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FOCUS

The monthly magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Blacks and Democrats: An Imperfect Alliance

Democrats Need a Strong Black Turnout at the Polls in November to Hold on to the White House and Regain Control of Congress

Black Workers in a Changing Labor Market

The Joint Center Embarks on a New Initiative to Study the Nature of the Jobs Being Created by a Restructuring Economy

Tales of Survival

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POLITICAL TRENDLETTER

PERSPECTIVE

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Vote! A Lot Is at Stake

In an era when much of the news is driven by statistics, a Census Bureau report released this month is noteworthy: black and white adults between the ages of 25 and 29 finish high school at about the same rate—87 percent. The fact that there is parity between blacks and whites at the secondary education level is good news. These statistics are also good news because a well-educated public is one of the basic pillars of a healthy democracy.

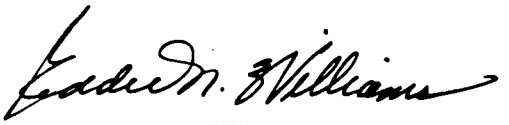
But there has been less statistical parity between blacks and whites in an area that bears more directly on the viability of our democracy—voter registration and turnout. Census Bureau data show that African American turnout at elections has been consistently lower than white turnout. In the 1992 presidential election, there was about a 6 percentage point gap between blacks and whites in voter registration and a 10 percentage point difference in voting.

The voting disparity is particularly disturbing when one remembers that literally thousands of Americans—of all races—struggled in the 1960s so that the right to vote would be guaranteed to us all. Some gave their lives in that great cause. We all remember Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mississippi NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was also cut down by an assassin's bullet in the driveway of his own home. Youthful civil rights workers Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner were abducted and murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan near Philadelphia, Mississippi. Their bodies were dumped under a dam and bulldozed over. Michigan housewife Viola Gregg Liuzzo was shot to death by Klansmen on a deserted Alabama road while shuttling civil rights marchers from Selma to Montgomery.

Because of the suffering of these martyrs and many other nameless Americans who were beaten, jailed, and murdered because they fought to win the franchise for those denied it, today, many millions of Americans have the right to cast ballots to determine who occupies the White House, state houses and city halls, as well as who sits in Congress, on school boards, and the local water commission. People in such countries as Nigeria, Myanmar, and Iraq are making great sacrifices just to walk to a neighborhood school or community center unmolested to do what most Americans take for granted: vote.

The shame is that in the 1994 election, fewer than half of all eligible voters went to at the polls. Worse, about 36 percent of eligible black voters were unregistered, and only about half of those registered actually voted. Even more is at stake this election because the voting public will determine who will be president for the next four years and which political party will control Congress. These choices will affect a myriad of issues ranging from federal spending for social programs and tax policies to who will be appointed to fill future Supreme Court vacancies. Since these and other issues affect every American, can any eligible voter in good conscience afford not to vote?

It comes down to personal responsibility. Voting remains the best way to preserve our democracy and is the most potent political tool available to minority Americans, especially black Americans. Thanks to the heroic acts of people who helped win the right to vote for disenfranchised Americans three decades ago, voting this year won't take much courage, just a little time. ■



PRESIDENT

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Blacks and Democrats: An Imperfect Alliance

Democrats Need a Strong Black Turnout at the Polls in November to Hold on to the White House and Regain Control of Congress

by David Bositis

This election year, as much as at any time in history, the political interests of African Americans and those of the Democratic Party have converged in an informal alliance that is helping to push President Clinton into the first reelection victory of a Democratic president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Much of the impetus for this black support, however, comes from outside the party. Republican members of the 104th Congress, especially Speaker Newt Gingrich and the House GOP freshmen, have so energized and galvanized black opinion against their policies and programs that more support for the Democrats has been generated than at any time in recent memory. But Clinton will need a big turnout of black voters at the polls to capitalize on black dissatisfaction with the GOP. To accomplish this, he will have to overcome black concerns over Clinton's policies on welfare and other issues.

Clinton has had an uneven relationship with African Americans since the 1992 election campaign, when he ran as a "New Democrat," advocating some positions that were unpopular with African Americans in his party. For example, he supported the death penalty and permitted the execution of two convicts in Arkansas during 1992. Furthermore, his promise to "end welfare as we know it" was not well received by many. On election day, Clinton got 82 percent of the black vote—substantial support, but the lowest of any Democratic nominee since John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Following the election, relations between Clinton and black Americans warmed significantly. Clinton chose Vernon Jordan to lead his transition team and once in office, he made four black appointments to his cabinet—all in departments that had never been headed by African Americans: Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, and Veterans' Affairs. One of Clinton's campaign promises was to have an administration that "looked like America," and for the most part, he has kept that promise, appointing record numbers of women, blacks and other minorities to administration positions.

The president's high levels of black support are also due to his sharp differences with congressional Republicans following the 1994 elections. After the GOP assumed control of Congress, Clinton spent much of 1995 drawing contrasts between his policies and House Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America." The year culminated in several presidential vetoes and two GOP-engineered government shutdowns. Clinton's defense of affirmative action and his support for a minimum-wage increase, and (more modest) health care reform in 1996 have further cemented his relationship with black voters.

Long-Term Loyalty

The black affinity for the Democratic Party is broad and long-term. Joint Center national surveys conducted between 1984 and 1996 have confirmed a strong and relatively stable identification of African Americans with the Democratic party. In the Joint Center's January 1996 survey, 81 percent of blacks identified with the Democratic party, while Republican identification stood at less than 9 percent.

This high level of black attachment to the Democratic party is now more than three decades old. Prior to Roosevelt's New Deal, a majority of voting blacks were Republicans, since the GOP was, after all, the "party of Lincoln." But even as support shifted to the Democratic party during the Roosevelt era, the decades between 1930 and 1960 saw the black presidential vote for Republicans remaining in the range of 23 to 39 percent (President Dwight Eisenhower received 39 percent of the black vote in his 1956 reelection bid).

The initiatives of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in pushing for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as Johnson's Great Society programs, brought an increase in black support for the Democratic Party in the 1960s to levels that have since been sustained. On the other side of the political ledger was the Republican party's sharp turn to a more conservative posture—especially in espousing "states' rights"—a position African Americans associate with southern segregationists. Republican presidential nominees, including Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, have used states' rights and other racially tinged appeals to court white southerners.

Clinton Favored Over Dole

Recent polls confirm that the decades-old loyalty that African Americans have had for the Democratic Party is still strong. For example, the Joint Center's national survey released in January revealed that 87.6 percent of the black respondents had favorable attitudes toward Clinton, while only 9.1 percent had unfavorable attitudes. Dole was viewed by African Americans more unfavorably (48.0 percent) than favorably (30.8 percent). In what was then a hypothetical election match-up, survey respondents preferred Clinton to Dole by 85 to 6 percent. Even among black Republicans, Clinton defeated Dole 46 to 41 percent.

Continued on page 4

Dr. Bositis is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.

Blacks and the Democratic Party

Continued from page 3

Of perhaps equal or greater direct importance to black political participation is the impact this election will have on Democratic control of the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as control of numerous state legislatures where black members are important elements of Democratic membership and leadership.

The Republican takeover of the U.S. Congress ushered in a period of unprecedented change and turmoil for the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Most African American legislators had had no experience with a GOP-controlled House of Representatives, since it had been 40 years since the last one occurred. While Republicans trumpeted the election of a second black Republican representative, J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, for black politics the more relevant outcome of the 1994 midterm election was the CBC's significant loss of power. The 38 black Democrats in the CBC, in changing from majority to minority status, lost three full committee chairmanships (Armed Services, Government Operations, and Post Office and Civil Service), and 17 subcommittee chairmanships.

Nationwide, the black voting-age population numbers approximately 22 million. Clinton and the Democrats are obviously hoping for a large turnout of black voters. Dole and Republicans generally, have to view a large black turnout with some concern. According to exit polls, black voters made up 8 percent of the actual electorate in 1984, 1988, and 1992. However, they represented a much greater share of the Democratic presidential candidates' votes: 18 percent of Walter Mondale's total in 1984, 15 percent of Michael Dukakis's total in 1988, and 15 percent of Clinton's total in 1992.

In 1992, African Americans represented a key voting bloc in many of the states won by Clinton. These states include most of the major battleground states this year—Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Louisiana, Ohio, New Jersey, Missouri, and Tennessee. Half of Clinton's vote in Louisiana in 1992 was black, as was 40 percent of his votes in Georgia, one-third in Maryland, and one-fourth in Illinois.

Congress and the Black Vote

The black vote also will be crucial to the Democrats regaining control of the House of Representatives. The Democrats must not only reelect their incumbent members, but must also win in a number of open seats being vacated by retiring legislators and defeat a portion of the GOP freshman class.

Obviously, the impact of the black vote in U.S. House races depends largely on the size of the black voting-age population in each congressional district. Of the 435 congressional districts in the country, 101 have voting-age populations that are at least 15 percent black. Currently, Republican House members represent 26 of those districts.

More than 90 percent of all black voters reside in 20 states and the District of Columbia. The eligible black electorate exceeds 20 percent of the total electorate in six southern states: Mississippi (31.6%), Georgia (24.6%), Louisiana (27.9%), Alabama (22.7%), South Carolina (26.9%), North Carolina (20.1%). In many states with large black voting-age populations, the size of the black turnout will be critical to the election of statewide Democratic candidates running for governor and the U.S. Senate.

Whether black voters will turnout in large numbers is an open question. According to U.S. Census Bureau studies, in 1992, 63.9 percent of African Americans reported being registered and 54 percent reported voting. This compares to the respective white rates of 70.1 percent registration and 63.9 percent voting. Thus, the gap between white and black electorates in the 1992 election was 6.2 percent in registration and 9.9 percent in turnout.

Black turnout varied tremendously among the states where black voters are concentrated, ranging from a low of 43.4 percent in New York to a high of 71.5 percent in Louisiana. In three states (Tennessee, Louisiana, and California) black turnout exceeded white turnout—in Tennessee by a substantial 8.1 percentage points. In quite a few states, black turnout was not only low—near or below 50 percent—but much lower than white turnout. Arkansas, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut were the worst states in this regard.

At the present time, President Clinton has solid leads in all of these states. But even if this lead holds over the remainder of the campaign, raising the level of black turnout in these states is absolutely critical to House and Senate elections.

Limited Choice

All indications are that for most African American voters, the essential choice of the 1996 elections is between President Clinton and the Democrats, on the one hand, and on the other, Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, and the activist Republican freshman class in the House. For most black voters that is no choice at all, which is the reason the Democrats are so well positioned among African Americans. A fear that pervades the black community is a Dole administration working with Republican House Speaker Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott to undo black social, economic, and political gains of the past 30 years. Further, should Clinton lose the election, many fear that the Supreme Court, with new conservative nominees, would backpeddle on civil rights even more than it already has in the past four years.

The up-side of a Clinton win, coupled with the Democrats retaking the House, would be a major resurgence of black power with CBC members potentially chairing or playing key roles in several major committees: Ways and Means, Economic and Educational Opportunities, Judiciary, and National Security. Some believe that a strong CBC in the 105th Congress would aggressively promote an agenda that focuses on urban programs, anti-poverty initiatives, and a renewed and strengthened commitment to civil rights. ■

Editor's note: For an analysis of "African Americans and the GOP in 1996," see the June/July issue of FOCUS.

SEPTEMBER 1996

TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

Congressional Elections: New Faces and Tough Races

by David C. Ruffin

When the 105th Congress convenes next January, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) will begin the legislative session with several new members who were not on Capitol Hill at the beginning of the 104th Congress. The Caucus will have experienced an unprecedented seven departures, including the resignations of **KWEISI MFUME** from Baltimore, **MEL REYNOLDS** from Chicago, and **WALTER TUCKER** from Compton, California, during this term. In special elections over the last year, these legislators have been replaced by **ELIJAH CUMMINGS**, **JESSE JACKSON, Jr.**, and **JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD**, respectively (see the February/March and May issues of *FOCUS*).

CBC members who decided not to run for reelection include **CARDISS COLLINS** of Chicago and **HAROLD FORD** of Memphis, both veterans of 11 terms in Congress, as well as two-termer **CLEO FIELDS** from Louisiana, who lost more than half of the black voters in his congressional district when federal courts ordered that it be redrawn. Six-year incumbent **BARBARA-ROSE COLLINS**, representing Detroit in Michigan's 15th congressional district, was defeated in her August 6 primary by State Rep. **CAROLYN C. KILPATRICK**.

The electoral outcomes for three of the seats being vacated by outgoing black members of Congress are fairly predictable. Cardiss Collins' seat is all but certain to go to black Cook County Commissioner **DANNY DAVIS,** Harold Ford will likely be succeeded by his son **HAROLD FORD Jr.**, and Carolyn Kilpatrick can be assured of winning the seat now held by Barbara-Rose Collins. Davis, Kilpatrick, and Ford, all Democrats, are running in majority-black districts that are overwhelmingly Democratic.

Other congressional elections this November present possibilities for both gains and losses in the Senate and the House. One of the most publicized races is the rematch between GOP North Carolina archconservative Senator **JESSE HELMS** and black challenger **HARVEY GANTT**, the former Democratic mayor of Charlotte (see chart below). Gantt came within three percentage points of unseating Helms in 1990.

A major battlefield state for House races is Georgia, where the majority-black districts of two-term black incumbents **CYNTHIA McKINNEY** and **SANFORD BISHOP** were dramatically redrawn in accordance with a Supreme Court decision that charged they were racially gerrymandered. Although these districts—newly created in 1991—were stripped down

1996 Congressional races to watch

U.S. House of Representatives

State	District	Major city	Black pop.		Candidates
Colorado	1	Denver	13%	Open Seat	**Joe Rogers** (R) vs Diana DeGette (D)
Georgia	2	Albany	35		**Sanford Bishop** (D) (Incumbent) vs Darrel Earlum (R)
	4	Decatur	32		**Cynthia McKinney** (D) (Incumbent) vs John Mitnick (R)
Illinois	7	Chicago	60	Open Seat	**Danny Davis** (D) vs Randy Borow (R)
Indiana	10	Indianapolis	27	Open Seat	**Julia Carson** (D) vs Virginia Blankenbaker (R)
Michigan	15	Detroit	68	Open Seat	**Carolyn C. Kilpatrick** (D) vs Steve Hume (R)
Mississippi	4	Jackson	37		**Kevin Antoine** (D) vs Mike Parker (R) (Incumbent)
Tennessee	9	Memphis	54	Open Seat	**Harold E. Ford Jr.** (D) vs **Rod DeBerry** (R)

Note: Black candidates appear in bold.

so that black voters are now in the minority, both incumbents won their primaries to the surprise of some political experts. Both Bishop and McKinney still face tough contests against Republican challengers in November's general election.

In Mississippi, black urban planner and former Air Force captain **KEVIN ANTOINE** is taking on white incumbent Democrat-turned-Republican **MIKE PARKER,** who represents Jackson in the 4th district. This is an uphill race for Antoine, who is focusing his campaign on African American voters, who make up 37 percent of the district, while reaching out for support from white Democrats.

Contests involving black contenders for open seats will also be hard-fought. Democratic state senator **JULIA CARSON** is vying for Indiana's 10th district (Indianapolis) left open by the retirement of Democrat **ANDREW JACOBS** after 15 terms. Carson will have to beat Republican **VIRGINIA BLANKENBAKER**, who is white and a former state senator, to win the seat, which has never been held by an African American. Black Republican attorney **JOE ROGERS** is facing off against white Democratic state representative **DIANA DeGETTE** for Colorado's 1st congressional district, which is being vacated by retiring Democratic Congresswoman **PAT SCHROEDER**.

Redistricting Update

Lawsuits challenging majority-black congressional districts have continued to threaten black incumbents throughout the country, including those in states outside the South, such as New York and Illinois. But the most imperiled districts are in the South. This year, federal courts overturned redistricting plans in five southern states, ruling that several majority-minority congressional districts were unconstitutional because race was a dominant factor in drawing their boundaries.

With a black population of 32 percent, Louisiana's new court-imposed district plan contains only one majority-black district out of seven—the 2nd district in New Orleans, represented by **WILLIAM JEFFERSON**. The 4th district, which had been 63 percent black, had its black population cut in half, inducing incumbent Cleo Fields to decide not to run for a third term.

Fields is the first casualty of the legal assault on majority-black districts that began with the Supreme Court's *Shaw* v *Reno* ruling on the North Carolina redistricting plan in 1993. In April, the courts also scrapped Florida's congressional district plan. When the state legislature subsequently redrew black Congresswoman **CORRINE BROWN**'s 3rd district, the percentage of black voters was reduced from 50.3 to about 43 percent.

Similarly, a June Supreme Court ruling ordered that 13 of Texas's 30 districts be redrawn. The majority-black districts represented by black incumbents **EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON** of Dallas and **SHEILA JACKSON-LEE** of Houston both lost black voters—Johnson's district went from 49 percent to 44 and Jackson-Lee's from 51 percent to 45. They will have to face Republican opponents in the November 5 election, running in districts that were just formed on August 6. Jackson-Lee will face management consultant **LARRY WHITE,** and Johnson will be opposed by sales executive **JOHN HENDRY.** Nevertheless, Johnson and Jackson-Lee, as well as Corrine Brown of Florida, are expected to win reelection because their core support was retained in their reconstituted districts.

Black North Carolina representatives **EVA CLAYTON** and **MELVIN WATT** will run for reelection in their districts as they are currently drawn, but the courts have ordered that the North Carolina plan be redrawn in 1997. From the end of the nineteenth century until majority-black congressional districts were created after the 1990 census, no African Americans had been able to win congressional elections in Alabama, Florida, Virginia, or the Carolinas.

But the loss of African American voters in these recently created majority-black districts may not necessarily signal the decline of black congressional representation from the South. Over the past four years, voters in these states have received competent representation in Congress from African Americans who have provided services to any constituent seeking help regardless of race. In light of this experience, white voters may rethink their historical refusal to vote for black candidates.

But the legal challenges to majority-black districts that jeopardize African American political participation are expected to continue. A court challenge to revise the boundaries of Virginia's 3rd district (Richmond), represented by **ROBERT SCOTT,** was heard this month, with a ruling to be handed down at a later date. Further challenges are expected to be levelled against state legislative, judicial, county, and city council districts and wards. ■

ECONOMIC REPORT

Black Household Income Rose and Poverty Declined in 1994

In 1994, black median household income actually increased by 5 percent to $21,027 during a time when total household income for all Americans rose by less than 1 percent. Nevertheless, black household income remains at about 60 percent of the value of median household income for whites.

Although median household income continues to rise for blacks and other groups, the gains have not been sufficient to compensate for inflation. Overall real median household income (figure 1), which adjusts for changes in the cost of living, remains less than 1 percent higher than it was twenty years ago. Real median income was actually lower in 1994 than it was five years earlier for white, black, Hispanic, and Asian households, with black households having the lowest median income of any of these other groups, as was the case in 1989.

The number of poor families decreased 340,000 between 1993 and 1994, and the poverty rate for families fell from 12.3 to 11.6 percent. While the poverty rate for black families declined from 29.4 to 25.6 percent between 1993 and 1994, it remains more than three times the rate for white families (8.1 percent).

Health Care and Pension Reform Passed

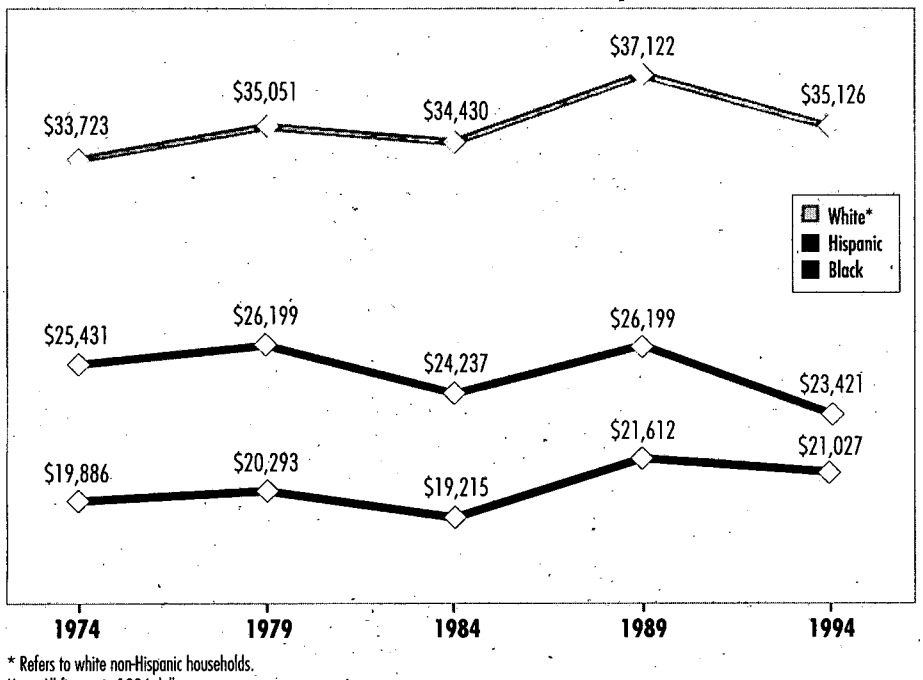
In August, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the minimum wage bill and the Kennedy-Kassebaum health care bill, which contain several provisions that are likely to affect millions of American workers. The best known, and most contentious, of these provisions is the increase in the federal minimum wage from $4.25 to $4.75 per hour effective October 1, 1996, and then to $5.15 an hour on September 1, 1997. As discussed in the June/July *FOCUS*, this increase is expected to benefit more than 10 million low-wage workers, 1.5 million of whom are black.

The minimum wage bill also contains provisions that could significantly increase pension coverage and benefits for as many as 10 million workers, according to estimates from the U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics data suggests that almost 60 percent of all workers (about 83 million individuals) are currently without pension coverage. The lack of pension coverage is particularly acute for workers in small firms (fewer than 100 employees) where only about 25 percent of workers are covered, compared to 75 percent of workers at large firms (more than 1,000 employees). Taking steps toward improving pension coverage and benefits is vitally important to the long-term well-being of the almost 3.5 million black workers without pensions.

The minimum wage legislation would simplify rules for employers who want to establish a pension by significantly reducing the costs of doing so. It is hoped that an increase in coverage will result. Small employers will now be able to establish a new 401(k)-type plan called a NEST (National Employee Savings Trust) by filing just a one-page form. The legislation also relaxes family aggregation rules so that each family member working in a business is treated the same as an unrelated individual in terms of the maximum allowable tax-deferred contribution to a pension. Consequently, small businesses run by a husband and wife or more than one family member will be able to set more aside. In return for easing these rules, small

FIGURE 1

Real median household income by race



* Refers to white non-Hispanic households.
Note: All figures in 1994 dollars.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

employers with NEST plans would agree to match worker contributions of up to 3 percent of pay or contribute 2 percent of pay for all workers (up to $6,000) regardless of whether they participate in the pension savings plan.

Large businesses and tax-exempt organizations would also be allowed to establish the popular 401(k) pension plans more easily. Large employers establishing 401(k) plans under the simplified and relaxed "nondiscrimination rules" (provisions that prohibit firms from favoring highly paid employees) would need to agree to contribute 3 percent of pay for all workers or match contributions dollar for dollar on the first 3 percent of pay and pay 50 cents on the dollar for the next 2 percent (up to $9,500). Because workers are more likely to contribute to plans with an employer match, it is expected that more workers will end up with pension savings when they retire.

The second piece of legislation is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (Kennedy-Kassebaum bill), which would ensure that workers who left their jobs could continue to receive health coverage without regard to any pre-existing medical conditions. This legislation also prohibits health insurance plans from dropping group coverage for sick employees or for a business with sick employees and requires them to make individual coverage available to those who leave group plans.

Increasing access to private health insurance is critically important for blacks because 50 percent of them are covered by private health insurance (compared to 74 percent of whites) and because they are 40 percent more likely than whites to be uninsured. While this bill falls short of the comprehensive health care reform debated in 1994, it is a step toward easing "job lock," which keeps an estimated 25 million workers from pursuing better opportunities for fear of losing their health care coverage.

Connecting Inner City Residents to World of Work

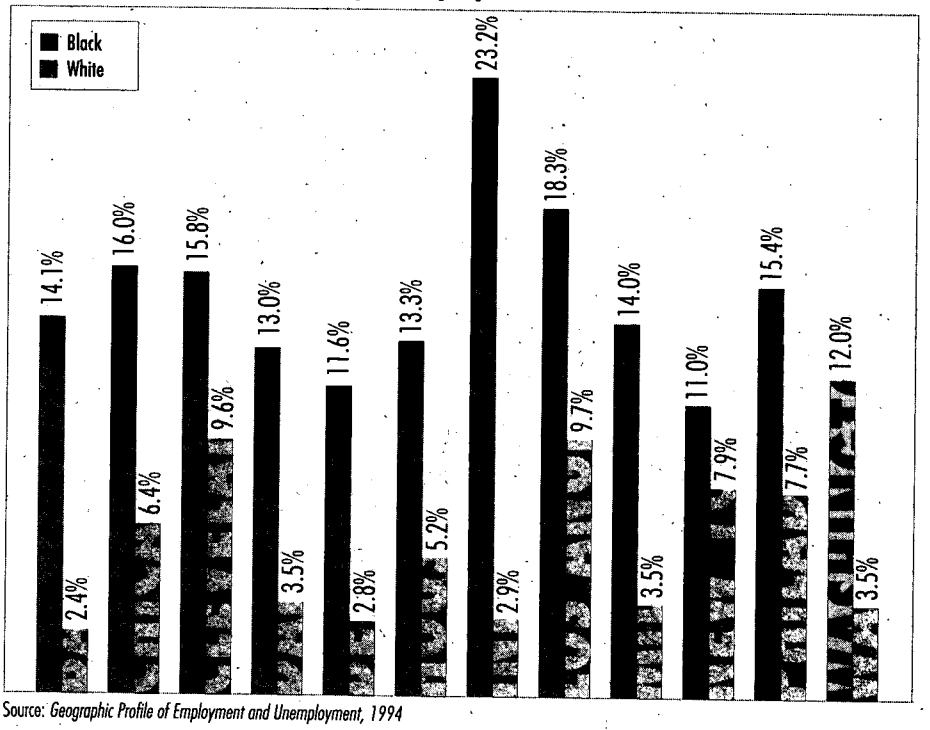
Over the next two to three years, the Rockefeller Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, other foundations, and several state and local governments and community-based organizations, will be undertaking an initiative to see if it is possible to boost employment for inner-city workers through a concentrated set of programs. They will be assisted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, which will provide technical assistance to communities participating in the programs.

Three types of demonstrations will be used: a Jobs-Plus program, which focuses on changing housing and welfare programs to make work more financially rewarding to public housing residents; a Neighborhood Jobs Program, which targets inner-city neighborhoods with the hope that a concentrated employment initiative will change not just individuals but the entire community; and a Competitive Systems Initiative, which involves restructuring traditional employment and training systems to reward positive outcomes through financial incentives to both individuals and placement agencies. The types of work/placement initiatives that will be used are not new but rather have been proven to work in the past.

The Rockefeller Foundation is currently selecting communities that will be participating in the pilot programs. There are likely to be ten to fifteen public housing projects in the Jobs Plus demonstration program, approximately six inner-city neighborhoods in the Neighborhood Jobs Program demonstration, and four metropolitan areas in the Competitive Systems pilot program. ■

FIGURE 2

Central city unemployment rates, 1994



Source: *Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment, 1994*

Black Workers in a Changing Labor Market

The Joint Center Embarks on a New Initiative to Study the Nature of the Jobs Being Created by a Restructuring Economy

by Edward Montgomery

A recent Pew Associate opinion poll showed that more than two-thirds of American voters are very concerned about both their own and their children's labor market prospects. This anxiety is over their ability to finance retirement, maintain their health insurance, and their children's future job opportunities. Underlying this growing insecurity is the widely held public perception that the labor market in the United States economy has undergone a fundamental transformation. Some of the primary factors to which economists attribute these changes are a globalization of the United States economy, rapid technological change, declining unionization, and increased immigration. This transformation, whatever its causes, is viewed as having altered both the nature and consequences of job loss and the economy's ability to create sufficient numbers of good high-paying jobs in the future.

The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that between January 1993 and December 1995, 8.4 million workers lost their jobs due to plant closures or downsizing. Today's heightened anxiety over the economy may have been influenced not only by this overall level of job loss but by the fact that corporate giants such as AT&T, General Motors, IBM, Kodak, and others have announced massive reorganizations with the attendant layoffs of thousands of workers. Further, the federal government and many states have engaged in moves to downsize their work forces. Since government workers, and those at large companies, traditionally have expected to spend their whole careers with their respective employers, it is not surprising that a view has taken hold that the world has changed. Further, since government employment represents a large share of black middle class jobs, it would not be surprising to find even more anxiety among blacks and other minorities about their job security and employment prospects.

This anxiety has led politicians at both the local and national levels to focus on the question of whether the United States economy can deliver sufficient numbers of good jobs now and in the future. This question is particularly important for blacks who have historically been the first to lose their jobs when downsizing occurs and the last to gain employment when the economy expands.

While job loss among white-collar workers has captured the media's attention, it does not give a complete picture of the labor market. Although job losses among these workers is an important issue, job loss among blue-collar or lower skilled workers should also remain an important concern. Also critical is that the employment picture depends not only on whether workers are more likely to lose a job, but also on their prospects for finding new employment. Thus, job creation in a growing economy is as vital an issue as job loss. Finally, not all jobs are created equal—the level of pay and benefits varies widely and is critically important in assessing the labor market.

As an institution that focuses on strategies for moving African Americans into the economic mainstream, the Joint Center has committed itself to research that will help policymakers to develop effective strategies to facilitate blacks' access to the good jobs of the 21st century. An important first step in this process is to develop an understanding of just how the labor market of the 1990s is different from that of the 1950s and 1960s. This article reviews major changes in the United States labor market and what they mean for African Americans.

The Changing Labor Market

The United States has experienced a dramatic transformation in the types of jobs that workers have had since World War II. There has been a significant shift in goods-producing jobs, such as those in manufacturing, which have been supplanted by service type employment. While 42 percent of the work force was employed in goods-producing industries in 1940, only 20 percent are today. Service sector employment has grown from about 40 percent of employment in 1940 to almost 80 percent of all employment today. As is illustrated by the movement from agriculture to manufacturing in the first half of the 20th century, such large shifts in the labor market are not necessarily bad for workers in general or blacks in particular. While a third of the black work force, and almost 20 percent of the overall work force, was employed in agriculture in 1940, less than 3 percent of either group currently works in that sector. That shift was associated with a dramatic rise in average earnings for workers and a reduction in the black/white income gap.

While the decline of agriculture and the rise in manufacturing were associated with rising earnings for the American worker and declining inequality for blacks, recent data suggest that the decline in manufacturing and the rise of the service sector may have had an unfavorable impact on earnings and wage equality. Between 1973 and 1993, real average hourly earnings in the United States actually fell by almost 14 percent. Not only has the level of real earnings declined, but there has been a dramatic increase in wage

Continued on page 6

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Continued from page 5

inequality in the United States. According to a 1994 National Bureau for Economic Research study, between 1973 and 1993, the gap in earnings between the top 10 percent of wage and salary earners and the bottom 10 percent increased by about 18 percent for men and almost 25 percent for women. Further, between 1980 and 1994, the gap between the average earnings of college and high school graduates increased by more than 50 percent. A February 1992 *Quarterly Journal of Economics* article by John Bound and Richard Freeman revealed that the earnings of both college- and high school-educated black men have actually declined relative to their white peers since 1975.

Economic Insecurity: Who Should be Concerned

Although there is strong evidence of a change in the earnings structure, several recent studies have failed to find much evidence of a significant change in overall job loss or job security. Despite extensive media attention on layoffs and downsizing at large corporations and their effect on college-educated or white-collar male workers, all of these studies find relatively small increases in job loss rates for these groups since the early 1970s. Those studies that have looked at the likelihood of having a long-term job have also found that there has been little, if any, change since 1973 in the likelihood that highly educated male workers will hold a long-term job (10 or 20 years). These studies do find, however, that to the degree job security has diminished, the reduction has occurred primarily for blue-collar workers or high school dropouts or graduates. Further, while job loss rates for college-educated males and females may have increased slightly since the mid-1980s, they have not increased more than those for less educated workers. The likelihood that a highly educated worker will lose his or her job is still appreciably lower than is the case for less educated workers.

These studies provide little evidence about what has happened to blacks over this period. Since they are overrepresented in blue-collar occupations and are less likely to be college graduates, it is likely that they have suffered a greater increase in job loss. Strikingly, a September 1994 National Bureau for Economic Research paper found that to the extent job security (retention) has changed over time blacks have suffered a bigger reduction in job security than either blue-collar workers as a whole or college-educated workers. Further, Robert Fairlie and Lori Kletzer, from the University of California at Santa Cruz, found in their 1995 study that while job loss may have become more of a problem in the labor market, it remains the case that African Americans are about 30 percent more likely to be displaced from their jobs due to a plant closing or corporate downsizing than white workers. In addition, as Henry Farber states in a May 1996 National Bureau of Economic Research paper, once blacks are laid off, they also tend to have a harder time finding a new job or they remain unemployed longer than whites. Further, any new jobs that they find tend—even more so than is the case for whites—to be at a lower wage relative to their old jobs. Thus, while the economic costs of these transformations in the United States economy may have risen for whites, it remains the case that blacks suffer at a dramatically higher rate from such transformations.

While the incidence of job loss may have increased for blacks, it is important to remember that their employment prospects also depend on the economy's ability to create new jobs. In a dynamic economy, while some firms or companies are laying off workers, others in the same industries are creating new jobs. The fact that job loss and job creation co-exist simultaneously can be seen by the fact that despite the reductions in government employment and the layoffs at some major corporations in the 1990s, the United States managed to increase *total* employment by more than 8.5 million people since 1993. This job creation has been large enough to accommodate the growth in the labor force and to actually reduce unemployment for both blacks and whites during this period.

Job Creation: A Joint Center Agenda

While blacks' share of recent job growth has been sufficient to lower their unemployment rate to levels not seen in more than a decade, little is known about the nature of the jobs currently being created. Are these high wage and benefit jobs as an April 1996 Council of Economic Advisers report claims, or are they low-wage, hamburger flipper jobs as critics contend? Even if the majority are good jobs, questions remain: Are African Americans getting their share of good jobs or have their employment gains occurred only in low-paying occupations and industries? What skills do black workers need to compete for the jobs of the future? What, if anything, can federal, state, and local governments do to stimulate job growth and see to it that blacks share in these gains? The Joint Center, through its economic policy program, is committed to pursuing the answers to these questions and to developing effective public policies that ensure that blacks are in a position to take advantage of the opportunities posed in the changing United States labor market.

Unfortunately, the current evidence is inconclusive at best. According to a study by Randy Ilg that appeared in the June 1996 *Monthly Labor Review,* while all of the net employment growth between 1989 and 1995 can be attributed to job gains in two low-paying industries, services and retail trade, the high-paying managerial and professional occupations account for 75 percent of the employment change. Overall, the job growth appears to be occurring at the top and the bottom of the pay scale with middle earnings jobs declining. ■

Tales of Survival

A New Book Chronicles the Lives of a Diverse Collection of Young Black Men as They Make Their Way in America

by Marland E. Buckner Jr.

Young black men in America are a hot topic these days. Media reports frequently feature some nameless brother committing a heinous crime or otherwise behaving like a menace to society. Stories detailing soaring homicide and suicide rates feed the stereotype that black youth are predators and embodiments of black America's decay or that they are helpless, hapless victims of intractable social problems. Darrell Dawsey's recently published *Living to Tell About It: Young Black Men in America Speak Their Piece* relentlessly assaults these "either-or" categories. The words and stories of black men, aged 15 to 24, from radically different walks of life across America form the core of the book. Their diversity lays to rest a host of clichés.

Dawsey's bottom line is this: "We get shot and jailed, yes, but so do we continue to enroll in college, marry and raise productive children. So do we start businesses, respect our elders and clean our yards.... Our lives are complex." Dawsey provides evidence of hope and happiness amid this diversity, but make no mistake, this is not a manual for an "everything's gonna be alright" sensitivity session; there is enough rage, lunacy, and despair present to depress even the most steadfast optimist. The book won't make you happy, but by the end you'll have a clearer sense of what's really going on among young black men.

Dawsey, a 27-year-old writer/journalist, introduces chapters dealing with childhood, parenthood, neighborhood, sex, work, and violence, with his own reflections, before moving to those of his subjects. His own experiences figure prominently. Dawsey was raised by his mother in an urban environment full of violence and tragedy, much of which he experienced firsthand. But his eventual success as a Wayne State University graduate and reporter in Detroit and Los Angeles also reflects the hope to which many of his subjects testify.

And what subjects they are. Dawsey's crew is the most diverse imaginable. All manner of young men are present. New York rapper Notorious B.I.G. and Harvard graduate John Copeland from Miami share the stage with Victor Brownfield, convicted dope dealer from Omaha, Nebraska. The contrasting personalities are presented in no particular order. The unmitigated despair of one interviewee is followed by the boundless optimism of another, producing a kind of emotional dissonance that illustrates diversity and neutralizes superficial classifications.

Listen, for example, to nineteen-year-old Anthony Meyers, unemployed, self-professed Christian crack dealer (that's right) from Long Beach, California: "Like if I get a dime sale [ten dollar crack deal], when they [women] give it to me and they got kids who're crying, I'll just give the kids whatever they need. Or I'll give the mom two or three dollars." This preposterous contradiction is followed by a profile of 23-year-old New Yorker Sean "Puffy" Combs, CEO of Bad Boy records and millionaire who claims, "It's not something that happened overnight... I worked hard." A few pages later we meet Jay Adande, 22 year-old Northwestern University graduate and reporter at the *Chicago Sun-Times* who insists, "I know there's a history of racism in this country and it's not set up for black people to succeed. But I believe anyone can do anything, and it's been proven time and time again."

Adande's cheerful middle-class optimism is tempered by the struggles of Eddie Burnside, a decent, persevering 24-year-old policeman in Jackson, Mississippi, who says, "Yeah, it hurts sometimes to see [drug dealers] making a thousand dollars a day, and I am making a little over a thousand dollars a month. But I can go somewhere and I don't have to watch my back. I can go home and sleep at night...."

Dawsey is not simply concerned with demonstrating diversity among young black men. Through his depiction of their struggle to endure, he hopes to make a larger point about American culture, namely that it has targeted young black men for termination through various means including drugs, violence, and incarceration. Much of this belief is expressed as rage, born of personal experience, which appears to cloud his judgment. His apparent embrace of popular conspiracy theories suggests a victimology where survival, and nothing more, is all that can be achieved. Dawsey might do well to heed the words in a popular rap song, "It's not a white man's finger on the trigger," or, in some cases, the bottle, the needle, or the pipe.

Nonetheless, Dawsey's work is a superb starting point for a conversation about the status of young black men in America. He gives us the names, faces, and voices behind the headlines and statistics that so often present young black men as monolithic. He urges us to confront stereotypes about black men, even as he embraces many about American culture. *Living to Tell About It* is a serious book and deserves a wide audience. It is a vivid, collective biography written with a passion entirely appropriate to its subject matter: survival. ■

Mr. Buckner is the Southern Education Board Doctoral Fellow in American Studies at the College of William and Mary and a research analyst at the Joint Center.

Center for Urban Policy Tracks Devolution

The "New Federalism" revolution that began during the administration of President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s has gained enormous momentum since the 1994 congressional elections. "Devolution" is now one of the favored terms for what is a massive effort to shift responsibility for social, economic, and environmental safety nets from Washington to state and local governments.

A recent illustration is President Clinton's decision to sign a comprehensive Welfare bill that would eliminate the federal guarantee of cash assistance for the nation's poorest children. New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani estimates that the cuts in welfare will cost his city alone $900 million a year—an additional burden that could be ruinous, given imbalances between projected city spending and revenues.

With this transfer of control to the states, the voices of the communities (predominantly minority) likely to be most negatively affected could be muted in state policy deliberations. State governments have, at best, an uneven record of representing minority interests, and because most African Americans and Hispanics live in the central cities, urban-suburban political rifts have had far-reaching negative consequences for the representation of minority interests in state legislatures.

For example, state governments sanctioned the creation of suburban municipal jurisdictions that, many argue, have isolated central cities politically and cut them off from needed revenue sources. Suburban-led movements to reduce property taxes have also placed severe limits on property tax revenue, forcing localities to cut back on social programs with disproportionately negative consequences for minority communities.

The urban-suburban rift in state politics has certainly hurt minority interests, but current federal policy, proposing to consolidate social programs into block grants to the states while cutting overall funding for social services, will be even worse. According to a 1995 study by the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the reduction in federal funding will cause many states to radically downsize or even eliminate some social programs, resulting in increased competition for funding between the various service providers, recipients, and advocates.

Recognizing the severity of current and proposed cuts in state funding, several community organizations and educational institutions are committing their resources to developing an understanding of the state budget process and fiscal issues. Some organizations are getting their communities involved in the state budget process, but the number of such groups representing historically underrepresented groups is small.

"New Voices in State Policy"

The "New Voices in State Policy" program at the Barnard Columbia Center for Urban Policy (BCCUP) was designed to lay the groundwork for better nationwide coordination of these activities. Its objective is to identify African American and Hispanic groups across the nation that have an interest in state fiscal policy analysis and alternative program development and to assess their strengths and weaknesses in those areas. A survey soliciting both capacity-related information and organization referrals is currently underway. The BCCUP's goal is to bring together an advisory council of state policy experts to digest the survey findings and develop programs to train grassroots organizations in policymaking involving the budget process.

Organizations interested in or currently conducting state policy analyses are encouraged to contact the BCCUP for more information or to receive a questionnaire at: Barnard Columbia Center for Urban Policy, 3009 Broadway, New York, NY 10027-6598
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