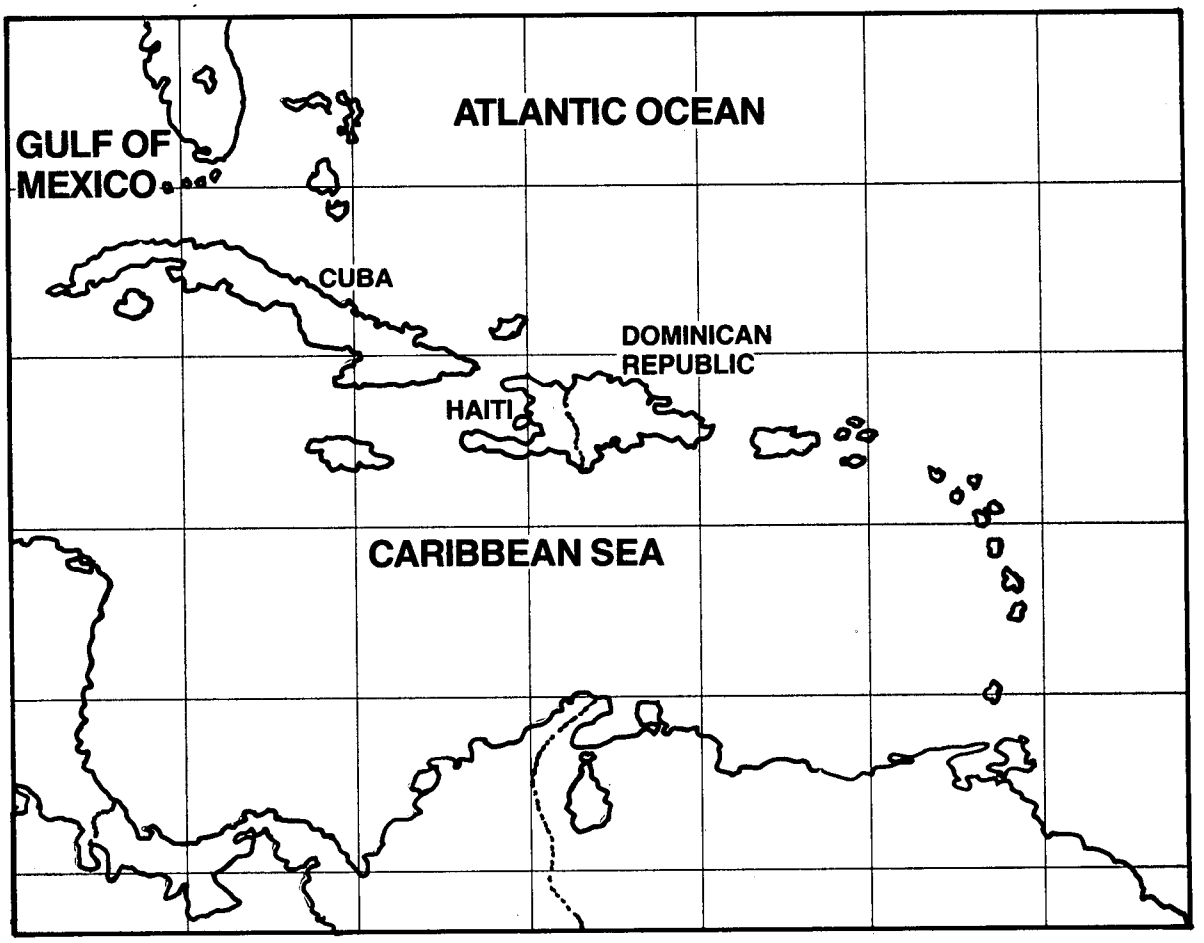
Volume 10, No. 1 January, 1982

FOCUS



U.S. POLICY IN THE CARIBBEAN

Despite modest political and economic gains by a few nations, the Caribbean as a whole remains a region of instability. Political ferment and faltering economies persist as both cause and effect of the inability of most Caribbean nations to achieve economic and social strength.

Historical ties, extensive trade, and the mere fact of proximity make the problems of the Caribbean immensely important to the United States. That conditions in the Caribbean can dramatically affect this country has been vividly impressed upon us in recent years, most notably by developments in Cuba since 1961 and, more recently, by waves of refugees reaching our shores.

Joint Center for Political Studies

Perspective

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the most significant civil rights movement in the history of this nation, dedicated his life to attaining equality and justice for millions of previously disenfranchised black Americans. Under his leadership, black and white Americans joined together to reaffirm America's commitment to the ideals of justice, human dignity, and freedom for all mankind. We believe there is no better way to celebrate Dr. King's birthday this year than to restate the case for making it a national holiday.

Legislation to make January 15, the birthday of Dr. King, a national public holiday has been before the U.S. Congress for thirteen years. Representative John Conyers (D-MI) of the Congressional Black Caucus introduced the first bill to recognize Dr. King's birthday in 1968. When Congressman Conyers reintroduced the bill in 1981, it was defeated in the House by only five votes. Other proposals to recognize Dr. King's birthday include designating the third Monday in January as the holiday instead of the actual birthday and designating the third Sunday in January as the holiday. The latter proposal passed in the House of Representatives. Celebrating the birthday on the weekend, however, does not carry the full status of a national public holiday. Two bills are currently awaiting consideration by Congress—H.R. 800, reintroduced by Congressman Conyers, and S. 93, introduced by Senator Charles McC. Mathias (R-MD). Both bills establish January 15 as a national public holiday in honor of Dr. King.

The strongest argument against a new national public holiday is the expense. The additional costs of the holiday would be paying for work that would have to be performed on the holiday and paying overtime for work thrown off schedule by the holiday. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management has indicated that the cost to the federal government of overtime or holiday rates for a one-day holiday is approximately $24 million. This figure represents only 12.7 percent of the total amount of money expended daily by the federal government to cover payroll expenses. Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office has stated that costs to the federal government may be offset, at least in part, by decreased utility and other service costs. Costs to state and local governments may be offset by tax revenues from increased consumer and leisure-time spending.

At present, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Wisconsin, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia recognize January 15 as a holiday. Four other states have designated another date to honor Dr. King's contribution to this nation: New York, Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. The Virginia legislature recently passed a bill to recognize Dr. King's birthday on January 15, but Republican Governor John Dalton vetoed the bill. With the election of Chuck Robb, a Democrat who was strongly supported by black Virginians, this bill is likely to be enacted if passed again by the legislature.

H.R. 800 is pending action before the Subcommittee on Census and Population in the House of Representatives. Congressman Robert Garcia (D-NY) is chairman of the subcommittee. S. 93 is awaiting consideration by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC) is chairman of this committee. The public hearing process is the first step in the consideration of a bill by the Congress, and letters urging immediate attention to this matter should be addressed to each member of Congress.

Eddie N. Williams
President

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Measuring Poverty: Problems Ahead

by William P. O'Hare

(Dr. O'Hare, a social demographer, is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.)

"The number of people remaining in poverty is very small and it grows smaller everyday."—Martin Anderson, currently domestic advisor to President Reagan, 1978.

"There were 29.3 million persons classified as poor in 1980, an increase of 3.2 million over 1979." —U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981.

These two contradictory views indicate how important the proper measurement of poverty is for shaping public policy. The first statement implies that there is little need for public programs to assist the poor and that the recent federal cuts in social programs are of little consequence. But if the Census Bureau is correct, not only is there a large number of people living in poverty, but the number is growing.

The official government definition of poverty consists of income thresholds, which vary by characteristics such as family size and ages of family members. Guidelines issued by the Office of Management and Budget indicate that the poverty threshold for an average family of four was $8,385 in 1980.

The basis for establishing these income thresholds can be traced back to the original poverty guidelines formulated by Mollie Orshansky of the Social Security Administration in the early 1960s as part of the War on Poverty. The original poverty threshold was computed by taking the cost of purchasing the Department of Agriculture's "Economy Food Plan" and multiplying the cost by three, because a 1955 USDA survey had shown that one-third of a family's budget usually goes for food. The resultant figure was then adjusted for family size and other characteristics. This method of calculation has been modified only slightly since its inception.

The poverty threshold was originally set at a lower level for farm families than for nonfarm families, because it is assumed that farm families, by growing their own food, offset some of the food costs borne by nonfarm families. In 1969, the threshold for farm families was raised from 70 to 85 percent of that for nonfarm families; and in December 1981, the farm/nonfarm distinction was eliminated.

That same year, it was decided that the thresholds should be updated according to the Consumer Price Index rather than the actual costs of the economy food plan.

The Census Bureau produces most of the official statistical data on the poor, but it does not provide the official definition of poverty. Only OMB has the authority to set the official poverty level. At present, a White House working group on economic statistics has apparently been given the responsibility for defining or redefining poverty, and even though there has been no sign yet of what they plan to do, some recent actions by the administration suggest the direction in which changes might go. For example, federal welfare regulations now allow states to count food stamps and housing subsidies received by families as income in determining eligibility for welfare benefits, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development plans to propose that food stamps be counted as income in determining housing subsidies for the poor.

Counting Noncash Benefits

Such inclusion of noncash or in-kind benefits in calculating income for the poor is being considered as a means of redefining poverty itself. Cash transfer payments, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children and other public assistance, are already counted as income in the determination of poverty status. The White House is expected to argue that the official statistics on poverty overstate the real number of poor people because they do not include such benefits as food stamps, subsidized housing, and free health care in calculating income.

But to say that the inclusion of noncash public benefits in income calculations would correct an "overstatement" of the number of poor is to miss several points. For one, there are large noncash benefits received by the nonpoor. Untaxed employer-paid health and life insurance, tax-free interest, the enormous tax expenditures going to businesses—not to mention highway construction, price supports, and tuition subsidies for college—are all government benefits that go largely to the nonpoor. One prestigious researcher recently concluded that "the most obvious example of nonmoney income is the imputed net rental return on a home owner's equity in his or her house." Since few poor people own their own homes, this is decidedly a benefit for the nonpoor. Proponents of inclusion of noncash benefits in measuring poverty are advocating one standard for the poor and a different one for the rich: count the in-kind benefits of the poor, they are saying, but not the in-kind benefits of the rich. If the noncash benefits to the nonpoor were counted as income—and taxed appropriately—the increased revenue would probably produce a balanced budget without the slashing of social programs recently witnessed on Capitol Hill.

Furthermore, there is no mention of the general public value of some of the programs to aid the poor. For example, medical assistance for the poor has the effect of improving the "public health" of the entire country and therefore has benefits for the nonpoor as well.

The notion of including noncash benefits as income can lead to some peculiar results. For example, if the costs of medicaid payments are added to income, the implication is that the more medical expenses one has, the better off one is . . . the sicker, the better! And the HUD proposal to count food stamps as income would mean that the more food stamps you received—that is, the poorer you were—the more you would pay in rent.

Although the official definition of poverty is only a statistical device and does not necessarily have to be used for programmatic purposes, it is not hard to understand the interest of the current administration in including the in-kind government welfare benefits in the calculation of income, which in turn would be used in measuring poverty status.

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U.S. Policy in the Caribbean

by Jake M. Dyels, Jr.

(The author is a senior fellow at the Joint Center on leave from the U.S. Department of State under its Pearson Fellowship program.)

(Continued from front cover)

On December 7, the Joint Center for Political Studies sponsored a forum on "The Caribbean and U.S. Foreign Policy," supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. George Dalley, a member of the Civil Aeronautics Board and former deputy assistant secretary of state, spoke on U.S. ties and interests in the Caribbean; Irving A. Cheslaw, former U.S. ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, spoke on challenges facing the United States in the Caribbean; and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Stephen W. Bosworth discussed current and emerging U.S. policy in the region. Other participants included embassy representatives of Caribbean and other nations; Caribbean affairs specialists from the business community, congressional committee staffs, and academe; and representatives from the Office of Caribbean Affairs of the U.S. Department of State.

The nations of the Caribbean represent an array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, economic structures, and political systems. Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and several other countries are former British colonies. English is the official language, governments are popularly elected, literacy rates exceed 80 percent, and per capita incomes are well over $1,000 (in Trinidad and Tobago, over $5,000). Haiti is a former French possession. The official language is French, the literacy rate is somewhere between 10 and 20 percent, and per capita income is $260. Haiti's government is headed by Jean-Claude Duvalier, President for Life, who succeeded his father Francois ("Papa Doc") Duvalier, also President for Life, in 1971. The Dominican Republic was formerly under Spanish rule, the official language is Spanish; the literacy rate is approximately 62 percent. The country has a past history of authoritarian rule but now has an elected government. Another Spanish-speaking nation is Puerto Rico, which has a commonwealth association with the United States.

Levels of development and abilities to provide basic services vary from nation to nation, as do official approaches to solving national problems. Common to virtually all Caribbean nations, however, are high rates of inflation, rapidly expanding young populations, growing unemployment, and general underdevelopment. The consequent political volatility of the region is a condition the United States cannot afford to ignore.

Development Assistance

At a meeting in Nassau in July, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, and the United States agreed to coordinate their Caribbean trade and assistance efforts. They also agreed that their aid would be strictly economic and that each donor could decide independently which nations it would aid, with no nation of the area being excluded automatically.

In recent years, Canada and Venezuela have granted more aid to the Caribbean, in proportion to their gross national products, than has the United States, and Mexico's involvement has been steadily growing. Mexico and Venezuela have assisted nations of the region mainly by granting advantageous terms for petroleum purchases, a critical concession since the advent of the major oil price increases of the mid-1970s. Canada, long a major trading partner in the Caribbean, has had an official technical assistance program in the region for 25 years.

The United States is the chief trading partner for the Caribbean as a whole. U.S. imports from the region are mainly primary products such as bauxite, sugar, and petroleum. About 87 percent of the non-petroleum products enter the United States free of duty, although some are subject to quota limitations. Manufactured goods, foodstuffs, and machinery constitute most of the U.S. exports to the region.

The U.S. economic assistance program will cost approximately $211 million in FY 1982. A combination of grants and loans for specific development programs, economic support funds, and PL 480 (Food for Peace) allotments account for the bulk of the costs. Traditionally, U.S. aid has gone toward increasing the capacity of countries to meet basic human needs by improving agricultural production and food distribution, meeting energy needs, and developing manpower resources. Other major programs have been related to health, population control, and education. U.S. indirect assistance to the Caribbean has been mainly via the Caribbean Development Bank, which has received over one-third of its total capital resources from the United States.

The Caribbean Basin Initiative

At around the same time the coordination agreement was reached, the Reagan administration announced its plan to increase U.S. involvement in the Caribbean through aid, trade, and investment. Under the plan, called the Caribbean Basin Initiative, the island nations are grouped with the nations of Central America that surround the Caribbean. The Caribbean islands have traditionally been treated as a separate bloc, but the administration argues that by lumping them together with Central America, it can gain greater attention to its plan in Congress and broaden donor participation. Others, however, believe that the arrangement indicates that U.S. interest is motivated more by fears that the disturbances in Central America will spread to the Caribbean than by concerns with the problems of the Caribbean nations themselves.

The initiative includes some direct bilateral assistance, which is to be coordinated with assistance from the multilateral development institutions (International Monetary Fund, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Caribbean Development Bank) and the other donor countries. But the main thrust of the initiative is to expand trade and opportunities for both foreign and domestic investment in the Caribbean nations.

According to the administration, the overall ob-

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jective of the plan is to expand the productive sector to enable nations to increase their resource base, provide employment, and move toward economic self-sufficiency. At the December 7 JCPS forum, Deputy Assistant Secretary Bosworth stated that through intensive consultations with other donor countries and individual Caribbean and Central American nations, the administration has determined that the most acute need of the area is revitalization of productivity, which will lead to more exports and thus create jobs. The administration is giving serious consideration to requesting congressional authority to negotiate with individual countries one-way duty-free entry of their products, thereby ensuring a market for Caribbean goods and encouraging investment. Mr. Bosworth stated that the complete program is expected to be unveiled in 1982.

Security Considerations

An important area of disagreement among experts—apparently within the administration as well as without—is the level and form of security assistance needed in the region. Historically, U.S. official interest in its southern neighbors has been in direct proportion to perceived threats the area's problems posed to our interests. At present, the threat that seems to concern the administration most is Cuba.

Cuba's success in establishing close relationships in the region has been less than impressive; only tiny Grenada could be called a possible ally. Nevertheless, critics say, our government's policies toward the Caribbean are influenced more by the fear of Cuba expanding its influence in the area than by any other factor. They say that bilateral relations between the United States and individual Caribbean states are too often dependent on that nation's relations with Cuba. Relations between the United States and Jamaica, for example, have warmed steadily since 1980, when Michael Manley, a friend of Castro, was replaced as prime mininster by Edward Seaga, who recently severed all relations with Cuba

Despite concerns about disputes in the area and Cuba's policies, the United States and other major donors agreed that there would be no military or security aspects to their coordinated assistance. Even so, it is expected that support for local law enforcement and Coast Guard forces, sorely needed in some countries, will be granted.

Immigration

Displaced persons from the violently troubled areas of Central America and persons fleeing economically blighted areas there and in the Caribbean are entering neighboring countries by the thousands.

Immigration to the United States from the Caribbean is a serious foreign policy issue. Recently, to stem the flow of "Boat People" fleeing Haiti to the United States, the Reagan administration initiated a policy of interdiction on the high seas by the U.S. Coast Guard. By agreement with the government of Haiti, those persons on the boats who do not qualify as refugees under U.S. law are returned to Haiti. Those who reach U.S. shores are placed in detention centers under U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service control. These practices have been called illegal and inhumane by the Congressional Black Caucus and others and may be challenged in the courts by attorneys representing Haitians currently detained by the INS.

The Caribbean Policy Debate

Having voiced a commitment to assist the Caribbean nations in overcoming their economic ills, the United States must now make that commitment meaningful. An extensive program of assistance to the Caribbean is long overdue.

But many points of controversy stand in the path to an effective Caribbean assistannce package. Any proposal for one-way duty-free entry of goods, for instance, is certain to run into opposition in Congress. Increased importation of products such as textiles, which compete with domestic production in already ravaged industries, will certainly meet resistance, as will larger rum imports, which will clash with traditionally protected Puerto Rican production for mainland markets.

The domestic implications of immigration from the Caribbean are equally complex. The administration is faced with concerns about the burden of large influxes of refugees on the one hand and accusations of racism on the other hand. Refugee processing costs aside, the impact of large numbers of unskilled persons settling in communities already suffering from rising unemployment and diminished revenues creates pressures that compete with pressures for equitable, humane treatment of the refugees and makes acceptable solutions extremely elusive.

In terms of our own national interests, there is much to gain and little to lose by investing in the stability of our closest neighbors. Helping the nations of the Caribbean to achieve strength and stability without resorting to radical or violent means is probably the best way to counteract any Cuban attraction. Furthermore, an extensive Caribbean assistance plan would reverse criticism that the United States takes its Caribbean neighbors for granted and ignores their needs and interests.

Formulation of the administration's plan has been a lengthy process. Implementation may be even more difficult. Any meaningful assistance plan has to be closely linked with the individual nation's own development plan. Assistant Secretary Bosworth explained that a primary reason that details of the Caribbean Basin Initiative have not yet been made public is the extensive consultations in progress between the United States and others involved in order to achieve the utmost in coordination and cooperation and to be sure that the ultimate plan reflects the thinking of Caribbean leaders.

Looking back at past expressions of interest in the Caribbean—Pan Americanism, the Good Neighbor Policy, the Alliance for Progress—it is difficult to identify examples of true U.S. commitment and sustained interest and effort. The Caribbean Basin Initiative will be watched closely to see if it is more successful.

Senate Hearings on Voting Rights Act

by Armand Derfner

(Mr. Derfner is coordinator of the Voter Law Policy Project at the Joint Center.)

The United States Senate begins hearings this month on S. 1992, the bill to extend and clarify the Voting Rights Act of 1965. S. 1992 was introduced on December 16 by Senators Charles Mathias (R-MD) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) on behalf of of 61 Senate co-sponsors, 21 Republicans and 40 Democrats. The bill is identical to H.R. 3112, which was passed by the House of Representatives in October by a vote of 389-24.

Procedures in the Senate are more complex than those in the House of Representatives and often lend themselves to the use of delaying tactics such as the filibuster, which has been used to bottle up civil rights legislation so many times in the past. The "magic number" of votes necessary to stop a filibuster is 60, so it is especially significant that S. 1992 was introduced with 61 co-sponsors.

Roadblocks Ahead

But despite the overwhelming bipartisan support shown so far, the road to passage in the Senate will be rocky, because a small group of powerful senators have served notice that they will wage a fierce battle against the bill. These opponents are led by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), who is making a comprehensive assault on civil rights enforcement laws across the board, and Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC), a foe of the Voting Rights Act since 1965.

These two senators occupy strategic positions. Senator Thurmond is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Voting Rights Act. Within the committee, hearings will be held by the Subcommittee on the Constitution, headed by Senator Hatch and also including Senator Thurmond. The other subcommittee members are Charles Grassley (R-IA), Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), and Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

The timing of the hearings is a matter of concern. Despite requests to hold hearings before the end of last year, Senator Hatch scheduled the hearings to begin on January 13, with a commitment to end by February 28. Now the starting date has been pushed back another week, and there have been intimations about going into early March—a move civil rights supporters have labeled absolutely unacceptable. They are concerned because the bill must clear a number of hurdles before the August expiration date for key provisions of the Act. Those hurdles include subcommittee mark-up following hearings, full committee mark-up, floor action (which may involve a filibuster), a House-Senate conference (if the two bodies pass different versions), and presidential action. Because any delay along the way could be fatal to the Act, a precaution learned from old civil rights battles was taken: when the House bill was passed in October and was sent to the Senate, it was "held at the desk" rather than being referred to the Judiciary Committee. This means that even if the Judiciary Committee bottles up the legislation or sits on it, the House bill can be sent directly to the floor.

The fact that 61 senators have co-sponsored S. 1992 does not mean they will all vote against weakening amendments. Indeed, opponents of the bill have already begun approaching some of the co-sponsors asking them to withdraw their support or to be ready to support weakening amendments. Civil rights groups have therefore been urging their members to keep contacting their senators in support of S. 1992.

The tentative hearing schedule proposed by Senator Hatch indicates the outlines the Senate debate will probably take. One major issue will be the "bail-out" provision, which was added as a compromise in the House of Representatives to give covered jurisdictions an incentive to improve their records. Attempts in the House to weaken the Act by making it easier to bail out were uniformly rejected by 2-1 and 3-1 margins. Nonetheless, such attempts will probably be made again in the Senate.

The "Intent" Test

The more significant issue, though, is likely to be Senator Hatch's efforts to require specific proof of discriminatory *intent* in voting discrimination cases. The basic approach of the Voting Rights Act is to make a finding of voting discrimination dependent on a showing of discriminatory effect or result, without requiring a showing of discriminatory purpose or intent.

This standard is spelled out in Section 5 (the preclearance provision), and it has been understood to hold true under Section 2 (which authorizes lawsuits to challenge voting discrimination not covered under Section 5). Last year, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Mobile* v. *Bolden,* upset this understanding by indicating that proof of discriminatory purpose was required in a case brought under Section 2. For this reason, the House acted to restore the original meaning of Section 2 by making it clear that proof of discriminatory result is sufficient. This amendment is likely to be the chief target of Senator Hatch and others; indeed, there have been some suggestions that Senator Hatch will attempt to require proof of discriminatory purpose under both Section 2 *and* Section 5.

The "intent" or "purpose" issue is a familiar battleground. At the close of 1980, Senator Hatch led a fight to require proof of discriminatory purpose in housing cases, which killed legislation that would have put teeth in the housing discrimination laws. Opponents of effective civil rights enforcement have long recognized that requiring proof of discriminatory purpose is the easiest way of crippling enforcement.

The importance of this issue to the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act is clear. For example, the *Birmingham News* opposed the purpose requirement because of the impossibility of proving the purposes of people who may be long dead, saying, "It would be quite a trick for anyone to subpoena them from their graves for testimony about their racial motivations." And Senator Russell Long (D-LA) said, "I think that the bill is correct in saying that if what is done has the effect of denying people their rights, that it doesn't make any difference what the intent was. We used to have a saying in law school that

the road to hell was paved with good intentions, and that doesn't excuse you, that you do something that does a lot of harm to other people. And in this case, I don't think the test should be intent—I think the test should be the result, the effect of it. If the law has the effect of denying people their rights, or a practice has the effect of denying people their right to vote, it should be stricken down and people should be protected and so I think the way the House bill passed and the House decision in that regard is correct and I support that position."

There may be other attempts to cripple the Act by extending the preclearance provision nationwide or by ending the provisions requiring assistance to language minorities. Both these tactics were tried in the House and soundly rejected. They can be expected to reappear in the Senate, together with other challenges. The overwhelming bipartisan support for the Act thus far has encouraged civil rights supporters, but they are aware of the roadblocks ahead and they know that any relaxation would mean defeat for an effective Voting Rights Act.

Co-sponsors of S. 1992

The 61 senators who co-sponsored S. 1992 are:

Andrews (R-ND)
Baucus (D-MT)
Bentsen (D-TX)
Biden (D-DE)
Boren (D-OK)
Boschwitz (R-MN)
Bradley (D-NJ)
Bumpers (D-AR)
Burdick (D-ND)
Byrd (D-WV)*
Cannon (D-NV)
Chafee (R-RI)
Chiles (D-FL)
Cohen (R-ME)
Cranston (D-CA)
Danforth (R-MO)
DeConcini (D-AZ)
Dixon (D-IL)
Dodd (D-CT)
Domenici (R-NM)
Durenberger (R-MN)
Eagleton (D-MO)
Ford (D-KY)
Glenn (D-OH)
Hart (D-CO)
Hatfield (R-OR)
Hawkins (R-FL)
Heinz (R-PA)
Hollings (D-SC)
Huddleston (D-KY)
Inouye (D-HI)
Jackson (D-WA)
Johnston (D-LA)
Kassebaum (R-KS)
Kennedy (D-MA)
Leahy (D-VT)
Levin (D-MI)
Long (D-LA)
Mathias (R-MD)
Matsunaga (D-HI)
Melcher (D-MT)
Metzenbaum (D-OH)
Mitchell (D-ME)
Moynihan (D-NY)
Packwood (R-OR)
Pell (D-RI)
Percy (R-IL)
Pressler (R-SD)
Proxmire (D-WI)
Pryor (D-AR)
Quayle (R-IN)
Riegle (D-MI)
Roth (R-DE)
Sarbanes (D-MD)
Sasser (D-TN)
Specter (R-PA)
Stafford (R-VT)
Stevens (R-AK)
Tsongas (D-MA)
Weicker (R-CT)
Williams (D-NJ)

* Issue number 4 of the Voting Rights Report (published by the Joint Center) erroneously listed Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia as one of the co-sponsors of S. 1992. Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia should have been listed instead. We regret the error and any inconvenience it may have caused.

Measuring Poverty

(Continued from page 3)

The first government source to explore the ramifications of including noncash income, a 1977 report by the Congressional Budget Office, showed that inclusion of noncash benefits in the calculation of income leads to a dramatic decline in the number of families classified as poor. Lowering the official number of poor could be used to justify even more cutting of social programs.

The Real Measurement Problems

The fact is, there are problems with the present method of measuring poverty, but they tend to understate rather than overstate the amount of poverty in this country. Current evidence indicates that one-fifth rather than one-third of a family's income generally goes for food, and thus the poverty line should be five rather than three times the cost of the economy food plan, or 1.67 times the current level. The food plan itself is one designated by the USDA for "emergency or temporary use when funds are low" and does not represent a recommended long-term diet, which would naturally cost more. Recent work shows that use of a more realistic food plan and multiplier would raise the poverty threshold by at least 50 percent. Mollie Orshansky, who designed the original guidelines and now advocates updating them, says "that update would change the number of poor for 1975 from 26 million to 36 million." But the changes needed to produce a technically better and more timely measure have not been adopted by the government.

Moreover, the current measure of poverty makes no attempt to examine the costs actually associated with a minimum standard of living. On the other hand, the Bureau of Labor Statistics regularly calculates a budget for a "lower standard of living" based on updated actual costs of maintaining a household. In 1980, the cost of this budget was 67 percent higher than the poverty standard in 1980 (the BLS lower family budget was $14,044 compared to the poverty line of $8,385 for an average family of four). If the BLS budget were used as the poverty line, fifty million people (one-fourth of the population) would be classified as poor.

Another factor in the measurement of poverty in the United States that is often overlooked is the Census undercount. Given the characteristics of the people generally missed by the Census Bureau, such as minority status and transient life style, it would not be surprising if as many as one-fifth of the persons missed in the count were below the poverty line. The real size of the population living in poverty is thus consistently understated.

Many signs indicate that we can expect an initiative on the part of the White House to alter the method of measuring poverty. If that alteration is a means of obscuring the true dimensions of poverty in the United States, the implications for public policies are ominous. Discussion of the changes should not be allowed to focus on the inclusion of noncash benefits to the exclusion of other equally pressing problems in developing a proper measure of poverty.

Telescope

February Symposium on Minority Public Administrators

The National Conference of Minority Public Administrators, a section of the American Society for Public Administration, will sponsor a one-day symposium on February 26, 1982, at Howard University in Washington, D.C. The symposium's theme is "Minority Public Administrators in the 1980s: Meeting the Challenge."

Speakers will include federal officials, representatives from state and local governments, business executives, and scholars. The purpose of the symposium is to establish a dialogue between minority public administrators and the Reagan administration about the problems of the 1980s.

For further information, telephone Sharon Anderson, Chair, Symposium Planning Committee, at 202 667-1546.

Strengthening the Nation's Black Colleges

At a luncheon honoring black college supporters, President Reagan signed an executive order calling for government-wide coordination to ensure full opportunities for black college participation in federally sponsored programs. He also encouraged private sector involvement in historically black institutions. According to the National Urban League, the president stated, "it should never be forgotten that when educational opportunities were denied elsewhere, these institutions offered hope to black Americans. . . . with a serious commitment to protecting these unique educational institutions, we have made certain that in an era of budget cuts, black colleges and universities will actually receive a $9.6 million increase in federal Title III funds—a jump of almost 8 percent."

Two recent reports indicate the need for strengthening black participation in higher education. In *A Losing Battle: The Decline in Black Participation in Graduate and Professional Education,* J. Christopher Lehner, Jr., states that participation dropped from 6.0 percent in 1976 to 5.7 percent in 1978. Mr. Lehner states that financial obstacles seem to be the major reason.

Donald H. Smith, in *Admission and Retention Problems of Black Students at Seven Predominately White Universities,* states that poor preparation in secondary schools appears to be the main barrier to black access to the full resources of the universities surveyed. He also cites ambivalent feelings of black students toward black faculty and administrators and the absence of a support system as underlying reasons for high attrition rates.

Both reports are available from the U.S. Department of Education, National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Colleges, 1100 17th Street, NW, Suite 706, Washington, DC 20202.

JCPS Fifth Annual Dinner

The Joint Center for Political Studies will hold its fifth annual dinner Tuesday, March 2, 1982, at the Washington Hilton Hotel. As in previous years, the date was chosen to facilitate participation by the many elected officials who will be attending the National League of Cities' Congressional Cities Conference February 27-March 2.

The dinner will honor Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., for his exemplary contributions to the advancement of civil rights. The National Chairman of the dinner is Robert E. Kirby, Chairman of Westinghouse Electric Corporation. The General Committee Chairman is Jayne Brumley Ikard, a member of the board of governors of the Joint Center.

Tickets for the dinner are $150 per person, $1,500 for a table of ten. For tickets or further information, please contact Margaret Dickens at 202 626-3555, or write Dinner Committee, P.O. Box 50253, Washington, D.C. 20004.

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