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Joint Center for Political Studies

Perspective

Our Rights Have Been Snatched Away

Have you ever heard of the Supreme Court's *Grove City* decision or the proposed "Civil Rights Restoration Act"? Since *Focus* readers are well-read and politically astute, you probably have. But what about your friends and neighbors?

Grove City was the biggest civil rights robbery in history, and the Restoration Act is the most underpublicized police job in recent memory. Together they are an issue crying out for public attention and congressional action: we need the Civil Rights Restoration Act to recapture the civil rights stolen by the *Grove City* decision.

Here are the basic facts. More than 20 years ago, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of that act prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in a "program or activity" that receives federal money. Using Title VI and its "program or activity" language as a model, Congress later enacted legislation that protects the civil rights of women (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972), of disabled persons (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), and of the elderly (the Age Discrimination Act of 1975).

But the enforcement of all those civil rights laws was put in jeopardy by the Supreme Court's 1984 ruling in *Grove City College v. Bell* and the Reagan administration's interpretation of the ruling.

The Court ruled that since the student financial aid office was the only part of Grove City College that received direct federal funds, the aid office was the only part of the college that was subject to the anti-sex-discrimination provisions of Title IX. The rest of the college would be free to discriminate against women in programs or activities.

Shortly afterward, William Bradford Reynolds, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, declared that the Court's interpretation would be applied across the board to all four of the civil rights laws, since they all have the same "program or activity" language and share a common legislative history. Since the other three statutes cover not only educational institutions but all organizations that receive federal funds, the Justice Department was therefore extending the ruling to corporations, local governments, hospitals, airports, and so forth.

Later that same year, several members of Congress responded to the Court's decision and the administration's interpretation of it by introducing a bill called the Civil Rights Restoration Act. That act would recommit Congress to its full original intent in passing the civil rights laws: namely, prohibiting discrimination throughout *entire* agencies or institutions that receive *any* federal funds. The bill passed the House of Representatives but died in the Senate.

The bill was reintroduced in 1985. With dozens of cosponsors in the Senate and a couple of hundred in the House and supported by a bipartisan coalition of groups lobbying Congress, the bill was widely expected to become law. As of now, it has not. Because the U.S. Catholic Conference and anti-abortion groups want to attach two abortion-related amendments to it, the Civil Rights Restoration Act has been kept on hold since last May.

The proposed amendments no doubt raise important issues that are of great concern to many people. However, the protection of civil rights is also important, and legislation to achieve that protection should not be used as a battleground for conflicts over abortion.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, "Citizens should let their representatives and senators know that they want the Civil Rights Restoration Act passed as a clean bill, without these controversial amendments. Only enactment of this important piece of legislation can restore effective civil rights enforcement. Simple justice requires no less."

Unless we take action now, we will continue to be robbed of our full civil rights. The Civil Rights Restoration Act is an appropriate police action to prevent such robbery.

For more information on the Civil Rights Restoration Act, contact the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (the organization mobilizing the bipartisan coalition that supports the act) at 2027 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 (202/667-1780).

Eddie N. Williams
President

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Getting On-Line

by Vernon L. Robinson

(The author is a doctoral fellow in information systems at George Washington University. He is president of the Cutting Edge, an information systems consulting firm, and a member of the board of directors of the 21st Century Institute for Political Action.)

> A black woman announces her candidacy for the U.S. Senate, strongly supported by 80 black political, community, and business leaders from across her state. At no time did all those leaders sit down together. Instead, in conceiving, planning, and conducting her campaign, the woman coordinated the leaders' feedback through a computer-based conference.
>
> A state legislative black caucus files a bill that will dramatically improve educational opportunities for low-income children. The caucus has only one professional on its staff; nevertheless, it drew on the expertise of more than 200 black professionals—people so mobile that the caucus could not maintain current mailing addresses for three-quarters of them. The staff person kept in touch with everyone through a computer-based conference, which served as a permanent address for all those professional nomads.

These hypothetical events represent a few of the ways in which computer-based conferencing can help politicians and political aspirants achieve their goals. Especially in districts where money and advice are scarce for black office-holders and candidates, this technology could prove a great boon to those who make the effort to learn about and use it. Computer-based conferencing is not a minor technological innovation but represents a quantum leap in the number of people able to contribute to a discussion and in the speed with which feedback can be received.

What Is Computer Conferencing?

Computer conferencing is a method of communicating in which the participants, who may be at widely scattered locations, use a computer system to record their own comments on a given subject and to retrieve the comments that the other members of the group have recorded. Instead of talking to one another face to face or over the telephone, in other words, conferees at a computer-based conference "talk into" and "listen to" their computers without anyone else having to be on the line at the same time.

Participants simply type their comments at a keyboard and send them over telephone lines to a central computer, which files the comments under a particular conference topic in the order in which they are received. Conferees may access all conference topics to which they "belong." They may also send messages directly to individual members of the conference (which is analogous to whispering at a conference table).

What Are Its Benefits?

Computer-conferencing technology has been available for over a decade, but until recently not many organizations used it. Only a few government, business, and university offices could be hooked up, and the necessary equipment was expensive. But since the early 1980s, the costs of hardware, software, and time for accessing lines have been falling; the number of homes and offices with personal computers has been growing exponentially; and more people have become computer literate. Computer-based conferencing has therefore become more feasible as a way for people in different locations to communicate with one another.

Computer-based conferencing has several advantages over telephone conferencing. First, the only equipment needed is an inexpensive lap-top computer and a telephone modem. Second, conferees can participate in the "conference" at any time of the day or night, without having to coordinate their schedules. Third, the quality of participation is better because people have time to reflect before responding to what someone else has said.

Finally—and probably most important to those who are involved in politics and concerned about the link between participation and empowerment—conferencing allows more people to participate than other forms of communication do. Therefore, it provides an increased sense of "ownership." That is, in most round tables and other group discussions, a small number of people make the most important decisions and impose them on the rest of the group in a top-down fashion. The bulk of the group has not had a voice in the decision-making and feels less than committed to ensuring the success of the project. In contrast, computer-based conferencing allows many more people to participate in all stages of decision-making, so many more people have a stake in what happens to the project.

In fact, computer-based conferencing makes possible the creation of a nationwide round table of equals who have a sense of "ownership" in a given project because they contributed equally to its development.

Computer-based Conferencing and Political Participation

The advantage of allowing more people to participate is especially significant to public officials and would-be public officials. With computer-based conferencing, such people can expand the network of those with whom they exchange ideas, information, data, and advice. They can therefore project their influence further, strengthen their positions with constituents or potential constituents, and tap the resources of many more people than would be possible otherwise.

In particular, computer-based conferencing makes it easier for black public officials to use the informational and technical resources of the burgeoning and highly mobile black professional class. The knowledge and skills of that class have often been hard for traditional political and community groups to draw on. For one thing, those groups have been rigidly hierarchical, placing a premium on "dues paying." For another, the members of the middle class have been highly mobile, so they no sooner pay their dues than they move to another community or region and begin the cycle anew. Computer-based conferencing can change all that, as it offers public officials and the black middle class a unique and valuable two-way opportunity. Public officials can gain new sources of ideas and information; black professionals can indirectly put their knowledge and training to work in the public sphere.

One national computer-based conference dedicated to supporting black political action at every level is

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Black Political Opinion

by Linda F. Williams

(The author is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.)

Politically, blacks have long been liberal on the issues that matter most to them—economic and civil rights issues—and their voting behavior has reflected that liberalism. But after Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980, many political analysts began speculating about the level of latent black support for conservative priorities and policies.

Throughout Reagan's first term, however, poll after poll showed black Americans to be steadfastly liberal on economic and civil rights issues. Moreover, almost all blacks, whether liberal or conservative, disapproved of the way Reagan was handling his job as president. In the presidential election of 1984, 89 percent of the black vote went to Reagan's opponent.

Nevertheless, conservatives continued to search for support among blacks, waging what some have termed "the battle for the black mind." And recently, several polls have produced "evidence" that black support for Reagan may be growing—or, at least, that black approval of the way Reagan is handling his job may be growing.

Does this mean that black attitudes have fundamentally shifted? If so, why? And does it mean that black voting patterns will be different in the future from what they have been in the past?

What the Polls Seemed to Show

In late December 1985, a *New York Times* headline surprisingly claimed, "Most Blacks Back Reagan, Poll Finds." That headline itself received headlines in newspapers across the country. The *Times* poll found that, a year after the election, a whopping 56 percent of blacks approved of the way the president was handling his job.

Not so surprisingly, conservatives greeted the *Times* finding with enthusiasm, whereas black leaders and many analysts questioned it. The enthusiasm was natural, but so too was the skepticism, since several other polls conducted at about the same time produced findings that differed considerably from the *Times* findings and from one another. For example, also in December 1985, the Gallup poll and the ABC/*Washington Post* poll reported that 27 and 36 percent of blacks, respectively, approved of the way the president was handling his job. A month later, in January 1986, the ABC/*Washington Post* poll and the *New York Times* poll reported that 23 percent and 37 percent of blacks, respectively, approved of his handling of the job.

Evaluating the Polls

Obviously, these divergent findings cannot all be correct. To interpret them, we must evaluate the polls that produced them.

To evaluate a poll, we need to consider—

- the type of sampling procedure (does everyone have an equal chance of falling into the sample?);
- the margin of error;
- the size of the sample (the larger the sample, the smaller the margin of error);
- the method of interviewing, i.e., by telephone or personal interview (nonwhites, Southerners, lower-income people, the less well educated, younger adults, and people in small communities and rural areas are less likely to have telephones);
- the characteristics of the interviewers (responses can be affected by the personalities, racial characteristics, and styles of the interviewers); and
- the wording of the questions (were the questions unambiguous and unbiased?).

By those criteria, the January *Washington Post* poll (reporting a 23 percent black approval rating of Reagan) appears to be more valid than the others. All the surveys used the same kind of sampling procedure and the questions had the same wording, but the January *Post* sample included a larger number of blacks (1,022) and therefore had a smaller margin of error, and it used black interviewers. In contrast, the December *New York Times* poll, which started the furor, interviewed only 103 blacks, and as the *Times* chief pollster, Adam Clymer, recently reported, they were almost certainly an unrepresentative sample.

Although some of the polls may have suffered from methodological problems, all of them showed some black movement in support of the president. Reagan's job approval rating among blacks has at least tripled since November 1984, when most national polls found it to be about 8 percent.

Such an unexpected and striking development raises two questions: what caused the change, and what does the change mean for black partisanship and presidential preferences?

What Caused the Change?

The reasons for the improvement in black ratings of Reagan are not immediately obvious, but we can make several guesses. Possibly by now the 1981 Reagan budget cuts and the harsh recession of 1982 seem so far in the past that they no longer influence black views of the president. Or, since younger blacks and black men approve of the president in greater proportions than older blacks and black women, possibly blacks are attracted by Reagan's "strong leadership" (Rambo?) appeal. Blacks may also be responding to the same issues that have improved the president's ratings among whites (that is, the TWA hostage crisis, his personal battle with cancer, and the Geneva Summit). Another possibility is that blacks are already looking ahead to the post-Reagan era and feel it is pointless to set themselves against a man who, in any case, will soon be out of office.

Finally, the polls themselves may be having a bandwagon effect. Reagan's personal popularity among the populace as a whole may discourage both Democratic and black leaders from criticizing him, and that, in turn, may temper black attitudes toward Reagan. Growing numbers of blacks may thus feel it is futile not to go along with the majority—not to jump on the bandwagon.

Whatever the reasons for the improved ratings, the improvement clearly has more to do with the president's personal style and political success than with his political philosophy. When blacks were asked about Reagan's handling of particular economic and race-specific policies and about their own political philosophies, they distanced themselves from the president by exceptionally wide margins.

(Continued on page 9)

A Special Report

Many people agree that America's welfare system needs to be changed. Perhaps the first way to start is by dispelling some commonly accepted misconceptions about how benefits are distributed, who the recipients are, and how welfare affects its recipients. This report is the Joint Center's attempt to sort out some of the answers to these questions, especially with respect to blacks.

The report printed here is a modified version of one prepared in cooperation with the organizers of the National Issues Forum (NIF), a nationwide program of community discussions that bring interested citizens together at the local level to discuss major public policy issues. This report complements a monograph on welfare policy that the Domestic Policy Association (NIF's sponsor) prepared for the NIF meetings.

Blacks and Welfare: Sorting Out the Facts

by Katherine McFate

(The author is special assistant to the director of research at the Joint Center.)

The country is engaged in a vigorous debate about the future of federal welfare policy. Three issues are at the center of this debate: the high cost of welfare spending, especially at a time of soaring federal budget deficits; a belief that the very costly social welfare programs of the past two decades have largely been ineffective in significantly alleviating poverty; and a fear that some welfare programs, notably Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), might be intensifying social problems by encouraging illegitimacy and dependency. Although these concerns have been most vigorously expressed by conservative analysts and policymakers long opposed to federal social welfare programs, a growing number of other people now question the continued effectiveness of programs like AFDC, and urge reform.

The debate about welfare policy raises a number of profound value questions. Should the federal government provide assistance to the poor? If so, to what extent? And what criteria should it use in determining whom to assist?

Unfortunately, consideration of these questions and of welfare policy in general is often influenced by misconceptions about the distribution of welfare costs, the recipients of welfare benefits, and the effects of welfare programs. Moreover, these misconceptions often have racial overtones. There are two reasons for this. First, a disproportionately large segment of the black population receives assistance. Second, some of the social welfare programs of the 1960s were enacted in part to create opportunities for those who had suffered from decades of legalized discrimination. The result is that some white Americans view welfare programs as handouts to blacks unwilling to support themselves.

Many Americans do not understand that poverty programs are not the main cause of recent increases in welfare spending; that more whites than blacks receive welfare; and that higher unemployment rates among blacks have created a need for government assistance, rather than the reverse.

The Distribution of Welfare Costs

During the past two decades, federal social welfare expenditures have increased substantially by every measure: in absolute dollars, as a percentage of the federal budget, and as a proportion of GNP. Public concern about this increase appears to have centered on AFDC, Medicaid, and other programs to aid the poor. However, welfare expenditures also include several programs targeted at groups other than the poor. These include Social Security and Medicare for the elderly; veterans' compensation; disability and unemployment support for workers; and federal loans for college students. Most of these programs were established as part of the New Deal of the 1930s; some were created in the mid-1960s.

By 1984, the average annual AFDC payment was* less than half *the average Social Security payment.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s some welfare programs were modified. The most costly of these changes was a major reform of the Social Security system in 1972. Social Security benefits were increased by 20 percent, and a cost of living adjustment (COLA) was tied to these increased benefit levels. The COLA was designed to protect the elderly on fixed incomes from the ravages of inflation, which had significantly reduced the buying power of the dollar. The COLA did protect the elderly. It also rapidly escalated social welfare expenditures, especially since the number of Social Security recipients was increasing.

Virtually all the other major welfare programs were also experiencing sharp increases in expenditures, in terms of absolute dollars. For example, veterans compensation went from $2 billion to $10 billion; federal unemployment payments grew from $2.6 billion to $23.7 billion; and student assistance increased from $329 million to $8.5 billion. In short, during the past two decades, government social welfare spending of all kinds has skyrocketed. The recipients most in the public eye have been the poor, but the recipients receiving the most money, as we have seen, have been the elderly.

The Recipients of Welfare Benefits: The Elderly

Ironically, even though polls consistently show that a large majority of the American public believes too much money is spent on welfare, the public also remains committed to the single most costly welfare program—Social Security. (Congress has therefore been adamant about protecting COLAs for the elderly from the budget reductions called for by the Reagan administration.) This widespread public support for Social Security is rooted in the belief that retired

workers and elderly citizens are "entitled" to the benefits they receive. Most Americans believe that Social Security payments are simply returns on the savings an individual made during his or her working years.

That belief is erroneous. Current Social Security payments come not from a person's earlier contributions to the Social Security system but from current payroll taxes. Thus, yesterday's workers are being supported by today's work force—at a level far beyond the level of Social Security deductions taken from their paychecks many years ago. Not only that, but some of the workers of today who are helping to support the recipients of Social Security are themselves poor and may even qualify for means-tested government assistance, like Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Although Social Security benefits are distributed in a nondiscriminatory way, blacks benefit less than whites. One reason is that blacks are underrepresented among Social Security recipients. Blacks are 12 percent of the population but only 10 percent of the families, and 9 percent of the unrelated individuals, receiving Social Security. This underrepresentation is due to blacks' shorter life expectancy. In 1982, a black person's life expectancy was almost 6 years less than a white person's (69 and 75 years, respectively). Life expectancy for black men was actually less than the retirement age—which means that many black men contribute to Social Security all their working lives but do not live to receive benefits.

The second reason blacks benefit less than whites from Social Security is that benefit levels are tied to wage levels, and during their working years blacks have lower wages than whites. The average black family received only $5,091 a year from Social Security in 1983, whereas the average white family received $7,117. Individual blacks received an average of $3,721 per year, and individual whites $4,777.

The Recipients of Welfare Benefits: The Poor

Children and families dependent on government assistance programs have not fared as well as the elderly. The principal program from which they receive direct financial aid is AFDC. But no COLA clause was attached to that program and, as a result, families with poor children have experienced a 30 percent decline in the real value of direct government assistance during the past two decades. Other welfare benefits, such as Food Stamps and Medicaid, have also declined by about 20 percent through inflation. By 1984, the average annual AFDC payment was *less than half* the average Social Security payment. Whereas the federal government spent about $8.3 billion on AFDC payments to families with poor children in 1984 and another $20.1 billion on Medicaid, it paid out over $225 billion in Social Security and Medicare benefits for the elderly.

Poverty has special disadvantages for children because its effects are cumulative. A child born into poverty will have difficulty acquiring the skills that could enable him or her eventually to break out of the cycle of poverty.

The negative effects of poverty begin while a child is still in the womb. Poor women are less likely to receive prenatal care and are therefore more likely to give birth to underweight babies who have severe health problems. As poor children grow, the preventive health care they receive is more likely to be inadequate. They are also more likely to suffer from nutritional deficiencies that interfere with their cognitive development.

Poverty among children has been rising dramatically. Today, 20 percent of the children growing up in America— over 14 million children—are growing up in poverty. In female-headed households, more than 50 percent of all children are poor. Even in families with male breadwinners, about 14 percent of the children are poor.

The great increase that has occurred in the number of poor families with children is closely related to a great increase in the number of families headed by women. During the past 2-½ decades, the number of female-headed families has more than doubled. It rose from 4.5 million in 1960 to 10.1 million in 1985—and 44 percent of all female-headed families with children live in poverty. Moreover, research shows that such families are likely to remain poor for longer periods than two-parent families.

The increase in the number of female-headed households has been especially pronounced among blacks: almost half of all black families are headed by women, and more than half of all black children now live in families headed by women. Among black female-headed families, the poverty rate is 67 percent—in contrast to the 44 percent rate for all female-headed families. Although black female-headed families constitute only 4 percent of the population, they constitute 33 percent of all poor households that remain in poverty for more than eight consecutive years.

The main reason minorities rely on AFDC for longer spells than whites is that among female heads of families with children, blacks are much less likely to (re)marry than whites.

The major program to provide aid to poor children, AFDC, was established during the New Deal to help widows with children, and orphans. In about half the states, AFDC now provides support to poor families with children under 18 with an unemployed father, and in all states it provides support to poor female-headed families with children, whether the women are widows or not.

The federal government provides over half the AFDC funds, but state governments administer the program and set eligibility standards and benefit levels. This leads to great differences among states in benefit levels. In 1984, for example, Alaska gave $800 monthly to a family of four and Mississippi gave only $120. In 1984, in only five states did the monthly AFDC payment reach even 70 percent of the official federal poverty level. In most states, AFDC payments were less than half the poverty level. And in seven states the payments were *less than one-quarter* of the poverty level.

Of the more than 14 million American children who live in poverty, only about 11 percent receive AFDC support. And even for those who do receive benefits, at current levels AFDC is unlikely to lift them out of poverty.

Does Welfare Lead to More Female-Headed Families?

Critics of federal welfare programs have blamed those programs for much of the increase in the number of female-headed families. They contend that the availability of AFDC benefits encourages some men to stop supporting—or even to abandon—their families. They also claim that generous welfare benefits encourage young women to have children out of wedlock. (As we have seen, however, in no state are welfare benefits generous.)

Welfare rules in 26 states deny benefits to families with an able-bodied father in the household. Nevertheless, many

years' worth of research has yielded no evidence that welfare benefits contribute significantly either to the dissolution of intact families or to a growth in the number of out-of-wedlock births. If welfare benefits caused an increase in the number of female-headed families, we would expect the increase to be greatest in states with the highest benefit levels. Research has found no consistent relationship between AFDC benefit levels and the increase in the number of female-headed families.

In fact, with respect to illegitimacy rates, researchers at Harvard University found that states with high benefit levels tended to have lower illegitimacy rates than states with low benefit levels, even after adjustments were made for differences in race, region, education, income, and urbanization. Moreover, the researchers did not find any relationship between the size of the AFDC payment and the rate of illegitimacy when they looked at illegitimacy only among the group most likely to be eventual AFDC recipients (nonwhite teenage high-school dropouts). Between 1972 and 1980, while the number of children in black female-headed households was increasing by 20 percent, the number of black children supported by AFDC was *falling* by 5 percent. The women who were purportedly having children "to get on welfare" were neither applying for nor receiving AFDC support.

Does Welfare Encourage Dependency?

Another claim frequently made about welfare for the poor is that recipients would rather receive government handouts than earn their own keep. Neither attitudinal nor demographic evidence supports this assertion. A survey taken by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1985 showed that almost 80 percent of the poor said they would prefer to earn their living rather than receive welfare, and almost 90 percent said the best way for the government to deal with poverty was to give poor people job training or else create government jobs for them, rather than simply give them more money.

When AFDC was instituted in the 1980s, its benefits were considered temporary expedients to help recipients get through a few bad years. Popular misconceptions to the contrary, AFDC recipients still use welfare in this way. Only a small proportion of AFDC recipients could be characterized as having long-term dependency on welfare. In 1979 (the latest year for which data are available) about 30 percent of the families on AFDC had received it for less than a year, and the majority of all families on the rolls had been there for less than 4 years. The number of families that had been receiving public support without interruption for 10 years was less than 8 percent of the total.

Women usually leave the AFDC program for one of three reasons. First, their dependent child may grow up or leave the household, making them ineligible for AFDC; second, they may marry or remarry, thus obtaining private support; third, they or other members of the household may find employment and lift the family out of poverty with their earnings.

About 15 percent of AFDC recipients exit from the welfare rolls because they have "lost" their children; about 33 percent leave through remarriage; and another 33 percent are able to earn enough as workers to leave. Information on about 10 percent is unavailable. Still others receive aid from members of their extended family or from an inheritance.

Of those who leave through marriage or an increase in earnings, about 40 percent return to AFDC at some future time. Of those who leave through increased earnings, a third of them remain poor. When welfare mothers work, the wages they earn are usually very low. A full-time job at minimum wage does not provide a family of three with an income above the poverty level.

Not surprisingly, women who have graduated from high school are more likely to earn their way off welfare than high school drop-outs, and they are also more likely to (re)marry than high school drop-outs are. This fact alone puts minority women in a worse position than white women, since blacks are more likely than whites to be high school drop-outs.

Marriage as a Way Out

The main reason minorities rely on AFDC for longer spells than whites is that among female heads of families with children, blacks are much less likely to (re)marry than whites. White women in all categories of age and education are three times as likely as black women to use (re)marriage to exit from AFDC. The low rate of (re)marriage among black women is a function both of the unfavorable ratio between black males and black females in the 25-55 age group and of the high rate of unemployment among black males.

There are several reasons that the male-female ratio among blacks is much less favorable to women than the comparable ratio among whites. Among both blacks and whites mortality rates are higher for male infants than for female, but the difference between male and female infant mortality rates is greater among blacks than among whites. Moreover, black males have a much higher probability of dying before age 30 than white males (one out of every five black men will be a victim of homicide before age 30). Finally, a higher percentage of black males are in prison.

Work programs cannot successfully train public assistance recipients and place them in private sector employment without providing adequate support services.

Of the black men who have survived to become potential spouses, a high percentage are often unable to fill the role of provider because they are not employed. Among whites, the ratio of employed men per 100 women has been relatively constant for the past three decades. Among blacks, the ratio has been declining steadily since the early 1960s. This decline began *before* 1968, when welfare eligibility requirements were loosened and welfare rolls expanded. In the 1950s and the early 1960s, the Census reported that nearly three-quarters of all black men were working, but by 1984, after several recessions, the Census counted only 55 percent of black men as employed. (The rest were unemployed, not in the labor force, or not available for interview.) The jobless rate among black men today, in other words, is similar to the jobless rate of the entire working population during the Great Depression.

Welfare and Work Incentives

Critics of AFDC and the Food Stamp program claim that these programs destroy an individual's incentive to work. The facts belie this charge. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, when AFDC rolls were expanding, the labor force participation rate of women (both black and white, lower- and middle-class) increased significantly. Even during the period when welfare availability and benefits were growing most rapidly, the labor force participation rate of poor women, already high, was increasing. Today, over 60 percent of all black women and 55 percent of all white women work. Most mothers with

children under age six do not work full-time, but among those who do, blacks are more numerous than whites.

Until the 1980s, federal law had encouraged AFDC recipients to combine work and welfare. Legislation was passed in 1967 requiring AFDC recipients with children older than six to register for work or training. In 1969 the "$30 and a third" rule was instituted, allowing the first $30 and a third of all other money earned by AFDC recipients to be disregarded in the computation of monthly welfare benefits. Moreover, working AFDC recipients were allowed to deduct work expenses when they estimated their income to determine the amount of benefits for which they were eligible.

In 1981, however, the Reagan administration's Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) drastically changed the work incentives for AFDC recipients. The "$30 and a third" rule was limited to the first four consecutive months of employment, and ceilings were set for child care and working expenses. As a result of the OBRA reforms, approximately half of all working AFDC recipients lost their AFDC and Medicaid eligibility; thus, by working, they cost their families both income support and health care coverage. Another 40 percent lost part of their AFDC benefits. A report by the General Accounting Office said the OBRA reforms made it economically "rational" for many working AFDC recipients to give up work to retain benefits. However, the incentive to work and not be dependent on welfare was so great that the vast majority of working poor chose to give up government assistance (including medical insurance) rather than give up their employment.

Social welfare spending, especially in the area of health care, has been of real benefit to blacks as well as whites.

OBRA simultaneously tightened up eligibility rules for AFDC and authorized states to operate work relief programs to force recipients to "work off" their grants. This shift in policy was reinforced by the 1982 Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which permitted states to require women to conduct a job search upon applying for AFDC benefits.

Other attempts have been made to put welfare mothers to work. However, neither the government-sponsored Work Incentive Program (WIN) of the late 1960s nor the experiments of the privately funded Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation have been very successful. They have showed that many welfare mothers are highly motivated and want to support themselves, but they have also demonstrated that work programs cannot successfully train public assistance recipients and place them in private sector employment without providing adequate support services, such as child care, transportation to work or to training, and remedial education in basic skills. Many of the early programs did not provide adequate support services and did not train participants for jobs that would allow them to become self-sufficient.

State Initiatives

In response to OBRA and reductions in federal support for poverty programs, a number of states are planning and administering programs of their own design with the aim of reducing welfare dependency. Guidelines vary enormously, reflecting the degree to which state legislators are aware of the problems encountered by previous programs and shape the new program to prevent similar failures.

State employment and training programs offer a promising alternative to government support of the poor and seem to be quite popular with both the general public and the poor. Programs planned and implemented at the state level may be more flexible and responsive to unique local and individual circumstances than federal programs are. But for state initiatives to be successful, careful planning is necessary; immediate increases in administrative manpower and in the time and money invested in welfare recipients may be necessary, as well. The promised pay-off in long-term savings to the taxpayers, however, is very great, as more and more welfare recipients become able to support themselves.

Massachusetts is often cited as an example of a state that has successfully implemented an employment and training program for welfare recipients. Participation is voluntary. A combination of counseling, training, social support services, and work experience is tailored to the needs of individual recipients. The program's administrators claim that 23,000 AFDC recipients have found private employment through the program, saving taxpayers almost $36 million.

Reassessing Welfare

When we look back on the record of our country's social welfare programs and ask whether they have accomplished anything of merit, the answer must be a resounding yes, especially since World War II. Between 1950 and 1980, advances were made in eradicating poverty and its effects: life expectancy increased, infant mortality rates were cut in half, and the official poverty rate dropped from 30 percent of the population to 13 percent. Among individuals over 65, the official poverty rate dropped from 33 percent in 1960 to 16 percent in 1980. Among individuals in families headed by women, it dropped from 45 percent in 1960 to 37 percent in 1980. Public assistance has played an important role in ensuring that all American children are provided with a minimum level of support (but *not* a "comfortable" standard of living).

For blacks, although poverty remains a serious problem, living conditions have substantially improved. Just 25 years ago, more than half of all black people in the United States lived in poverty, and today about a third do. Infant mortality rates for blacks, although still twice those of whites, dropped more rapidly between 1950 and 1980 than did infant mortality rates for whites. The life expectancy for blacks increased by almost nine years between 1950 and 1980. That for whites increased by only five years. Clearly, social welfare spending, especially in the area of health care, has been of real benefit to blacks as well as whites.

Should public assistance do more than it has done? A consensus seems to be growing that it should. Americans believe in the dignity of work; they believe that jobs are better than handouts. Many state legislatures are trying to restructure their public assistance programs to make those programs lead to self-sufficiency for the able-bodied poor rather than simply provide subsistence. In the short run, this may require greater investments of time, effort, and even money. However, the potential payoff for taxpayers and for the poor themselves is enormous.

National and state legislators will be debating these issues in the year ahead. They will ask whether the nation can afford the time and money required for preparing the poor to lead independent lives. Perhaps a better question is whether we as a nation can afford the long-term costs of failing to create training and employment opportunities for the poor.

Black Political Opinion

(Continued from page 4)

Economics, Race, and Political Philosophy

Take economic issues, for example. When the January *Washington Post* poll asked, "Generally speaking, would you say Reagan's economic policies have helped most blacks or held them back, or made no difference one way or the other?" 49 percent of blacks said Reagan's policies have "held them back," 33 percent said Reagan's policies have "made no difference," and only 11 percent said the policies had helped. In the same poll, only 14 percent of the black respondents approved of the way Reagan was handling unemployment; only 10 percent approved of the way he was handling aid to the poor; and only 23 percent approved of the way he was handling the federal deficit.

On race, the same poll found that 56 percent of blacks thought Ronald Reagan was a racist. Another 56 percent said blacks had been helped by many government assistance programs that the Reagan administration wishes to eliminate. Blacks also differed with Reagan on affirmative action programs. In fact, blacks now support these programs more than they have in the past. Blacks agreed by 50 to 38 percent with the statement that "Because of past discrimination, blacks who need it should get some help from the government that white people in similar circumstances don't get." In a *Post* poll five years earlier, blacks had disagreed with that statement by 49 to 41 percent.

On political philosophy, the January *Post* survey asked people to label themselves ideologically. Twenty-three percent of blacks called themselves conservative, a number statistically indistinguishable from the 24 percent who applied that label to themselves five years ago. The number of blacks who called themselves liberal, however, rose during the same period, from 36 percent to 41 percent. Clearly, this is *not* evidence of any burgeoning black conservatism, whatever else it may be.

What Lies Ahead

So perhaps in the end the only thing we can conclude from the Reagan approval ratings is that—

- black public opinion is reasonably diverse;
- a majority of blacks are still liberal on policies important to them;
- a great majority of blacks still oppose Reagan's conservative policy agenda; and
- blacks as a group are still far more liberal than whites as a group.

If, then, blacks remain liberal on the issues that matter to them, what inferences can one draw as to black partisanship and presidential politics during the next few years? In other words, what party and what kinds of candidates are blacks likely to support in 1988? A look at the last two presidential elections may help us answer that question.

The Effects of the Last Two Elections

The presidential elections of 1980 and 1984 sharpened a distinction between the Republican and Democratic parties that has existed at least since the critical party realignment of 1932. Since 1932, the Democratic party has been relatively more liberal and the Republican party relatively more conservative. But until 1980, each party had a substantial ideological wing that tended in the other party's direction (conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans).

Between 1964 and 1980, more and more voters were calling themselves independents. At the same time, the voters who continued to call themselves Democrats or Republicans were increasingly committed to their party's dominant ideology. The two Reagan elections accelerated that process of polarization, reinforcing and clarifying the distinctions between the two parties while reducing both the leftward dispersion of the national Republican party and the rightward drift of the national Democratic party. Between 1980 and 1984, Reagan's popularity grew most among people who called themselves conservatives, people who called themselves Republicans, and white born-again Christians. On the Democratic side, the groups that gave Mondale more support in 1984 than they gave President Carter in 1980 were people who called themselves liberals, people who called themselves Democrats, people earning less than $12,500, Jews, and blacks.

Within the electorate, therefore, the two parties are now a great deal more ideologically distinct, as well as farther apart, than they were before 1980. Since 1980 the Republican electorate has been much more solidly conservative and the Democratic electorate much more solidly liberal, at least at the ballot box. Fewer and fewer Republicans can be called liberal or moderate Republicans, and fewer and fewer Democrats can be called conservative Democrats.

Blacks and the Two Parties

The sharper the lines of ideological demarcation between the two parties (at least in terms of the issues important to blacks), the less one can expect black voting behavior to change. As long as the national Republican party remains dominated by staunch conservatives who fail to address the black agenda (civil rights enforcement, administrative and judicial appointments, minority contracting, and educational and social programs), that party will not receive the support of black voters. As long as the national Democratic party is perceived by blacks as addressing the black agenda, that party will enjoy the support of black voters.

The January *Washington Post* poll demonstrates that blacks continue to perceive the Democrats and not the Republicans as supporters of their agenda. Seventy-two percent of black respondents said Republican leaders generally did not care about the problems of black people, whereas only 16 percent said the Republicans did care; conversely, 71 percent of black respondents said they thought Democratic leaders cared about the problems of blacks, compared with only 19 percent who said the Democrats did not care.

Changes may lie ahead, however. Already many hitherto loyal Republicans, including members of Congress, are showing signs of discomfort with the new ideological image of the party under Reagan: exceptionally conservative and anti-black. Within the administration itself, battles have been fought over affirmative action policy, economic sanctions against South Africa, domestic budget cuts, and other matters important to blacks.

On the Democratic side, there is obvious discomfort with the party's image not just as a liberal party but also

as a "special interests" party. Since the 1984 election, therefore, the party has attempted to limit the role of certain groups, especially the minority caucuses. This has prompted blacks to wonder about their future role within the Democratic party.

Will Blacks Support a Republican in '88?

One can expect, therefore, that if someone less conservative than Reagan were to win the Republican party's presidential nomination in 1988, the Republican party might receive more support from black voters than the 10 percent Reagan got in 1984. George Bush received only a 23 percent favorable rating from blacks in the January *Washington Post* poll, so he would have to change his image substantially to gain black votes. But Robert Dole (who has recently favored retention of affirmative action and has reached out to blacks) or Howard Baker or Jack Kemp (whose congressional records have received reasonably favorable ratings from civil rights groups such as the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights) might win many black votes. Indeed, on some issues— economic growth and equal opportunity (if not affirmative action)—Republicans might attract blacks without losing many recent ultraconservative converts to the GOP.

If Republicans were to stress those two issues, the black vote would probably be less monolithic than in 1980 and 1984. No doubt the Democratic nominee would still receive the majority of black votes, but the percentage would probably be under the 89 percent received by Walter Mondale in 1984.

Two Republicans who have already demonstrated how to attract a greater proportion of the black vote are Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey and Mayor George Voinovich of Cleveland. Instead of attacking black leaders as President Reagan and some other Republicans have done, these two candidates embraced them and addressed issues important to blacks. Governor Kean won 60 percent of the black vote, and Mayor Voinovich won in 85 percent of the black precincts.

Black votes may in fact come to look increasingly attractive, if not necessary, to Republican candidates. The January 1986 CBS/*New York Times* poll showed that the percentage of Americans identifying with the Republican party had declined 6 points since early 1985 (dropping from 35 percent to 29 percent), whereas identification with the Democrats remained steady (at 37 percent). Moreover, should a recession occur in 1987, as many economists predict, large numbers of white Southern and blue-collar voters may defect from the Republican ticket as they did in 1982 (the previous recession year).

Will Blacks Support a Democrat in '88?

On the Democratic side, the potential presidential candidates are relatively unknown among blacks or do not receive high favorable ratings from them. Consequently, they may have more trouble attracting black votes than past Democratic candidates have had. Aside from Jesse Jackson, the only Democratic party leader to receive a strong favorable rating (81 percent) in the January *Post* poll was Edward Kennedy, who has announced his decision not to seek the nomination. This leaves Senator Gary Hart as the party's front runner. However, Hart received only 3 percent of the black vote in the 1984 Democratic primaries. In the *Post* poll, 55 percent of blacks reported that they did not know anything about Hart or had no opinion of him, and only 30 percent gave him a favorable rating.

Will Blacks Support an Independent in '88?

If no Democratic or Republican candidate emerges who is popular with blacks, blacks might launch a third-party or independent candidacy. The name put forth most often in this connection is Jesse Jackson. The January *Washington Post* poll showed that 87 percent of the blacks interviewed looked favorably on Jackson, who finished third in the 1984 race for the Democratic nomination for president. Jackson might run again for president, as a Democrat in the primaries and as an independent in the general election. Two out of three of the black respondents (66 percent) said he should seek the Democratic nomination again in 1988, whereas only 26 percent said he should not; and 53 percent said it would be "a good idea" for a black leader like Jackson to run for president as an independent, whereas 37 percent said it would not be a good idea.

The search for an independent presidential candidate, black or white, may pick up momentum as domestic programs undergo the drastic cuts required by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings balanced budget legislation.

An independent candidacy is not likely to be very successful, however. Its probability of success is minimized by state electoral laws, custom, and the extent to which American voters have been conditioned to support a two-party system. Before John Anderson decided to run for president as an independent in 1980, 25 percent of Americans said they would support him—but in the election he received only about 6.6 percent of the vote.

The Means May Shift, But Not the End

The conclusion suggested by the recent polls, then, is that growing numbers of blacks approve of Reagan's performance as president without accepting his conservative philosophy. Despite the president's increasing personal popularity among blacks, black attitudes and goals remain as they have long been. The great majority of blacks continue to favor government intervention in the economy and in the enforcement of civil rights. This liberal orientation is understandable, given the central role that the federal government has played in reducing racial discrimination since the 1950s and in alleviating conditions such as high rates of unemployment, inadequate health care, and substandard education that blacks suffer from disproportionately.

But although black attitudes and goals are unchanged, black actions—the means by which blacks try to achieve their goals—may well be shifting. If a moderate or liberal Republican ran for office against a moderate Democrat, substantial numbers of blacks might support the Republican. If both major party candidates were conservative, blacks might pursue an independent course. The particular strategy black candidates and voters use will probably depend on the kinds of candidates put forward by the two parties. The goal, however, remains constant: to use the ballot as a tool to improve socioeconomic opportunities for blacks and other minorities.

Telescope

Duke Law Professor Named 1987 JCPS Distinguished Scholar

Jerome M. Culp, an economist and associate professor of law at Duke University, has been selected as the Joint Center's Distinguished Scholar for 1987. Established under a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, the Distinguished Scholars Program enables outstanding scholars and public policy analysts to spend up to one year conducting research at the Joint Center.

During his year at the Joint Center, Culp will examine the economic impact of court enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. (Title VII prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.) His study is entitled "The Federal Courts and Title VII: The Economics of Judicial Decision-Making."

The Distinguished Scholar selection committee, chaired by Dr. Michael Winston, vice president for academic affairs at Howard University, considered the project timely and important and felt that Professor Culp was uniquely qualified to carry out the research. Eddie N. Williams, president of the Joint Center, said, "We congratulate Professor Culp on his selection and are certain he will make a major contribution to the Joint Center's work during his tenure."

Culp will succeed Frank R. Parker, the scholar selected for 1985-86. Parker, a civil rights attorney, has been researching and writing a political and social history of Mississippi from 1965 to 1980, emphasizing increased black political participation.

Black Percentage of U.S. Population Up in 1984

Between 1980 and 1984, the black population of the United States grew twice as fast as the white population. According to a report by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the black population increased by 6.7 percent (from 26.8 million in 1980 to 28.6 million in 1984), whereas the white population increased by 3.2 percent (from 195.1 million in 1980 to 201.4 million in 1984). The total U.S. population (including members of the armed forces overseas) increased by 4.2 percent (from 227.1 million to 236.7 million). As of 1984, blacks constituted 12.1 percent of the population, up from 11.8 percent in 1980.

Copies of the report—*Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1980-1984,* Series P-25, No. 965—can be obtained for $2.25 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Infant Mortality Rate Increases Among Poor

According to a report published recently by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and entitled *Maternal and Child Health Data Book: The Health of America's Children,* the gap between black and white infant mortality rates is widening. About 5,500 more black than white infants died in 1983; this is the widest gap between black and white infant mortality rates in more than 40 years. A black infant in Chicago, Cleveland, or Detroit in 1983 was more likely to die in its first year of life than one born in Costa Rica.

In the population as a whole, the infant mortality rate, the proportion of babies born at low birth weight, and the percentage of babies born to women receiving late or no prenatal care have all worsened during the past few years. They had improved during the 1960s and 1970s. Marian Wright Edelman, president of CDF, says, "The most common victims of [these declining rates] have been America's poorest and nonwhite children."

The *Data Book* includes nationwide and statewide data on indicators of maternal and child health, with tables highlighting trends over the past several years. Copies are available for $9.95 from the Children's Defense Fund, 122 C St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

Getting On-Line

(Continued from page 3)

PACNET. Expected to be operational in April 1986, PACNET was established by the 21st Century Institute for Political Action. The institute, a black bipartisan political action committee with independent financing, was founded by a group of young black professionals in metropolitan Washington, D.C. This group raised money for Harold Washington and Wilson Goode in 1983 and realized that there was a need for a federal political action committee to appeal to young black professionals and to establish an independent financial base for blacks interested in running for office.

PACNET will provide a forum for people interested in discussing public policy issues, assessing candidates for elective office, giving technical assistance to candidates endorsed by the institute's board of directors, training campaign staffers (finance directors, press secretaries, campaign managers, and so forth), and supporting the institute's existing state subcommittees and creating new ones. At present there are state subcommittees in the District of Columbia, New York, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. They advise the national board on endorsements within their respective jurisdictions.

Because the institute's board of directors is interested in increasing the representation of blacks among elected officials of both parties at all levels of government, it will give PACNET's support primarily to challengers—of both parties. It will also invite the participation of other people who share its concerns.

Computer-based conferencing is not, however, a panacea. First, the technology will not produce the expected benefits without strong leadership. Skilled facilitators, called conference moderators, are necessary to provide direction and build consensus. Second, even though technology greatly increases the potential for feedback, brainstorming, and consensus, ultimately decisions will have to be made—and only human beings can make them. Finally, technology greatly improves the possibilities for participation but does not ensure it. Participation and its benefits will come about only if political and other resources are invested to make them come about.

(Editor's Note: Anyone interested in exploring computer-based conferencing further and linking up with PACNET can call Mr. Robinson at 202/676-4465.)

Ohio Task Force Targets Minority Health

by Ray Miller

(The author is a Democratic member of the Ohio House of Representatives. His article originally appeared in The Columbus Dispatch *and is reprinted with permission.)*

The state of health among blacks and minorities in America is alarmingly poor. Yet, until recently no one has clearly sounded the alarm.

Shocking Data

In August 1985, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Margaret Heckler, issued a report which compared the health of blacks and other minorities with that of America's white population.

That report revealed the following shocking data:

- Blacks have the highest overall cancer rate of any population group in the United States. Black deaths resulting from cancer are increasing at four times the rate among whites.
- Black males under age 45 are 10 times more likely to die from hypertension than white males.
- The prevalence of diabetes is 33 percent higher among blacks than whites.
- Cirrhosis mortality rates for blacks are twice as high as for whites.
- Blacks are two to three times more likely to be in treatment for drug-abuse-related problems than whites.
- Infant mortality rates for blacks are about double those of whites.
- Black women are almost four times as likely to die during childbirth as white women.

Most of this information is not new. To some it is not even particularly revealing. The tragedy is that these facts have been presented repeatedly in an anecdotal and incidental manner by those with the knowledge and ability to cause some change.

Task Force Set Up

At my request, [Ohio] Governor Richard F. Celeste has created a Task Force on Black and Minority Health to:

- Examine the conditions under which disparities in the health and health care services for black and minority communities exist, and recommend ways they can be reduced.
- Develop methods for disseminating health information and education materials expressly for the minority community.
- Develop models to improve access to and utilization of public health services.
- Develop strategies to improve the availability and accessibility of health professionals to minority communities, and
- Report its findings to the governor by February 1, 1987.

An Ounce of Prevention

While the recommendations that come from the task force should be tremendously helpful in addressing this problem in a systematic way, there are some things that we already know which can improve one's health. A wealth of scientific research reveals that the key to whether a person will be healthy or sick, live a long life or die prematurely, can be found in several simple personal habits: smoking, drinking, diet, sleep, and exercise.

We tend to forget that improved health comes more from preventing disease than from treating it once it strikes. Our fascination with the more glamorous "pound of cure" has tended to dazzle us into ignoring the often more effective "ounce of prevention."

Action, Not Blame

There are many reasons why the state of health among blacks and other minorities differs so significantly. We know that mental pain and poverty contribute to excessive smoking, chemical dependency, poor diet, and violent behavior.

We also know that hopelessness and despair turn one to false supports that accelerate death rather than sustain life. Who is at fault is not the question.

Now is the time for clear and decisive action on the part of government, business, education, health professions and the media to address this problem. There is no time for aimless debate.

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