to bring greater economic opportunities to America's poor and to strengthen the hold of upwardly mobile minorities on their middle class ladder.

▲ **Education.** In education, too, minorities have made impressive strides, notably in high school completion rates, SAT test scores, and college enrollment. Nevertheless, people of color must overcome serious disadvantages as they seek access to quality education. What is urgently needed is to upgrade the quality of our schools and the qualifications of the teachers who serve the bulk of minority youth.

▲ **Strengthening community.** The dispersal of successful blacks has left many traditional inner-city communities without leadership and role models. Reinvigorating home, school, church, social and civic institutions, and the spirit

of caring and of charity will be crucial to all of our goals to improve the quality of our lives.

While most Americans will be quick to agree in principle on these goals, there remains a reluctance among many leaders to commit adequate public funds to achieve them. In recent years we have witnessed vigorous, wide-ranging attacks on affirmative action and other approaches to closing the gap between majority and minority populations. Those attacks are not worthy of a democratic society. It is incumbent upon those who lead communities of racial and ethnic minorities not to flag in the continuing struggle for a diverse society. Nor should America's white leadership be passive. Indeed, promoting diversity is very much the business of the nation. It should be the business of all of us. ■



PRESIDENT



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Louis Martin: Crusading in Detroit

In the 1930s and '40s, the Labor Movement Played a Crucial Role in Desegregation, and Martin Stood at the Center of It All

The most influential voice on black affairs in the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter presidential administrations and a founder of the Joint Center, Louis Martin began his professional career as a 23-year-old crusading journalist and founder of the Michigan Chronicle. The following excerpts from the second chapter of his biography, Walking with Presidents: Louis Martin and the Rise of Black Political Power, describe Martin's fight against discrimination in Detroit and his successful effort to forge an alliance between blacks and the fledgling United Auto Workers union. Maligned by the political and industrial establishment of the city, Martin, who died on January 27, 1997, never wavered in his struggle for social and economic justice. Walking with Presidents is being published by Madison Books. Under the sponsorship of the Joint Center, the book was written by former Ebony editor Alex Poinsett, with an introduction by Pulitzer prize winning historian David J. Garrow.

When Louis Martin signed on with the weekly *Chicago Defender* in February 1936, he joined not just a newspaper but a tradition of protest that stretched back to 1827, the year John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish published the first black-owned paper in America, *Freedom's Journal*....The *Defender* preached its message well beyond the Chicago area. Through a network of Pullman-car porters, it was distributed across the nation, particularly in the South. The founder of the paper, Robert Abbott, had grown up in Savannah and aimed many of his editorials at the wretched economic conditions and horrible abuses of black Americans in the South. From its inception, the paper publicized and campaigned against lynchings. While the *Defender* gradually gained national prominence among blacks, it was not popular with everyone. Bundles of the papers, shipped south on the Illinois Central Railroad toward New Orleans, were often confiscated and burned. It was said that in some places, merely possessing a copy of the *Defender* could get a black man arrested....

In June [1935], John Sengstacke [publisher of the *Chicago Defender*] sent Martin, then only twenty-three, to Detroit as editor and publisher of the *Michigan Chronicle*. They agreed that he would earn twenty dollars a week for the first six months, after which he would be expected to make the paper pay his salary and expenses. He had landed the job in part because he had attended [the University of Michigan] at Ann Arbor, only twenty-eight miles from Detroit, and Sengstacke assumed he knew more about the city and state than anyone else on the Chicago paper's staff. [Lucius] Harper [executive editor of the *Defender*] warned that he had to produce a paper that would sell, that he was

not in the business of giving papers away. The veteran editor added that as long as people bought the paper, Martin should not be alarmed by criticism.

Harper gave Martin the keys to the *Chronicle's* one-room office and its roll-top desk. "If you want some help, kid, drop me a line," he said, adding, "From now on it's your baby." He presented Martin with all the *Chronicle's* cash—seventeen dollars and some change in a cloth bag....



The New Deal notwithstanding, during the middle and later thirties, millions remained unemployed, and unemployment actually began to rise again. For black people, traditionally last hired and first fired, conditions became extreme.

In the *Chronicle* and other venues during this period, Martin paid considerable attention to the rise of industrial unions. He saw the labor movement as a catalyst for broad social change, recognizing that unions were already bringing white workers better job security, higher wages, shorter hours, special overtime rates, a rational seniority system, and the machinery for handling work grievances.

A momentous change in the labor movement had occurred the year before the *Chronicle* was launched, when United Mine Workers (UMW) president John L. Lewis and other labor leaders established the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) for workers in the auto, steel, rubber, glass, textile, packinghouse, and other mass production industries. The CIO organized workers by plant instead of by crafts and skills as the more traditional American Federation of Labor (AFL) had done. Most important, the CIO was committed to worker solidarity regardless of race. This was a daring move at the time, in marked contrast to the AFL's history of excluding blacks or restricting them to Jim Crow units.

Because of the new union's promise of equal treatment for blacks and whites, Martin became one of labor's most influential supporters within Detroit's black community. Three black men would become crucial in linking the fortunes of the black community with those of organized labor: Martin, Horace White (a Congregationalist minister), and [State] Senator [Charles] Diggs. In allying themselves with the fledgling United Auto Workers (UAW), they found a critical supporter for the rights of black citizens in the coming decades.

Largely because of the AFL's past discriminatory practices, both rank-and-file black workers and leaders of black advancement organizations were skeptical of unions. In addition, many blacks were grateful to their employers and remained loyal to them, even though they were not treated as well as whites. This was especially true at Ford Motor

From the forthcoming biography, *Walking with Presidents: Louis Martin and the Rise of Black Political Power*, by Alex Poinsett (Madison Books, June 1997). To order, call 800-462-6420.

Louis Martin

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Company, Detroit's largest employer of black workers. Because the income of Ford's black workers had such a large impact on the prosperity of the larger black community, many in the black middle class believed that what was best for Ford was best for them....

Despite Martin's editorials, most of Detroit's black leadership continued to back the company against the union.... In 1939, Louis Martin played an important role in cementing the relationship between black workers and the UAW-CIO. As a result of a labor dispute, in November Chrysler locked out all 24,000 workers from its Dodge Main plant, and the UAW-CIO called a protest strike at all Chrysler plants. Although Chrysler did not treat its black workers nearly as well as Ford did, it was still the second largest employer of blacks in the area, many of whom had little sympathy for white co-workers who could advance to higher-level jobs that they were locked out of. Aided by a number of other organizations, including the breakaway UAW-AFL, Chrysler called a back-to-work meeting for black employees at its Detroit plant. Since these workers were only a tiny fraction of the plant's total workers and were limited to lower-level jobs, the plant could not have resumed production even if every black worker had returned. The striking UAW-CIO concluded that what the company wanted was to incite interracial violence so that the National Guard would be sent in, thereby breaking the strike.

On November 24, about sixty black workers attempted to force their way through the picket lines. In the ensuing violence, two policemen and six blacks were injured. The UAW called on the trio of young black leaders—Martin, Diggs, and Horace White—for help. Alarmed by the near inevitability of rioting, White and Martin sent telegrams to two dozen local black leaders urging them to attend a meeting at the Lucy Thurman YWCA the next day. Those who arrived at the meeting included not only union supporters but also company loyalists and others for whom this would be their first official encounter with representatives of the UAW-CIO.... United by the risk of imminent violence, the group agreed on a statement condemning the company's use of blacks as strikebreakers. Martin's name was among the four signed on leaflets distributed the next morning to black churches all over the city, pleading with workers not to try to break the strike.

No doubt hundreds were deterred by the efforts that came out of that meeting, but still, the next morning several hundred black workers assembled to march through the picket line of more than 6,000 mostly white strikers. Leaders from the UAW locals, a number of them black, walked through the crowd telling them that it was a setup. Although the black strikebreakers were jeered as they passed through the line, there was no violence. The next morning the strikebreakers were again allowed passage. Foiled in its efforts to spark a riot, Chrysler capitulated, and the federal labor conciliator managed to reach an agreement ending the strike. The UAW was

profoundly grateful to the young black leaders who had helped to avert a catastrophe. For special praise, UAW leaders singled out Louis Martin and the other signers of the leaflet.



The most explosive issue in Detroit during the war years was housing. As the nation geared up to produce war machinery, both blacks and whites flooded into Detroit, looking for jobs in the emergency industries. The available housing was vastly outsized by the expanding population, and large numbers of people had to make do sleeping in railroad cars and open fields. Ongoing tensions between newly arrived blacks and whites from the Deep South and whites from the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky eventually triggered disturbances. The presence of entrenched ethnic European neighborhoods only intensified the volatility of the mixture....

The housing crisis and job inequities led the organ of the Motor City's Association of Catholic Trade Unionists to warn city officials in 1942: "The ugly truth is that there is a growing, subterranean race war going on in the city of Detroit which can have no other ultimate result than an explosion of violence unless something is done to stop it." In August of the same year, an article written by Martin and fellow journalist Earl Brown exposed racial tensions in Detroit to a huge national audience through the pages of *Life* magazine. "Detroit is Dynamite," which appeared anonymously, predicted that Detroit was bound for terrible racial violence.

The prediction came true in 1943. During the spring, three black workers at the Packard Motor Car Company plant in the city were upgraded to the position of metal polisher. At the time, virtually all the company's black workers were trapped in the lowest pay categories, many of them as foundry workers. Outraged by the promotion, in June a group of white workers at Packard engineered a week-long strike. As a consequence, Martin recalled, "Tensions spilled over or combined with other waves of unrest arising from the housing and other issues to make the city a tinderbox."

A few days after the Packard hate strike, the tinderbox exploded.... Violence was erupting in and near the black ghetto that ran alongside the business district, just blocks from the *Chronicle*. Martin saw white mobs attacking cars along Woodward Avenue, overturning one of them. In front of his own office he saw the white driver of a milk truck try to pull away from a mob of black youths....

Twenty-four hours later, the toll was staggering. Federal troops had brought calm, but the worst riot in the city's history had left thirty-four people dead, at least seventeen of them blacks killed by police. Even at the height of the rioting, there were no racial incidents anywhere outside the ghettos. Yet Martin had been in a position to witness the chaos firsthand, and he later remarked that "perhaps no single experience in my life made a greater impact on my outlook and philosophy than observing the rioters."

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Family, Education, and Jobs

American Citizens, Corporations, and the Government Must Work Together to Address Poor Education, Poverty, and Discrimination

by Colin L. Powell

The following are excerpts from a speech by retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, given at the Joint Center's Annual Dinner on March 11, 1997.

With the end of the Cold War, the American people no longer have to worry about nuclear Armageddon. For many, this has become a time to look to home and turn our attention to the problems of crime and drugs and an education system that is not doing well. This is the time to look at the violence that is contaminating our society and destroying our children. This is the time to do something about the racial disharmony that seems to be pulling us apart and taking us away from that vision that Dr. Martin Luther King gave us. This is the time to act on the problem of incivility in our public discourse where we seem to be screaming and shouting at one another. This is the time to do something about an economy that isn't doing so well for those of our fellow citizens who are most disadvantaged.

This inward reflection is taking place at a time when the information and technology revolutions are sweeping the world. The world that we look ahead to is a world that will be structured by the power of the cellular telephone, the Internet and the Intranet, the fax machine, and the satellite dishes that you can put in any village on the face of the earth and bring the rest of the world to that village. These are just some of the things that are reshaping a world that will be fundamentally different from the one we have known.

To Provide for the Common Good

In the political arena, we are increasingly seeing the American people express to their political leaders in Washington, "We want to see less government in our lives, but not 'no government' in our lives. We want to have lower taxes, but we understand the need to provide for the common good, and we are willing to pay our taxes to take care of those of our fellow citizens who are in need because we are compassionate people, we are caring people, we are a loving people." When someone is hurting, someone is in need, then it is the responsibility of the family, the responsibility of our charitable activities, and the responsibility of the government to do something about that need in the most efficient way possible.

The American people are saying, "We want to see partisanship because that's what democracy is all about, but not partisanship to the extent that all civility breaks down and our political leaders spend more of their time screaming at each other than trying to deal with the

problems that we as Americans see in our daily lives." Something else we have seen in our national life that is very troubling is that somehow we have lost our moral bearings, that we have lost the sense of shame that used to guide us as a society and as a nation as well as the deep concern that racial disharmony has the potential of ripping us apart unless we do something about it.

The nation is doing well right now, by all measures. The stock market is booming, inflation is down, and the unemployment rate is low. I have been to places in America where the unemployment rate is negative . . . they're trying to import workers. We rejoice that the majority of African Americans are doing well. But the challenge that we have as a nation is that too many Americans, and especially too many African Americans, are finding it more difficult to cope. What is worse is that they are beginning to lose hope. Despair is creeping into the lives of too many Americans and from that despair comes a disbelief in the American dream. It eats away at us, destroys our families, and produces children who are easy prey to drugs, to crime, to violence—children who see no need to get an education, who live for today only.

The Challenge of Saving Our Children

You see a pathological breakdown in the values that have built this nation for so many years. There are too many young people in our society right now who are destined to go in 17 years from being wonderful, bright-eyed toddlers to inmates in the jails that are being constructed for them now.

That has to stop. That has to change. Of all the challenges we face in this great nation, I submit to you that there is nothing that requires our attention more than saving our children—black and white. That is why for the next phase of my life I have committed myself to trying to make a difference in the lives of young people, through the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, and in other ways—leveraging the talent, wealth, wisdom, leadership, and management experience that exists in American society to direct it toward the problems of America's youth.

At that summit, and the program that will grow out of it, we will be asking all Americans to do more—corporate America, nonprofit America, religious America, communities, and individuals—and to try to apply their assets, their resources, toward five goals. The first is in the area of mentoring. Too many of our young people do not have a responsible and caring adult in their lives. So we will try to

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Powell Speech

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mobilize more and more of those organizations and individuals who are willing to serve as mentors for children. The second goal is to create more 'safe places' for our children to go to after school when they are most exposed to violence and susceptible to getting in trouble. Third, we will commit ourselves to a healthy start for all young people. A fourth area is education—finding more and more opportunities for corporate America, government, and other sectors to supplement the education that youngsters get in schools with training programs and internships. The fifth area is to find ways for youngsters to give back so that in their teenage years they learn the importance of serving the nation.

A Simple Value System

Why is this important to me? Because of what I received from my family, from my parents, and from my city in the way of an education that put me on the road to success. What I received from my parents turned out to be a value system that was very simple and understandable. It was a value system that began with a base layer that said, "There is a difference between right and wrong. We always expect you to do that which is right and stay away from that which is wrong. Otherwise you will hurt yourself, you will shame yourself." And then there was the killer reason that my mother would always give me: "You will shame the family." I don't know of any lesson I ever received that was more valued than a belief in right and wrong and that you don't do that which shames the family.

The next layer in this value system is, "You are not here alone." There is a God, there is a Spirit, there is Something that fuels you, there is Something to whom you are accountable—Someone who will give you guidance—a Spirit that will intercede in your life. After that was the belief in hard work and education. My parents came to this country with nothing but a dream, a hope, and a belief, and they took advantage of the opportunity to work and raise a family.

The next layer of the value system was, "Believe in yourself." I was a black kid born in Harlem, raised in the South Bronx, where we didn't have a lot of money. I grew up in a country where, at that time, you are a second-class citizen if you are black, where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution do not really apply to you. There were places you couldn't go, opportunities that were not available to you. Nevertheless, you believe in yourself! Have self-respect, self-esteem . . . build on these values because the capstone value—the one on top—is a belief in America. Believe in the powerful redemption that resides in this country that allows us to constantly move forward and break down obstacles.

But too few youngsters share that value system today. How do I answer the boy who asks, "But General, if I didn't have parents like yours, can I get anywhere in life?" These have become foreign concepts in our communities, but we have got to get back to those values, and govern-

ment can not do it. We have got to do it! We have got to remember that it was *our* music, *our* art, *our* literature, and *our* poetry that took us through the dark period. So we have to raise our children, and where parental structure is lacking, we must make it up. So the motto is very simple: "Family, education, and jobs."

Being Good Stewards

It is not a motto that has always worked for black Americans because too often when we come from the best families and have all the values of the family, we get the best education and may be qualified for the best jobs there are, we still don't get them—for the simple reason that our faces are black. People ask, "Powell, why do you support affirmative action so strongly? Don't you know about the Declaration of Independence?" Yes, and I know it did not apply to us. During Reconstruction, we could have soared ahead, but they "Proposition 209'd" us in Reconstruction. We lost it all.

But we struggled and kept on coming. Now, here we are in 1997, when many more black Americans are doing well. But many others still have a long way to go. Those of us who are doing well have got to reach down and reach back and mobilize every institution in this country to help us, because the future of this nation is at stake. We must defend such programs as affirmative action, as I will continue to do. I became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because I was a good soldier, I was qualified, I worked hard for it, but I also became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because there were equal opportunity and affirmative action programs in the Army that made the way possible for me.

So the work before us is clear. We have to save our children. Each of us that is doing well has to reach down and reach back. And we have to teach our children a sense of shame, and we have to teach our children to believe in themselves. But the one thing we must never lose and which we must pass on to the children—that which was given to us by our forebears—is a belief in this marvelous country that we live in, this marvelous place that God has blessed, given to us, told us to be good stewards of, and to be good stewards of each other. And remember to always be proud to call it America! ■

Health Care Forums Coming This Fall

The Joint Center will be holding a series of healthcare roundtables this fall in conjunction with The Commonwealth Fund and the Kaiser Family Foundation. These workshops will address issues such as managed care, the quality of care available to African Americans, and discrimination in the provision of care.

The policy implications of these health issues present an unprecedented number of challenges and opportunities for black leaders at all levels of government.

Key findings will be published in *FOCUS* and on the Joint Center's web site.

Giving Kids a Healthy Start

After Sweeping Health Care Legislation Failed to Pass Congress, a Piecemeal Effort to Extend Care to Children May Fare Better

by Marland E. Buckner

Although efforts at comprehensive health care reform were torpedoed in 1993, recent attempts at modest reforms are meeting with some success. After passing legislation last year guaranteeing health insurance portability, congressional support for extending health care benefits to uninsured children is growing. In 1994, 10.5 million children were uninsured, according to the Government Accounting Office (GAO). Moreover, children are also the fastest growing group of uninsured Americans as many employers reduce or eliminate coverage for employees' dependents. Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) cited recent GAO data indicating that between 1989 and 1995, 5 million children lost health insurance coverage. On the floor of the Senate, Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) spoke for many when she denounced this as "a disgrace for a country as bountiful as ours."

Congress is currently considering several proposals to extend health care benefits to children. The most widely publicized measure is S.525, the Child Health Insurance and Lower Deficit Act, advanced by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-Ut.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). A second bill, S.526, sponsored by the two men, proposes an increase in the excise tax on cigarettes to offset the cost of S.525.

The Hatch-Kennedy bill proposes a five-year, \$30 billion block grant program for states to provide direct financial assistance to families to purchase health coverage for their children. Over the five-year period, \$20 billion would be dedicated to expanding health coverage and \$10 billion to reducing the deficit. The proposal also allows states to provide prenatal and postnatal care to pregnant women. The Hatch-Kennedy plan would have states contract with private insurers to provide services equivalent to those now provided through Medicaid. Many of the beneficiaries would be the children of the working poor. States would determine eligibility levels and share administrative costs with the federal government.

Senate minority leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and 14 Democratic cosponsors have introduced S.13, the "Children's Health Coverage Act," which would provide health care coverage to uninsured children and pregnant women. The act offers tax credits to families with incomes of 200 to 300 percent of the poverty line—currently \$16,000 for a family of four—in order to purchase health insurance for uninsured children. The subsidy would range from 10 to 90 percent of the cost of the insurance premium, depending on family income. The act prohibits insurers from excluding children on the basis of pre-

existing conditions and from arbitrarily dropping coverage for those who become sick. The bill also mandates federal government grants to states to enroll uninsured poor pregnant women in prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal care programs. States would oversee most aspects of this legislation, including certifying insurers and insurance plans, determining eligibility, collecting premiums from the families of eligible recipients, and distributing these funds to the insurers.

The central difference between these plans is also the main source of debate. While the Daschle plan calls for tax credits, the Hatch-Kennedy plan pays for itself by imposing a 43-cent surcharge on every pack of cigarettes.

Hatch and Kennedy respond to those who oppose their bill on the basis that it's a tax raising measure by arguing that it amounts to a "user fee" since smoking costs the nation an estimated \$50 billion in direct healthcare costs. They cite the American Lung Association's estimate that 419,000 Americans each year die from smoking-related diseases. One in four smokers dies of heart disease, cancer, or emphysema related to smoking habits, while children of smokers are twice as likely to get asthma as children of non-smokers.

Hatch and Kennedy further contend that the fee increase will not only fund their five-year program, but will also discourage kids from smoking. Each day, 3,000 American children smoke their first cigarette; of those who start, over half become addicted. With current estimates of teen smokers topping 3 million, Hatch and Kennedy hope that by raising the price of cigarettes, this "user fee" will curb nicotine addiction among young people, thereby lowering the long term health care costs to the nation.

Although polls indicate that 87 percent of the public supports raising taxes on tobacco to expand health services for children, many legislators who have benefitted politically from tobacco industry support have declined to support the proposed tax increase. Still others fear the Hatch-Kennedy proposals will create another entitlement the nation cannot afford. By employing the state-run, block grant approach, adding a substantial deficit reduction component, and limiting the program to five years, Hatch and Kennedy have sought to silence critics who claim theirs is another "big government program."

But even with the assistance of Republican cosponsors, Hatch and Kennedy face major obstacles. Despite some bipartisan support for providing health insurance to the nation's children, partisan politics and "taxophobia" on the Hill suggest their bill won't pass without a fight. ■

Louis Martin

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R.J. Thomas [of the UAW] and others asked for a grand jury to investigate charges of police brutality, but Mayor [Edward] Jeffries, Wayne County prosecutor William Dowling, and Detroit police commissioner John Witherspoon rejected the idea. Instead they issued their own report, in which Dowling named Martin as one of the black "agitators" responsible for instigating the violence through his editorials in the *Chronicle* and blamed the NAACP as well for raising black demands for change. A furious [NAACP executive secretary] Walter White responded, "When did it become a crime to ask that all Americans be treated fairly in a democracy?"

In the governor's report, to which Dowling again was a key contributor, the Detroit police were again vindicated and the chief blame laid on the black community. (It was admitted, however, that the black rioters interviewed had never read the *Michigan Chronicle*.) Walter White decided that the NAACP should undertake its own investigation, to be headed by the organization's chief counsel, a Howard University Law School graduate named Thurgood Marshall. Marshall's report contradicted Dowling's. It found that the Detroit police had responded to reports of looting by shooting blacks in stores, that "on several occasions, persons running were shot in the back" by police, that the police did not attempt to disperse armed white mobs on Woodward Avenue, and that indeed a number of officers were involved in attacking or encouraging attacks on blacks....

Martin had responded swiftly and angrily to Dowling's charge that somehow he had helped foment the violence. He later said, "I was deeply hurt to think that I could be portrayed as anything but a constructive citizen and an editor always fighting to right the wrongs of society." In a *Chronicle* editorial a few weeks after the riot, he pointed to the rash of anti-black attacks that had been launched well before the conflagration:

We want to know who stirred up the hate strikes against Negroes in the Hudson Naval Arsenal, Dodge Truck, Timken-Detroit Axle, Vickers, Inc., U.S. Rubber, and where are the guys who led over 20,000 white workers at the Packard Motor Car Company to stop war production for a week because three Negroes were upgraded?

Martin denounced Dowling and most of Detroit's public officials for failing to address the problems of black citizens. He charged that the riot resulted from their official anti-black and do-nothing policies....

Martin got his revenge a few months later when Dowling ran for reelection to his post as county prosecutor. He not only actively editorialized against Dowling's reelection but also refused to carry campaign ads that Dowling sought to have printed in the *Chronicle*. Dowling publicly complained that the *Chronicle* was unfair and threatened to sue. "I did not consider myself as brave," Martin recalled, "but I got many phone calls from readers who asked me was I not afraid to fight the county prosecutor so vehemently. Somehow it never occurred to me that it took courage to buck the prosecutor.... The sweetest election result in my life came with Dowling's defeat." ...

Within its first five years, Martin had molded the *Michigan Chronicle* into a potent force for economic, social, and political justice for Detroit's black community. Through his editorials, articles, and civic activities, Martin was a rational, ardent, and courageous spokesperson for black candidates, black suffrage, the newly emerging industrial unions, and the New Deal and the Democratic Party. At the same time, he challenged discrimination and injustice in whatever guise it appeared.... His efforts, like those of other black leaders in the North during the 1930s and 1940s to secure civil rights, foreshadowed the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. ■

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APRIL 1997

TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

by Marland E. Buckner, Jr.
and David C. Ruffin

Herman Confirmed to Head Labor

After a three-month confirmation battle, on April 31 the Senate confirmed **ALEXIS HERMAN** to be Secretary of Labor by a vote of 85 to 13. Herman now becomes the only black woman currently serving in the Clinton cabinet.

Despite the protracted struggle to bring Herman's nomination to a vote on the Senate floor, there was never any doubt about the outcome. In fact, Herman's nomination was not the issue. Republicans, led by **DON NICKLES** of Oklahoma, held up the nomination to pressure the President into recanting on his pledge to issue an executive order designed to encourage the use of union labor on federal construction contracts.

Although the executive order would not have been binding on federal agencies, Republicans charged that nonunion companies would be excluded from competition for federal contracts, and they dubbed the move a political payback for labor's support of Clinton in the '96 election. In response, Democrats threatened to bring the business of the Senate to a standstill until the

Herman nomination was considered. Both sides claimed victory when the President said he would not issue the directive as an executive order but as a presidential memorandum.

Herman, who follows **ROBERT REICH** as Labor Secretary, brings to the position considerable experience with labor issues, including those related to minorities and women. She headed the department's Women's Bureau in the Carter administration, and during the 1980s she was national director of the Atlanta-based Minority Women Employment Program and founded and operated her own company to advise public and private organizations on job creation, training strategies, and other workplace issues. From 1988 to 1992 she was chief of staff and deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee. In his first term, Clinton appointed her White House director of public liaison and assistant to the President.

In this last post, Herman headed up the effort to promote the President's programs and policies. Building public support for the administration's agenda also meant that her office had to respond to public and congressional criticism of Clinton's policies. Traditionally, the office of public liaison has concentrated on maintaining a good relationship with the President's core constituencies, and for Democratic presidents this has meant minorities, women, labor, and other affiliated groups. Under Herman, this approach

was changed: constituencies were defined more broadly, and the focus shifted from audiences to policy issues.

As Herman takes the helm at Labor, she will have a full agenda including legislation to expand the Family Leave Act, compensation for workers' overtime, as well as proposals involving employee pensions, and occupational safety and health.

Campaign Finance Reform and the Cost of Access

Since the '96 elections, the public has been treated to a stream of revelations about questionable practices employed by both political parties to circumvent campaign finance law. Out of the confusion has emerged a basic truth: political campaigns cost money and winning them costs a great deal of money. Politicians routinely complain that they spend too much time fundraising and too little governing. In addition to encroaching on legislative time, prohibitively expensive campaigns have another stifling effect: they make running for office very difficult for those without independent means or access to donors with deep pockets. Particularly affected are candidates who seek to represent minorities and the poor, constituencies rarely granted much support by corporations and monied interests.

The last election cycle was the most expensive in U.S. history. The Federal Election Commission re-

ported that campaign expenditures totaled nearly \$2.3 billion. This figure does not include “soft money” contributions to national party committees by Political Action Committees (PACs), contributions not subject to federal limits. Prior to the ‘96 election cycle, a series of court decisions loosened regulations governing how soft donations could be spent. The result was that the major parties raised over a quarter of a billion dollars in soft money, most of which was spent on costly television advertising.

Critics of the current system contend that many potential candidates are priced out of races because big-spending, PAC-supported candidates drive up the cost of candidacy. Some argue that soft money contributions should be banned entirely and that congressional candidates should be limited to spending only funds raised within their own districts. However, while this might reduce the influence of forces outside their districts, candidates seeking to represent less well endowed constituencies would then face even greater barriers in seeking elective office.

Within the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), opinion on this issue is divided. Figures from the Federal Election Commission indicate that PAC money is critical to the campaign war chests of many CBC

members. During the 1995–96 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, CBC campaign spending totaled nearly \$13 million and the average CBC member’s campaign spent approximately \$340,000. More than half of the CBC spending total came from PAC contributions (\$6.8 million).

In addition to driving up the cost of candidacy, PAC money also strengthens the power of incumbency. PACs have a vested interest in seeing that members who support their positions on issues, regardless of party affiliations, rise in seniority and gain power in committees where the PACs’ concerns are addressed. For African Americans this has led to mixed results. On the one hand, the power of incumbency, supported by PAC money, has proven invaluable to some CBC members facing tough re-election campaigns, particularly those whose majority-black districts had been redrawn. On the other hand, potential black candidates have been hurt because the power of incumbency is disproportionately held by white legislators and controlled by the party machinery.

Clearly, there is no “quick fix” to the problems of access created by the current campaign finance system. Although media attention remains focused on the matter and congressional investigations are already

underway, dramatic reforms are not likely in the near future.

Budget Untouchables

As the details of finalizing the \$1.6 trillion federal budget for fiscal year 1998 get worked out in House and Senate committees on Capitol Hill, most of the haggling will be over relatively small spending cuts, primarily for discretionary programs. However, for the six major areas that comprise 80 percent of the budget—national defense, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, net interest on the debt, and federal employment retirement and disability—spending will be practically unchanged.

Since spending for these six components of the budget totals nearly \$1.3 trillion (see table below), it leaves a pool of just \$300 billion to be divided among a myriad of discretionary programs, many of which low-income Americans depend heavily upon. These include programs that provide supplemental nutrition, child immunizations, housing support, and community development, as well as education and training programs that are not priorities of the President. These programs must compete for funding with communications satellite launches, national park maintenance, highway construction, and water treatment plants. ■

Outlay for the top six federal spending areas, 1988–98

In billions of dollars

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 estimate	1998 estimate
Net interest on the debt	151.8	169.3	184.2	194.5	199.4	198.8	203.0	232.2	240.8	248.0	252.0
National defense	290.9	304.0	300.1	319.7	302.6	292.4	282.3	273.6	266.0	268.0	260.1
Social security	216.8	230.4	246.5	268.8	285.2	302.0	316.9	333.3	347.1	364.2	380.9
Medicare	76.9	82.7	95.8	102.0	116.2	127.9	141.8	156.9	171.3	191.6	204.3
Medicaid	30.5	34.6	41.1	52.5	67.8	75.8	82.0	89.1	92.0	98.5	105.9
Federal employee retirement and disability	46.8	49.1	51.9	56.0	57.5	60.0	62.4	65.7	68.0	71.1	73.8

Source: Congressional Budget Office and Office of Management and Budget

ECONOMIC REPORT

by Margaret Simms and Malinda Lindquist

Whose Robust Economy?

By most accounts, the U.S. economy is strong, jobs are being created at a record pace, and employment opportunities are expanding. Since August 1996, the national unemployment rate (which measures the percentage of jobless people actively searching for work) has remained below 5.4 percent. While one in twelve black adults in the labor force is currently without work, the economic status of many African Americans did improve in the past year.

Nevertheless, the benefits have not been distributed evenly. Some regions have made greater gains than others. The Midwest, following a long period of stagnation, is experiencing an economic boom, and blacks have greatly shared in this recovery. Although much of the Midwestern boom is manufacturing based, it has not revived old-style manufacturing jobs. Instead, it has fostered a new crop of more highly skilled positions for which many unemployed blacks may not be qualified. For blacks to continue to make progress, their acquisition of skills will need to move in line with the demands of the labor market.

The National Picture

As of April 1997, the nation's overall unemployment rate was 4.9 percent. But this low figure hides a huge disparity: while only 3.6 percent of whites were unemployed, the rate for blacks was 8.4 percent. Among 16 to 19 year olds, the gap was even wider: 13.1 percent for whites and 31.2 percent for blacks.

The past year has brought some good news for black workers. Unemployment rates declined among black men (dropping 1.2 percentage points) and black youths (by 1.7 percentage points). Although the percentage of black women looking for work was unchanged, the overall trend has been a decline in black unemployment, and if the economy continues growing black employment should rise even further.

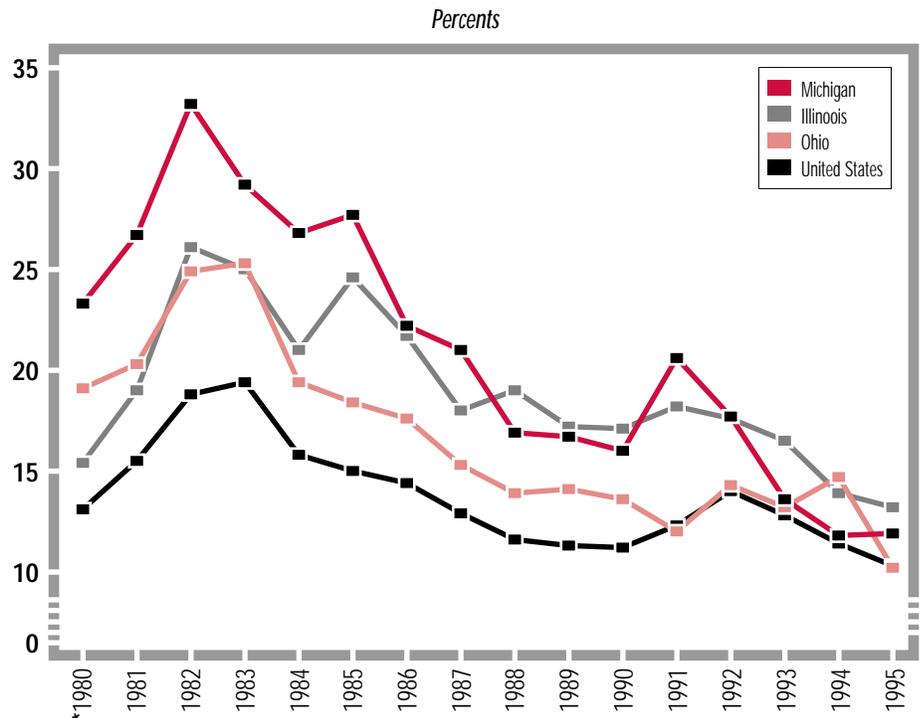
A Regional Reality

While the average unemployment rate for 1996 was 5.4 percent for the nation overall, in the Midwest it was only 4.5 percent, considerably lower than in the South (5.2 percent), the Northeast (5.6 percent), and the West (6.5 percent). This is surprising since the demise or exodus of many large industrial manufacturers and the subsequent displacement of thousands of workers during the 1970s in the Midwest led to its being named the "rust belt."

As of 1995 (the most recent year for which racial data by region are available), the black unemployment rate in the Midwest was 11.5 percent. Although blacks, even in this region, continued to suffer from unemployment rates twice those of whites, their employment situation has improved. In the three Midwestern states with the largest black populations—Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio—economic opportunities for blacks have expanded dramatically.

Each of these states has experienced a substantial drop in black unemployment since the mid-eighties (see graph below). In Ohio, black unemployment in 1995 actually fell below the national average for blacks. These improvements have been shared almost equally by black men and women. Unemployment rates fell 12.0 percentage points for black men and 10.4 percentage points for black women in Illinois. In Michigan, their unemployment rates were more than halved.

Black unemployment rates: U.S. and selected states, 1980–95



* Black and "other"

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment (1980–1995)*

Between 1985 and 1995, the percentage of the overall black population that held jobs increased. In Illinois, the employment-to-population ratio rose 4.8 percentage points for black men and 6.8 percentage points for black women. These increases were even stronger in Michigan: during the same ten-year period, the percentage of the black male population that was employed rose from 46.9 percent to 55.8 percent, and for the black female population it rose from 37.4 percent to 47.7 percent. If these regional trends persist, the economic outlook for Midwestern blacks appears to be on the upswing. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Midwestern economy continues to recover due to an expansion in exports. In 1996, Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio topped the list of Midwestern exporters to Mexico, with exports worth nearly \$3.2 billion, almost \$1.3 billion, and just over \$757 million, respectively. Since the improvement of the peso, Mexico has been importing large quantities of heavy construction equipment, automobiles, and agriculture, products frequently produced in the Midwest.

The *Washington Post* reports that this high demand has led to a shortage of workers in the Midwest's regional labor market and that "businesses announce reluctantly that they must expand in Mexico and China" because they cannot meet their labor force needs in the United States. However, even in Milwaukee, where some employers are recruiting workers from inner city churches, the black unemployment rate was 10.6 percent, nearly five times the white rate, as last reported in 1995.

One reason blacks have been unable to fully reap the benefits of the booming Midwestern economy is that U.S. manufacturing jobs today

are different from those of past generations. An eleventh grade education (typical for factory workers in the past) is no longer the ticket to a steady, high-wage job. Current manufacturing jobs require higher skill levels and are increasingly being filled by well-trained individuals. Policymakers should be conscious of these new requirements as they revamp their training efforts and create welfare-to-work initiatives. The persistent gap between black and white unemployment rates cannot be closed without better job training.

Measuring the Status of Blacks in the 21st Century

As plans for the 2000 Census move into high gear, current deliberations on several census issues will have important implications for how accurately we assess the status of African Americans, how well they are represented in government, and how effectively they gain access to government programs. Census counts are used to apportion seats in Congress, draw districts in state legislatures, and allocate government funds for education, health services, housing, and programs for low-income families.

One major census issue of concern to black Americans is the possible addition of a "Multiracial" category to the census questionnaire. Over the past few decades, the demographic picture of this country has changed appreciably. In an attempt to capture the diverse racial and ethnic composition of the population more accurately, the Census Bureau conducted two studies, the National Content Survey (NCS) and the Race and Ethnic Targeted Test in 1996.

Many critics were concerned that adding a multiracial category might have the effect of lowering the black population counts, since many blacks

might choose alternative ways of identifying themselves. However, the results of the NCS show that only one percent of the sample population considered themselves "Multiracial," and many who chose this category had previously reported their race as "Other" or "Asian or Pacific Islander."

Results of the Race and Ethnic Targeted Test are currently being evaluated and are scheduled for release in May. The Interagency Committee will release its recommendation on the issue of racial data collection to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in June. For the public comment period, look in the *Federal Register* in July or August (Internet address is <http://www.nara.gov/nara/fedreg/fedreg.html>). OMB will make its final decisions on the 2000 Census' multiracial category in October.

Meanwhile, use of reliable statistical sampling for ensuring that minority populations are not undercounted during the next census continues to be a contentious issue (see the June/July 1996 edition of *FOCUS*.) In April, the Senate drafted a bill that would have prohibited the Census Bureau from spending any money in its current budget to "plan or otherwise prepare for the use of sampling" in the 2000 census.

When the senators realized that this decision might keep the Census Bureau from using its traditional long form that is sent to one-sixth of all households (a form of sampling), they decided to revise the bill's language. Currently, the Census Bureau can proceed in its development of sampling methods as long as it makes no "irreversible" decisions. However, the sampling battle is not over, and *FOCUS* will provide new information as it unfolds. ■

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