

What Should be Done For Those Who Have Been Left Behind?

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The gods have been good to America. The political system has remained stable, and the country is prospering economically. More and more Americans are enjoying a standard of living that is the envy of all the world. Improvements in our economic well-being have brought with them the sense of freedom and fulfillment that comes from being able to enjoy the things that money can buy—travel, leisure, cars, and beautiful homes.

In the midst of plenty, however, problems persist. Perhaps the most glaring is the presence in our urban centers of communities known as ghettos. The persons living in the typical ghetto are black, but even more significantly poor. Many are on welfare, and even those who work tend to receive salaries that place them beneath the poverty line. As a consequence, the housing stock is old and dilapidated, retail establishments scarce, crime rates high, gangs rampant, drugs in surplus, and jobs in short supply.

Living under such adverse conditions tests the human spirit. It demands resiliency and ingenuity, and a fair measure of faith. The survivors are strong and determined individuals, who through hard work and the elemental bonds of love and friendship have made a life in the inner city for themselves and their families. The ghetto is their home. It has also been home for some of America's most talented writers and artists. Yet alongside these individual truths is a collective one, vividly and poignantly described by James Baldwin almost forty years ago in *A Letter from a Region of My Mind*. The ghettos of America were produced by the most blatant racial exclusionary practices. They isolate and

concentrate the most disadvantaged, and through this very isolation and concentration perpetuate and magnify that disadvantage.

Since Baldwin first wrote, many blacks have prospered and left the ghetto. Some have made their homes in racially integrated neighborhoods; others, perhaps the bulk, have settled in what have become black middle-class



neighborhoods. This exodus, and the emergence of the black middle class, is among the great achievements of our recent history. At the same time, however, the departure of these families from the ghetto has left behind a community that is even more impoverished than before simply because those with the economic means fled. On top of that, manufacturing jobs, one of the traditional sources of employment in the ghetto, have moved to the suburbs or to developing countries. As a result, the destructive dynam-

ics of ghetto life that Baldwin so powerfully depicted in 1962 have become only more intense. As the institution that isolates and concentrates the most destitute, the urban ghettos of America have created and promise to perpetuate a sector of the black community known as the underclass.

Many remedies for this betrayal of our egalitarian ideals have been proposed, some even tried. All are imperfect. The disparity between the magnitude of the problems and the modesty of proposed remedies is simply overwhelming. The only remedy that has any meaningful chance of success recognizes the ghetto itself as a structure of subordination and seeks to provide those who live within its walls what earlier generations secured for themselves—an opportunity to leave. Pursuing this remedy requires that resources be provided to allow individual families to leave the ghetto and to move to better neighborhoods if they so choose. Such voluntary relocation strategies have been tried with success in the very recent past, though only as pilot programs and only on a limited basis. I believe that we must expand these programs and recognize that they are founded on the most elemental sentiments of justice. They must be seen as a remedy for the role society in general and its agent, the state, have played in constructing these ghettos in the first place.

Providing these resources will have vast economic consequences for the country; it will also impose great human costs. Means might be devised to facilitate moving, and to lessen the disruption of a move. But no matter what, those who take advantage of the option to leave will face substantial hardships in adjusting to new communities, and lose the comfort

and support of neighbors they have known over the years. Those wishing to stay may find that choice effectively removed if many leave. Communities may be broken up, and receiving communities themselves will need to undergo long processes of adjustment. These consequences, like the results of earlier efforts at school desegregation, are disturbing, very disturbing. But they seem inescapable. The only alternative to a program that seeks to expand choice is to condemn a sector of the black community to suffer in perpetuity from the devastating effects of our racial history.

Changes in the Ghetto

Our ghettos were never surrounded by the physical walls that often marked the European ones, but even as late as the 1960s a blend of economics and racial practices produced the same sense of confinement. Few blacks could afford to live anywhere other than densely populated urban neighborhoods with poor housing stock. Public housing projects tended to be located only in black neighborhoods. Those blacks who were better off found it difficult, if not impossible, to move out of these areas because property owners in the more affluent neighborhoods, invariably white, were unwilling to rent or sell to them. Usually the state acquiesced in these exclusionary practices, and sometimes it actively supported them. As late as 1964, the voters of California approved an initiative, the notorious Proposition 13, that reaffirmed the right of property owners to sell or rent to whomever they wished, a measure that was later described by the Supreme Court as a thinly veiled attempt to encourage racial discrimination.

In April 1968, in the immediate wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Congress passed a federal fair-housing law. That law opened opportunities for those who had the economic means to move out of the ghettos into more affluent, typically white neighborhoods. Admittedly, blacks seeking to move had to cope with resistance to that law and considerable informal hostility, brutally portrayed only a decade earlier by Lorraine Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Still, the 1968 law made exodus or movement easier and thus began to chip away at one important source of confinement.

When the fair housing act was initially passed, only a few blacks were able, as a practical matter, to take advantage of their newly expanded freedom. Yet over the next thirty years things began to change. The number of blacks financially able to leave the ghettos increased significantly, thanks to the general growth of the economy and, perhaps even more importantly, to a number of civil rights strategies.

One such strategy consisted of efforts to enlarge educational opportunities. Resources were spread more equitably among schools, and black Americans gained access to some of the better elementary and secondary schools and colleges. The 1954 decision of the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* decreed as much, but it was not until the late-1960s that open resistance to that decision subsided and practical steps, usually under court order, were taken to implement it. The emergence of the black middle class can also be traced to a federal law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment. That law was first enacted in 1964, and full enforcement began in 1968. Affirmative action programs appeared at about the same time. They gave preferential treatment to blacks in employment and also in certain educational sectors that controlled access to the professions and other high-paying careers. As a result of these policies, plus a growing economy, a sector of the black community emerged with the economic means to exercise the freedom conferred under the 1968 fair housing law.

Moving to a better neighborhood is part of the American dream. It is hard to leave friends and familiar surroundings, but everyone recognizes that the quality of life—vulnerability to crime, the friends and classmates of one's kids, the quality of stores and housing—depends in good part on one's neighborhood. Many people move (provided, of course, they have the economic means to do so), and the new black middle class was no exception to this rule. Most moved to what were then white, middle-class neighborhoods. Some of these stabilized as integrated neighborhoods; others experienced so-called "white flight" and emerged, as I said before, as middle-class black neighborhoods.

Although moving out of the ghetto presumably improved the quality of life

of those who moved, it had an unfortunate effect on the economic and social profile of the community they left. It turned the black ghetto into a community of the most disadvantaged. Surely, some of those who remained might have valued their established relationships above all else and stayed for that very reason; others may have remained for religious or political reasons. My own sense, however, is that, generally speaking, those who stayed were the least mobile. They were the ones who had benefited least from the general growth of the economy or the more specific civil rights policies such as fair employment or affirmative action—the ones who suffered the deepest effects of our long history of racial oppression.

Along with the departure of the black middle class from the ghettos, these communities also suffered an exodus of jobs. Some plants once located in the inner city fell to global competition and closed altogether. Others moved outside the inner city to suburban communities to take advantage of cheaper land, proximity to airports, lower crime rates, and perhaps a workforce that appeared to be better educated or more able. Racial assumptions about the ability of the workforce no doubt played a role in these employer calculations. But given the manifest economic considerations involved, it is hard to believe that race was the only, or even primary factor. In any event, the result was that jobs were leaving just as the most successful in the neighborhood were also leaving. This made the plight of those left behind even worse.

Like the propensity of the upwardly mobile to move to better neighborhoods, commuting to work is a familiar American tradition. The hour commute from Stamford, Connecticut, to New York's financial district is familiar. Those who remained in the ghetto were not, however, readily able to adapt to the relocation of jobs by this means. Some jobs left the country altogether, and commuting to the suburbs was difficult, in some cases impossible. The distances were long, the pay was insufficient to cover the costs of whatever transportation might exist, and working outside one's immediate neighborhood was especially difficult for parents of small children. They wanted to be available for calls from schools and day-care providers.

Ghetto residents also faced a skills mismatch. The economic plight of the inner-city neighborhood parallels that of the United States over the last thirty years—the decline of manufacturing jobs. For America in general, the void has been filled by a growing service sector, which takes the Stamford commuter to Manhattan. But most of these new jobs were unavailable to those left behind in the ghetto, for, almost by definition, they had the lowest educational achievements and little work experience. They were not in position to compete for high-paying jobs in finance or communications. True, entry-level jobs in retail establishments, hotels, and other such service providers remained within reach, but there were few such jobs in their immediate neighborhoods because the residents were poor. One study reported that the ratio of applicants to those hired at fast-food restaurants in Harlem was fourteen-to-one.

We thus confront the fact that over the last thirty years—just as the black middle class has left the ghettos—joblessness in those communities has risen. In the 1980s, William Julius Wilson called attention to the emergence of the black middle class. In 1996, Wilson began his new book, *When Work Disappears*, with this startling observation: “For the first time in the twentieth century, most adults in many inner-city ghetto neighborhoods are not working in a typical week.” To be sure, many of these adults have child-care responsibilities, which is work but which Wilson excluded from his calculus. Also, some account needs to be taken of those who cannot work because of age or disability. Still, the fact that a very large number of the adults in certain urban neighborhoods are jobless is astonishing. It well warrants the stir that Wilson’s book caused.

Joblessness means no income, and it accounts for poverty and dependence on the welfare system, with all the stigmatization and loss of self-esteem such dependence entails. The human impact of joblessness goes even deeper. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, before it, the famed study of Marienthal by Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel, Wilson explained how joblessness deprives people of the patterned set of expectations that teaches discipline, instills our activities with meaning, and provides

a framework for daily life. Individuals without jobs are not only poor; they are less able to cope with life’s challenges and, also, probably pretty bored. Sustained joblessness can lead to activities that are self-destructive and a threat to others, most often neighbors. It might lead individuals to seek such palliatives as drugs and alcohol; or it might lead them to join gangs, which import a structure to ordinary life but pursue antisocial ends.

The contemporary urban ghetto, then, can be seen as the home of the black underclass, a group that suffers from a multitude of disadvantages—above all, joblessness and poverty—that relegate its members to the lowest stratum in society and lock them into it. The concentration of this social group in one relatively compact geographic area intensifies both the deprivation and the barriers to upward mobility. It turns the group upon itself, exposing those in the ghetto to a heightened risk of crime and violence, which impairs the quality of life in the community and creates further incentives for those who are able—both individual families and local businesses—to flee. The sense of isolation increases as the quality of life spirals downward.

Social Resources

Ghettos are not entirely without social resources—from the family to churches and schools—that might counter these dynamics. But these resources all seem too meager given the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, two changes in family structure exacerbate the downward spiral and may well entrench the underclass even more deeply. One is the prevalence in the ghetto of single-parent families; the other is the extreme youth of many of the mothers. Barely able to fend for themselves, teenage mothers are called upon to perform one of the most taxing responsibilities imaginable—instilling their children with socially constructive norms and values, teaching them social skills, and helping them set goals and aspirations. Even parents in more traditional family structures face severe obstacles. Sustained joblessness impairs one’s capacity not only to make material provisions for one’s family but, perhaps even more significantly, to socialize and help in the education of one’s children.

Everyone turns outside the immediate family for help in raising children, and this practice exists in the ghetto. Sometimes the surrogate parent is a grandparent, uncle, or aunt; often it is a neighbor. But the problems of the immediate family—sustained joblessness, or single-parent households, or teenage parents—are often replicated in the extended family. Sometimes these problems are compounded by the scars of the most blatant forms of racism. A grandfather who has been without meaningful work for decades is not likely to be an ideal care provider, let alone a role model, for the child of his sixteen-year-old granddaughter. An aunt who was herself an unmarried mother at age fifteen, and who spent the last decade in a state of dependency, is not an ideal surrogate parent for her newborn nephew. Nor are the immediate neighbors, many of whom—in part thanks to the black-middle-class exodus—are poor, jobless, or young single parents.

Local churches can occasionally help. They stand between the family and the state and often serve a crucial role supplying discipline and structure to children otherwise lacking direction. As James Baldwin explained, surely this must be one great source of the appeal of the evangelical churches and the Nation of Islam. Yet these institutions cannot fully compensate for the limits of the family as a socializing institution because membership or participation is typically within the control of a parent, who, for various reasons, including the problems induced by a life of joblessness, might be reluctant or even unable to cede control to another institution. At fourteen, Baldwin joined the church, but only over the strong objection of his father. Account must be taken of the increasing secularization of American culture, as prevalent in the ghettos as in the large cities of which they are part. Moreover, we must confront the possibility that certain less constructive characteristics of ghetto life might be replicated in the local churches—which, to some extent, reflect the culture of the neighborhood of which they are a part.

Access to a number of intermediate organizations is not controlled by parents, and, accordingly, these organizations might have greater potential than do churches to serve as parents’ surro-

gates. But because they too are neighborhood-based and thus fully dominated by youngsters who must grow up with insufficient family support or control, they can hardly fill the void. Local gangs teach discipline, but most often in service of criminal ends. The public schools stand ready to socialize the children who are entrusted to their care and to fill whatever parental void might exist, but because enrollment is normally determined on the basis of residence, elementary and secondary schools in a ghetto contain a heavy concentration of those children who have insufficient family support. As a result, such schools are likely to fail, not just in fulfilling their academic mission—teaching cognitive skills and knowledge of the wider world—but also in their even less well-defined socialization function: imposing discipline, building confidence, heightening aspirations, and instilling the values needed for personal success and a well-functioning society. Public schools in other communities are important sources of opportunity for social mobility, but not those in the typical urban ghetto. The challenge they confront is simply overwhelming.

The Failure of Familiar Remedies

Governments have tried a wide variety of public policy remedies to address this self-reinforcing system of disadvantage. The 1996 federal welfare reforms were designed to create incentives or pressure for welfare recipients to find work. A lifetime limit of five years was imposed on the receipt of welfare. Implicit in this measure was a recognition of the destructiveness of joblessness and the importance of work—even low-paid work—for the self-esteem it engenders and the structure it gives to day-to-day existence. The fear was also present that the availability of welfare for families with dependent children might encourage women to have children regardless of their economic ability to provide for them. In fact, the 1996 welfare reform measure was often presented as a strategy to combat teenage pregnancy and single-parent families.

In the long term, the 1996 welfare reforms might have the desired effect—though the available evidence indicates that the number of people who are able to move from welfare to work is smaller than

many people imagine. In the immediate future, however, it is likely to have disastrously counterproductive effects on the capacity of parents to assist in the socialization process. The bulk of federal welfare recipients are single mothers, and though the 1996 law pressures them to look for work, it makes no provision to pay for child-care services. As a result, the social processes that entrench the underclass across generations are only strengthened.

Tougher and more aggressive police tactics—proposed by some to end what they consider to be the under-enforcement of the criminal law in the ghetto—entails a similar dynamic. The hope is that by reducing criminal activity in the inner city, we will curtail the victimization of those who happen to live there and, at the same time, reduce the exodus of jobs and people attributable to high crime rates. It is doubtful that these new police tactics—for example, blanket searches of public housing projects in pursuit of illegal arms—can actually reduce the level of crime in the short run, but more fundamentally, a question can be raised about the impact these tactics will have on the life of the community in general. The level of crime might be reduced but only by ushering in the most strict police regime. The oppressiveness of such a regime is of concern to everyone, but particularly to ghetto residents who remember all too well the racial practices of the city police. Moreover, some of the proposed new enforcement strategies—for instance, enhancing sentences for drug-related crimes—may well increase the number of young males from the ghetto who will spend a good chunk of their lives in prison. Not only would this impoverish the ghetto community further, but it would also exacerbate the dynamics responsible for the prevalence in the community of single-parent families.

Other governmental interventions may have greater short-run chances of success. One is Head Start, which has its roots in the civil rights era and, more specifically, in the War on Poverty. It is based on a recognition that the family is sometimes an inadequate socializing agency, and reaches children at an early age, even before elementary school begins. Most Head Start programs are based in the ghetto. The burden these

programs take on is immense, given their neighborhood-centered quality and the backgrounds of the children they receive.

Head Start can succeed only through enormous investments, and even then the benefits might well be overrun by the hours spent back on the streets. We can also expect the lessons Head Start teaches to be unlearned once the child reaches a certain age, leaves the program, and enters the public schools, where resources, student/teacher ratios, the length of the school day, and the school year are likely to be set on a city-wide basis, without consideration given to the special needs of inner-city communities. Programs such as Head Start will make a difference in the lives of a few—who are likely to exit the ghetto—and for that reason must be continued as long as the ghetto exists. But they will not have a broad enough impact to break the ghetto's overall confining grip.

The most promising economic remedies are those that seek to deal with the spatial mismatch between workers and jobs, the fact that jobs have moved to the suburbs while the workers remain in the inner city. One strategy—the creation of enterprise zones in the inner city—provides economic incentives for businesses to relocate or simply remain there. Such incentives would have to compensate for higher land costs, increased security needs, and perhaps even lack of skills in the ghetto workforce due to sustained joblessness and inadequate social institutions. The economic logic behind the move of businesses to the suburbs seems so compelling, however, that there is reason to doubt the efficacy of such proposals.

William Julius Wilson, also concerned with the spatial mismatch, fully understands the difficulties of bringing business back to the ghetto and as a result has thrown his support behind another strategy for bringing jobs there: a neo-WPA program. Government would hire the unemployed, much as it did during the New Deal, to do jobs that improve the quality of life in the ghetto. These workers could repair the streets, clean the parks, construct new playgrounds, and perhaps even run various social programs.

Wilson's proposal does not have much chance of working. Certainly, government

can create jobs and open them to everyone. But what jobs will they be? How much will they pay? And what will be the chances of advancement? In essence, Wilson responds to these worries in a single, succinct sentence: "Most workers in the inner city are ready, willing, able, and anxious to hold a steady job." Notice that Wilson refers to "workers," not the "jobless," which he told us was the norm in the ghetto, and fails to give any specific content to the phrase "steady job." In truth, Wilson's rejoinder is at odds with the governing sociological insight of his book: that sustained joblessness not only produces poverty, but also undermines character. Joblessness removes structure from individuals' lives, and it tends to cause people to be decidedly not "willing, able, and anxious" to take the government jobs Wilson envisions.

A large number of ghetto residents may have flocked to the new McDonald's in search of work, but there is reason to doubt that they will pursue Wilson's neo-WPA jobs with such intensity. Such jobs contain few opportunities for advancement and would be tinged with the stigma that in our society is associated with any government handout. They are likely to be viewed as make-work. Wilson contemplates that the wages of the new government jobs would be slightly below minimum wage, but even if they were above the minimum they would not be sufficient—absent some further welfare program, say an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit—to lift the employee above the official poverty line.

More fundamentally, Wilson's proposal, or for that matter, any program to end the spatial mismatch by bringing the jobs to the ghetto, is doomed to failure. It overlooks the structural dimension of the problem—specifically, that the jobless individual is situated in a neighborhood with lots of other jobless individuals and that over the years this neighborhood has been racked by a host of destructive forces. Job creation in the ghetto must not only overcome the reluctance of any particular individual to accept a menial job, but also must reckon with the fact that this individual is a member of a group or community of similarly situated individuals. Together, these individuals exert pressure on one another and produce a culture in the ghetto that makes it most unlikely for a

job creation strategy such as the one Wilson proposes to work.

An Alternative

Any ameliorative strategy must confront the fact that the ghetto is not just the place where the underclass happens to live, but also, because it concentrates and isolates the most disadvantaged and creates its own distinctive culture, a social structure that entrenches the underclass. More than a location, it is a means by which a group is prevented from sharing in society's successes and kept far beneath others in terms of wealth, power, and living standards. This structure must be dismantled. The walls that confine those who live within the ghetto must be torn down. To speak less metaphorically, we must provide those who now live there with the economic means to move into middle- or upper-class neighborhoods.

Such a voluntary relocation strategy would: eliminate the spatial mismatch between jobs and residence, by allowing the jobless to move closer to where the jobs exist; break up the concentration of impoverished, single-parent households, by enabling ghetto residents to move to safer neighborhoods where there is more of a mix of economic classes and family structures; and enhance access to intermediate institutions, such as schools and churches, that are not so heavily burdened as those of the ghetto and that might have more of a chance of succeeding.

This strategy would improve the lives of the dispersed adults by situating them in communities where jobs exist—environments conducive to reshaping one's life into something more fulfilling and productive. It would also break the entrenchment of the underclass across generations, because children in the families that relocated themselves would be raised in safer, more positive surroundings and would reap the benefits of those surroundings. Of course middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, both black and white, have their own dysfunctions. Still, they have advantages over the ghetto in terms of safety, social services, education, and employment opportunities. Dispersal would capitalize on those advantages.

The strategic advantage of choosing racially integrated or predominantly white middle- and upper-class neighborhoods as the receiving communities of those who relocate should not be overlooked. Tying the fate of blacks to that of whites, which would be accomplished by such residential integration, may be the most reliable means of securing equal protection for the minority, because only then will every gain enjoyed by whites in social services or neighborhood improvements redound to the benefit of blacks. The integrative ideal affirmed by *Brown v. Board of Education* in part rested on the feat that the majority would always short-change the schools attended only by the minority.

Although gains might be achieved if families relocate to racially integrated or predominantly white middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, the receiving communities need be defined only by class, which will by itself mean enhanced access to jobs, better schools and social services, nicer housing, and higher-quality retail establishments. A black middle-class community created over the last thirty years as a result of antidiscrimination laws in housing and employment could thus be a suitable receiving community for some of the residents moving from the ghetto, as would an upscale racially integrated or predominantly white community. Sometimes the search for such neighborhoods might take us beyond the city limits, sometimes not.

Those who decide to move must not, however, be regrouped into another ghetto. The very purpose of this program is to allow people to leave the ghetto, under the theory that it is a structure of subordination, so care must be taken not to create another concentration of poor, jobless, single-parent families headed by teenagers. To achieve this objective, an agency needs to be created that would seek out the opportunities for such a move and allocate those being sent among the various middle- and upper-class communities. This agency would also need to assist in the relocation process itself. Every move is difficult, but the challenges of moving out of a poor, ghetto neighborhood and into one considerably more upscale and possibly predominantly white would be ex-

treme. The tasks that burden every move—trips to the hardware store for light bulbs, meeting the new neighbors, signing the children up for schools, knowing what social services are available—are intensified when the racial or class makeup of the new neighborhood is different from that of the old one.

Charitable organizations might be able to help in this relocation process, but given the magnitude of the endeavor, it will be necessary to rely on the government and its unique powers to raise and distribute funds. The relocation agency will need to be state-funded. In addition, state funds will be necessary to enable people who were living below the poverty level to afford the rents in the receiving neighborhoods. The rent of those moving would be subsidized, though the subsidies may go directly to those providing the housing. One method of implementing this plan would be to issue rent vouchers and to require that realtors and landlords in the specially designated receiving communities accept these vouchers. Such a requirement would be only one small part of the effort needed to render it impossible for receiving communities to thwart the purpose of the relocation program, which is to create class, and maybe racial, integration. Tough enforcement of existing antidiscrimination laws and perhaps the fashioning of new ones would also be necessary.

Any program seeking to end the dynamics responsible for the entrenchment of the underclass will require enormous dollar investment. The relocation program I have outlined is no exception to this rule, though in no way should these costs be assumed to be prohibitive. The magnitude of these costs can be gauged by considering a 1994 effort by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to institute an analogous, but smaller, relocation program. This program, called "Moving to Opportunity," offered aid to families who had children and were living in public housing in high-poverty census tracts within Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. (A high-poverty census tract is one in which more than 40 percent of the residents have incomes below the poverty level.) Those who applied and were selected

were given Section 8 rent vouchers that could be used only in census tracts that had under a ten percent poverty rate. Local non-profit organizations played a crucial role, supplying each moving family with a counselor who actively helped the family to find an apartment and to overcome the obstacles associated with the move. The cost of moving 6,200 families was \$234 million over two years.

These figures need to be adjusted to account for the scale of the program I am proposing, which would not be confined to persons living in public housing in five cities, but rather be nationwide in scope and available to all people living in areas marked by the high concentration of extremely poor black families. It is hard to estimate the total number of families in such areas, but a 1990 survey estimates that there are six million American blacks living in the inner-city ghettos or high-poverty tracts. Obviously, the number of families is less than six million, but using that figure for lack of a better one, we can estimate the total cost of the relocation program at \$100 billion per year if every ghetto resident chose to move. The actual net cost should be substantially less because money that might otherwise have been spent on community development programs, public housing, and perhaps even general antipoverty and welfare programs would be saved. Regardless, in light of the \$792 billion tax cut passed recently by both houses of Congress, the cost of dismantling the ghettos of America is surely within our reach.

Money is not everything. To assess fully the impact of this relocation plan, account must also be taken of the human costs arising from moving and even more from the disruption of communal ties in inner-city neighborhoods. In doing so, however, care must be taken not to romanticize the familiar. Some might recognize the reality of ghetto life and how it deteriorated over the last thirty years, and yet still hope that it is possible to keep the communities intact while transforming them into safe, flourishing environments with good jobs, attractive housing, safe streets, easy access to stores, strong schools, and all of the other characteristics of thriving neighborhoods. This honorable hope cannot be attained. Putting an end to the social dynamics that have transformed

some particular black ghetto into a structure of subordination would require so many deep interventions into the life of that community as to disrupt, if not actually destroy, all preexisting communal ties. The geography would remain the same but the community would be different. The program I envision openly acknowledges the threat to community but allows the residents of the ghetto to weigh the benefit of the preexisting communal ties against what might be a better life for themselves and their children. Integration, in any form, has never been a picnic, but neither is staying put. Here the choice is vested where it belongs: in the individual family.

Admittedly, the choices of those most anxious to leave will affect the options of those inclined to stay since the option of staying appears less appealing when so many of one's neighbors have left. But such decisional interdependence is inescapable and it is not clear why the balance should be cast in favor of the status quo. My sense is that most in the ghetto would jump at the offer of a subsidized move to a better neighborhood. Experience confirms this assumption. In the 1980s, HUD instituted another such relocation program, then in the context of a lawsuit, and the number of applications greatly exceeded the available subsidies. During one call-in application period lasting only a few days, 15,000 applicants called in pursuit of 250 places. With the prospect of a subsidy, most will leave, and that will be enough to break the concentration of destructive forces—poverty, joblessness, crime, children without adequate supervision, poorly functioning social institutions—that turns the ghetto into a mechanism for perpetuating the subordination of those who find themselves living there. The physical space that once belonged to the ghetto will quickly be claimed by developers for gentrification and for transformation into a new, up-and-coming neighborhood in the city.

Justice

To put the human and financial costs in perspective, we must come to understand that relocation is required not only as good social policy, but also as a matter of justice. The costs entailed in such programs are indeed great, as would be the costs of any program that seeks to tackle

the problem of the underclass, but they are comparable to those entailed in implementing *Brown* and are justified by an analogous theory of equal protection. The dual school system of Jim Crow was condemned because it tended to perpetuate the caste structure of slavery; the inner-city ghetto today has a similar effect, though the subjugated group is not defined, as under slavery or Jim Crow, in purely racial terms—race must be supplemented by economic and social coordinates. The subjugated group is not blacks in general, but the black underclass. The inner-city ghetto stands before us as the instrument responsible for the maintenance of that form of subjugation and thus represents the most visible and perhaps most pernicious vestige of racial injustice in the United States—the successor to slavery and Jim Crow.

Presently the state is not by statutes or regulations confining people to the ghetto. To the contrary, through antidiscrimination laws and affirmative action programs touching employment, education, and housing, the state has helped to create the black middle class and thereby enabled some to leave. But the state, as the representative of the larger society, also played an important role in the very creation of the ghetto, and is thus duty-bound to use its powers to remedy the present-day consequences of that action. In the historic decision that provided the foundation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Justice Hugo Black emphasized that any court had “not merely the power but the duty to render a decree which will as far as possible eliminate the discriminatory effects of the past as well as bar like discrimination in the future.” He was referring to the judiciary, for the duties of that institution were being contested, but the obligation he spoke of extends to all branches of government.

State complicity in the creation of the ghetto took various forms. Some of the state’s responsibility derives from the failure, for most of our history, to prevent acts of discrimination and violence aimed at keeping blacks out of white neighborhoods. In other instances the state played a more active role, for example by enforcing racially restrictive covenants. Though this practice was outlawed in 1948, it played a crucial role in the formation of the black ghetto for a good part of our history. Later it was

supplemented by more subtle, but equally pernicious practices, such as California’s Proposition 14. Restrictions on loan guarantee programs and on the location of public housing projects had a similar effect. The means by which residential segregation has been established and maintained in the United States—detailed in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton’s important 1993 book *American Apartheid*—are as sinister, and their effects as lasting, as Jim Crow segregation in the South, especially when coupled with this country’s traditional economic and social policies.

The foundation, perhaps the inspiration, for a voluntary relocation program along the lines I envision can be traced to the 1976 Supreme Court decision in *Hills v. Gautreaux*. The case involved the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)—the agency specifically charged with the construction and management of public housing projects in Chicago—and arose from the Authority’s practice of giving the local city council members the power to prevent the construction of such projects in their wards. It was understood that the residents of such projects would be largely or predominantly black, and council members from white wards used their power to prevent the construction of public housing projects in their wards. As a result, for years all public housing projects in Chicago were located only in black neighborhoods and thus helped constitute the urban ghettos of that city. By way of remedy, the Supreme Court sustained an order of a lower court requiring HUD to provide funds to disperse these concentrations of poor black families.

The relocation program upheld in *Gautreaux* was more focused than the one I am arguing for here. The moving subsidies went only to the residents of public housing projects, whereas I contemplate their being made available to all the residents of the ghetto, defined in terms of the high concentration of extremely poor black families. Moreover, because of this focus, the *Gautreaux* subsidies could be conceptualized as a form of compensation for a highly discrete act of racial discrimination, namely, the decision to locate the public housing projects only in black neighborhoods. Such a reading of

Gautreaux would limit its scope and reduce it to a public housing precedent, but I see lurking beneath its surface a far more powerful principle: an obligation on the part of the state to eliminate the social dynamics responsible for the perpetuation of the black underclass.

For one thing, it must be stressed that the remedial obligation imposed in *Gautreaux*—funding the relocation agency and providing the subsidies—was placed on HUD, the federal agency, not the CHA or the Chicago City Council. HUD did not play any role in choosing the site of the public housing projects. At most, it could be accused only of funding public housing projects with the knowledge that they were being built only in black wards. This conduct might be described as a means of supporting or acquiescing in the acts of discrimination, so as to bring it within the ambit of both Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Constitution’s equal protection guarantee. But the involvement of federal and state governments in creating urban ghettos may be similarly characterized. So may the government’s role in the dynamics responsible for joblessness and poverty in the ghetto, low levels of income, and the inferior quality of schools and social services available there.

Account must also be taken of the fact that the *Gautreaux* remedy required HUD to provide subsidies that would enable the public housing residents to move to predominantly white suburbs and to do so in a scattered fashion. A remedy conceived in purely individualistic terms—as a corrective for the race-based decision as to where to build public housing projects—could not possibly have that reach. At best, such a remedy would mandate the construction of public housing projects in white parts of the city—the relocation of the Robert Taylor Homes, for example, in a predominantly white ward with comparable land value or a similar socio-economic profile. Yet the remedy approved in *Gautreaux* sought a class transformation: moving the public housing residents, all of whom were black, into middle- or upper-class neighborhoods of the suburbs and scattering them so as to avoid any concentration of lower-class families that had lived in the public housing projects.

In purely personal terms, the *Gautreaux* remedy succeeded admirably. The employment opportunities and educational achievements of those who moved increased significantly. According to studies first published in 1991 by James Rosenbaum, among adults who had never previously held a job, those moving to the suburbs were over 50 percent more likely to become employed than those who stayed in the city. Among those who were children at the time of the move, 75 percent of those who moved to the suburbs were employed seven years after the move, compared with 41 percent of those who stayed; 21 percent in the suburbs had jobs paying more than \$6.50 per hour, compared with 5 percent of those who remained in the city; 54 percent in the suburbs went to college, compared with 21 percent in the city; and 27 percent of those moving to the suburbs attended four-year colleges, compared with 4 percent of those who stayed in the city.

Even more remarkable, I believe, is the fact that *Gautreaux* marked the beginning of the process of dismantling the massive public housing projects in Chicago, such as the Robert Taylor Homes, and thus represents the first decisive step toward the dissolution of the ghetto. In this respect the *Gautreaux* remedy should be seen not as a compensation for a discrete act of discrimination—as an attempt to put certain persons in the position they would have been in but for a particular act of discrimination—but as a broader remedy designed to eliminate a structure of subordination. *Gautreaux* was premised

on an understanding of how massive public housing projects—with their concentration of poor, jobless families, often unable to assist significantly in the socialization process, all sending their children to the same local school, victimized by crime and gangs—have become a mechanism for both creating and entrenching the black underclass across generations. It also constitutes a recognition of government's responsibility for dismantling that mechanism.

Although the *Gautreaux* remedy had grandiose ambitions, it was rather limited in its numbers. Only 7,100 families received subsidies. This, I believe, was a function of the fact that the precise number of families receiving subsidies was set in a consent decree or bargained-for agreement between HUD and the plaintiffs. The number was not dictated by considerations of justice, which is, after all, the only metric for a court or any other institution bold enough to provide equal protection. Every affirmative remedy poses the question of precise limits: How much must be spent to do justice? How much is enough? No detailed response can be given to these questions at this stage other than to say that the subsidies must be large enough to move out all residents of the ghettos who choose to move—large enough to bring an end to this social mechanism that is entrenching the black underclass. Anything short of that would allow to remain in place an instrument perpetuating a hierarchical structure that is at odds with the egalitarian aspirations of the Constitution.

In an attempt to minimize or trivialize dispersal remedies, and thus to highlight his neo-WPA program and the effort to bring the jobs to the ghetto, William Julius Wilson reminds his readers of the conditions of acceptability: "The success of this program," he writes of *Gautreaux*, "is partly a function of its relatively small size. Since only a few families are relocated to other housing sites each year, they remain relatively invisible and do not present the threat of a mass invasion." It is not at all clear what Wilson means by a "mass invasion," or whether that would ever be present given policies that are designed to avoid the creation of a new ghetto in a previously upper-middle-class neighborhood. The approach I envision entails moving few enough ghetto residents into each middle- or upper-class neighborhood that the prior residents remain. The more fundamental point, however, is to recognize that whatever hostility this relocation program engenders—either from whites or from blacks who pride themselves on having escaped the ghetto—it cannot be a basis for limiting the program or, even worse, turning one's back upon it. Justice permits of no such compromise. It requires instead that the state undertake all action necessary to end "lock, stock, and barrel"—as Judge John Minor Wisdom once put it in talking of the remedies for school segregation—the social processes that continue to perpetuate the near-caste structure of American society. ■

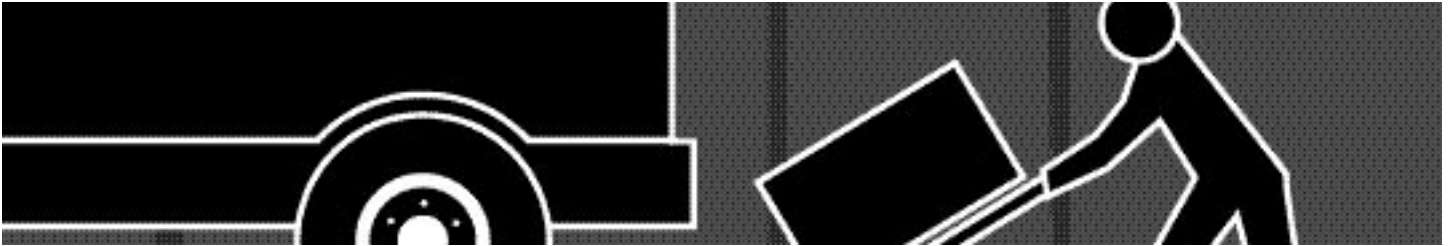


Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?

In this paperback version of the *Boston Review's* New Democracy Forum, Susan Moller Okin addresses the difficult issue of women's rights and multiculturalism, suggesting that in our eager rush to be sophisticated cultural relativists we should perhaps stop for a moment to consider whether there may in fact be cultures truly degrading to women; she points out the potential conflict between cultural respect and respect for the rights of individual women. Her respondents take issue with much of what she says, and their writings together form a provocative introduction to the matter of multiculturalism and women.

Can Relocation Save the Underclass?

Seven responses to Owen Fiss.



Down by Law

Richard Ford

One must applaud Owen Fiss's admonishment to end, lock stock and smoking barrel, the isolation and disempowerment that currently characterizes life in America's urban ghettos. Likewise Professor Fiss's description of the deplorable history of state-sanctioned racist policy that created and maintained the urban ghetto is a necessary but all-too-often ignored part of any policy discussion that addresses the conditions of the urban poor. This history should be part of any high-school education, but distressingly few Americans know of it or care to learn. And I agree wholeheartedly with Fiss's argument that the compulsory isolation of the ghetto is morally analogous to Jim Crow segregation and that the imperative that society find and implement an effective remedy is analogous to the imperative to desegregate public schools that was (partially) addressed in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Better yet, Professor Fiss is not content simply to describe the problem, as so many have already done. He insists that justice demands a viable solution, and his proposal is as bold and sweeping as the challenge is pervasive and daunting. Fiss's proposal: a comprehensive, although voluntary, program of relocation, funded by the state and available to anyone living in a sufficiently distressed neighborhood. Fiss faces unflinchingly the enormous cost of such

a program: he recognizes that not only moving expenses for millions of families but also sizable rent subsidies of indefinite duration would be required to insure that low-income families could move to middle- and upper-income neighborhoods.

Still, it is not clear that Fiss's proposal will serve all of the people he hopes to help. Fiss correctly notes that the blacks who benefited most from civil rights reform were those already well poised to do so—those with skills and education. These successful blacks left their former neighborhoods in what William Julius Wilson calls "black middle class flight," exacerbating the isolation and powerlessness of those left behind in the ghettos. We could expect a similar result if Fiss's proposal were enacted: those inner-city poor with some skill, experiences outside the ghetto, mainstream acculturation, and internalization of the work ethic will be more likely to take the initiative and leave the ghetto, and more likely to succeed when they do. Those worst off, both in terms of wealth and, more importantly, in terms of skills, will stay behind or when they try to move will meet with failure and alienation. They will then most likely retreat to their former neighborhoods or form new enclaves in the suburbs that will rapidly become the suburban ghettos Fiss hopes to avoid.

In this scenario, Fiss's reform will of course have helped those who move and succeed enormously. But it will leave an even more concentrated, even more desperate, and even more isolated super-underclass behind.

All of this is to say that Fiss's solution cannot be the only solution. Fiss criticizes William Julius Wilson's suggestion that public policy revitalize inner city communities through WPA-style public investments and jobs programs. He notes that such an approach fails to reckon with the lack of work ethic that, according to both Fiss and Wilson, is pervasive in the ghetto. But Wilson's proposal does have the merit of incrementalism: he envisions providing steady work for the poor where they live and are, if not comfortable, at least familiar. Fiss by contrast demands that these socially isolated poor not only develop a work ethic and mainstream social skills sufficient to win them jobs in the *privatesector* of a middle-class suburb, but also that they do so while simultaneously acculturating themselves to a new social milieu.

Moreover, there is a serious omission in Fiss's analysis of the ghettoization dynamic. Fiss asserts that problem of ghettoization is structural and self-perpetuating: social and economic isolation promote joblessness, despair, and socially dysfunctional behavior, which promote poverty, which insures social and eco-

Beyond Moralizing

J. Phillip Thompson

conomic isolation. But he omits a significant element of that structure: the laws governing the very middle-class and wealthy suburbs he hopes will become welcoming havens for the underclass. Wealthier suburbs have strong incentives to exclude poor urbanites and the means by which to do so, both supplied by the legal regime of American local government.

Incentives? In most states, American cities and towns fund public services primarily through property taxes. They also are entitled to limit access to those services to residents of the jurisdiction. This means that cities have an overwhelming incentive to encourage in-movers who will increase the value of property (and therefore tax revenues) and consume little in services, and to discourage in-movers whose presence will decrease property values and who will need a lot of public services. It scarcely needs to be said that the urban poor fit the latter description.

Means? Although American local governments do not have explicit immigration policies, they do have broad powers to restrict land uses. By excluding all or most high density or multi-family housing, middle class and wealthy suburbs can effectively screen out low income potential residents by prohibiting the housing that they can afford. Local governments also can and do resist regional public transportation, halfway houses, group living arrangements, and rehabilitation centers—all services that many low income people require in order to make the transition from troubled or dysfunctional lifestyles to success in the job market.

The engine of ghettoization is not entirely internal to the ghetto, nor are its root causes exclusively historical. Although Fiss recognizes the responsibility of the explicitly discriminatory policies of the past for the present reality of the urban ghetto, he does not consider the salience of present day public policy in reproducing the ghetto and reinforcing its borders. While Fiss's proposal is laudatory, it is incomplete. Without the reform of local policies that reinforce the isolation of the ghetto from outside, it would be like running the furnace with the windows open. ■

Owen Fiss argues that the contemporary black ghetto is a product of jobs “leaving just as the most successful in the neighborhood were also leaving.” With a high concentration of jobless individuals concentrated in inner-city communities, a “culture in the ghetto,” is produced that “makes it most unlikely for a job creation strategy such as the one [William Julius] Wilson proposes to work.” In his analysis of what created the ghetto, Fiss says that, “given the manifest economic considerations involved, it is hard to believe that race was the only or even primary factor.” Fiss's strategy is to break apart black ghettos once and for all and to disperse ghetto residents into resource-rich middle- and upper-class white neighborhoods.

I disagree with Fiss's description of how the ghetto emerged and his proposal about how it might be eradicated. I think the best place to begin this critique is with Fiss's characterization of what created the ghetto of the “underclass.” Fiss argues that economics, not race, was the primary factor in making the ghetto. He points to Wilson's observations that jobs did in fact leave cities and that the black middle class left certain black neighborhoods as well. Fiss does not discuss at all the history of political debate surrounding these issues over the last thirty years. His account makes it seem as though the ghetto is just a big accident that well-intentioned Americans created unknowingly. I find this hard to swallow. The civil rights movement made full employment a key issue after its legal victories over Jim Crow in 1964 and 1965. After waves of black congressmen were elected on the heels of the Voting Rights Act, they too focused on jobs. They linked the necessity for full employment to the need to repair the damage done by three hundred-plus years of slavery and segregation. And they warned as well that a failure to act would entrench segments of the black community into perpetual poverty and despair. They demanded,

thirty years ago, that African Americans not be forced to pay the price (in the form of persistent unemployment) for federal anti-inflation monetary policies. Congress mostly ignored them. The response of the American public was to elect a series of Republican presidents (with the exception of Democrat Jimmy Carter) who decimated support for cities between 1968 and 1992. Carter, it must be noted, was conservative on urban issues as well. Clinton, despite the best economy in memory, did virtually nothing to change the urban policy course put in place by Reagan. Perhaps as a former governor, Clinton was aware of how the Republican party exploited anti-urban (read: anti-minority) attitudes to win control of nearly two-thirds of the gubernatorial seats in the country. Another factor in the rise of conservatism in national politics was intense local opposition to forced school integration *in the North* as well as the South. Overall, efforts to integrate schools failed miserably. Black middle-class parents seeking quality schools for their children had few options other than leaving inner-city black neighborhoods.

It is important to remember these points because neither the exodus of jobs from cities nor the departure of the black middle class from the ghetto happened in a political and social vacuum. By separating race and economics, as Fiss does in saying that “manifest economic considerations” obviate race as a cause of the ghetto, Fiss implicitly makes the two assumptions. He assumes that political decisions made by government officials had no impact on economic decisions by firms on where to locate and who to hire. Second, he assumes that race did not affect these fundamental political decisions. Both assumptions are invalid. The US “free” market economy is no less a state product than the former Soviet economy. The US markets are no less “structured” than were Soviet five-year plans; the difference lies in how they are structured. The federal government's decision *not* to ensure full employment

in response to black demands, or *not* to put limits on firm's mobility despite devastating regional impacts on the rustbelt, were political decisions.

Race has everything to do with the politics. Nixon's appeal to the "silent majority," Reagan's visit during the 1980 presidential campaign to Philadelphia, Miss. (site of the murder of three civil rights workers in the 1960s), Bush Sr.'s use of Willie Horton, Bush Jr.'s and McCain's deference to state's rights on the issue of South Carolina's adoption of the Confederate flag—all of these are important symbolic reminders of how consistently Republicans have played the race card. Much more debilitating to African Americans, and more bipartisan, have been the attacks on "big government" and the "War on Drugs."

Exactly what is "big" government? It does not mean the military, or social security, or tax deductions for suburban homeowners. It means programs designed to help the undeserving poor (read: minorities). Tax cuts and spending limits brought about through the revolution against big government have severely undermined the capacity of city governments to do much about poverty. Big government does not include prisons, which are a booming public/private industry. African American and Latino youth are being incarcerated *en masse*. Even though illegal drug usage is roughly evenly distributed across race and ethnic groups in the United States, close to 90 percent of those jailed for drug offenses are black and Latino. In some cities, more than a third of all young black men are in jail, awaiting trial, or on probation. The vast majority are incarcerated for non-violent drug and property offenses. Those convicted of drug crimes frequently serve long sentences. Under the mandatory sentencing guidelines of the Rockefeller drug laws in New York State, for example, an offender convicted of possessing two ounces of marijuana is required to serve fifteen years to life. The California legislature passed more than 1,000 new criminal justice statutes in the late 1980s and early 1990s alone. These statistics represent a massive deployment of aggressive policing and punishment directed at black youth. Virtually no black person is immune to it because police tactics initially employed in the ghettos, what is

called racial profiling, are now employed on the nation's highways and downtown areas.

Even more alarming than the climate of terror produced by over-zealous policing and the criminalization of huge numbers of non-violent and poor black youth has been the public's acceptance of it. Since the victory of civil rights advocates in winning formal legal protection of African American citizens in the 1960s, a more effective and defensible form of racial subordination has set in—namely, racial subordination brought about through the normal mechanisms of democracy and government bureaucracy. It is not necessary for white Americans to be intense about their opposition to programs aimed at helping African Americans (or Latinos). Whites do not need demonstrations or protest movements. Since they are a strong voting majority in the nation and in nearly every state, they only need to vote. Voting is low-intensity politics. So long as white Americans are willing to tolerate a few middle-class blacks in their midst, they can absolve themselves of charges of racism. They can justify spending more on prisons than education (already a fact in some states) as giving minority youth what they deserve based on their bad behavior. It is argued by some that this is American egalitarianism at work. This is a lie. If bureaucratic enforcement were egalitarian, 70 percent of those jailed for drug possession would be white, and the sheer numbers involved would ruin the economy and turn the nation into a complete police state. I seriously doubt that lawmakers intend to do this, or that white Americans want aggressive policing targeted against *their* neighborhoods. Arrest statistics indicate clearly that white drug users are being exempted from targeting. There seems to be an unspoken assumption that the War on Drugs is not supposed to attack the white middle class. The white public expects this double-standard *in practice*, in the selective enforcement of drug laws. This expectation of favorable treatment by government, where equal treatment with blacks and Latinos would be unthinkable, constitutes corruption of the body politic—and it is a powerful form of racism built into the normal work-

ings of majoritarian democracy and government bureaucracy. What is most dangerous about it is precisely its normality—it does not require an abandonment of egalitarian rhetoric, nor does it require much political mobilization. Blacks are being terrorized and incarcerated *en masse* in a climate of public indifference.

To return to Fiss's article. I want to suggest that there are two cultural problems involved in the ghetto, not just one. There is a problem of ghetto subcultures organized around gangs and prison life that is threatening to most people who live in the ghetto and harmful to the participants themselves. The second problem is the corruption of broad sections of the white public that stems from their social privileges and basic control of public institutions. It is the latter that has created and maintained the ghetto.

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There is a problem of ghetto subcultures organized around gangs and prison. A second problem is the corruption of broad sections of the white public that stems from their social privileges.

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And it is the latter that blames the fruits of its creation solely on its victims. Fiss wants to disrupt the comfort and disinterest of white suburbia. I applaud this intent. But his proposal to integrate white suburbs is far removed from political reality. White suburbia has already shown *in practice* where it stands on racial integration and poverty deconcentration. With so many of those Fiss wants to move into white suburbia coming out of prison today, it would be

harder than ever to convince white communities to accept them. Trying to legally force white Americans to integrate against their will, in a country where they are a voting majority, has not worked and it will not. In this context, *in place* strategies such as Wilson's public works jobs proposal are a lot more politically realistic than housing and school integration.

To tackle the larger issue of continuing segregation, I think that more micro strategies are needed that engage whites on racial issues beyond moralizing arguments appealing to some fictional commitment to actual equality. One might want to figure out which predominantly white institutions or movements are disposed to want to fight against housing and school segregation, or the mass criminalization of African Americans and Latinos, and help them forge ties with groups concerned about urban poverty. Labor unions are targeting low-income minorities in organizing drives these days, and they are good institutions for engaging the race issue. It could be suggested to labor unions, for example, that building schools instead of prisons will create a lot more jobs and union members in the long and short run. Environmental groups are another potential source of support for eradicating inner-city ghettos. It might be suggested to environmentalists that the best cure for urban sprawl—air pollution and degradation of open spaces—would be to build livable dense cities, and the key to that is eradicating concentrated poverty. There is potential for real coalition building on urban issues that address group's self-interest but also move them beyond narrow definitions of their selves to a bigger "We."

Finally, I hope that instead of telling poor blacks that they cannot afford to live with each other (as Fiss does), some

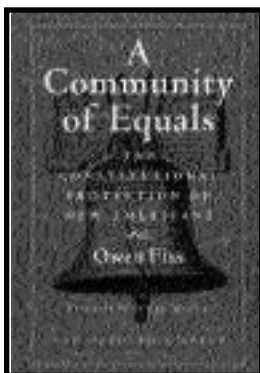
kind of democratic and empowering process can be envisioned in which African Americans might be able to utilize their churches, clubs, community organizations, and other social networks to promote their own vision of how they want to live with other Americans. Fiss's proposal would all but eliminate the black urban church, and would do deep damage to black political efficacy. I think this would be dangerous for African Americans. Fiss does not seem to understand this at all. He characterizes churches together with schools as "intermediate institutions," that in the suburbs, "are not so heavily burdened as



those of the ghetto and that might have more of a chance of succeeding." He seems to think that churches are like public corporations where goods can be

shipped around according to capacity and output can be ranked on an economic performance sheet. That is not what black churches are. They are voluntary associations consisting of dense social networks that frequently span generations. It takes a long time to build a sense of trust, caring, and community within a church. Some churches never achieve it, and those are the failures. The success of a church is not measured by how well established its members are in the economy, or by how many of its youth go to college. A successful church may produce these results, but it does not follow that an unsuccessful church cannot produce these results.

Fiss suggests that entrenched poverty has corrupted the black church, and that "we must confront the possibility that certain less constructive characteristics of ghetto life might be replicated in the local churches, which, to some extent, reflect the culture of the neighborhood of which they are a part." Fiss does not give any examples or explain exactly what "less constructive" characteristics he has in mind. I can only conclude that his economic and spatial determinism has led him to indict black churches by association with ghetto poverty. I am tempted to say that, no, white churches are the corrupt failures because their entrenched wealth and privilege silenced them through centuries of brutal racial oppression. I have seen too many caring white churches, however, to warrant such a simplistic indictment by association. I will say, however, that I have not found that "ghetto" churches are lacking in moral fabric as compared to their counterparts in rich neighborhoods. I bet Fiss has not either. Maybe a good place to begin a discussion of how to eradicate ghetto poverty would be to put a hold on pretensions of white middle-class moral superiority. ■



A Community of Equals:

The Constitutional Protection of New Americans

In this book's forum-style political debate, professor of constitutional law Owen Fiss takes issue with the United States' social and political treatment of immigrant aliens, arguing that it is high time for American society to live up to the promise of the Equal Protection Clause and avoid discrimination against non-citizens. Eleven other scholars and professors respond to Fiss' argument, bringing to the table the most important issues surrounding the debate about immigration and citizenship in the

Better Neighborhoods?

Robert Coles

Many of us know and admire the work of Owen Fiss, and are grateful for his brilliant, wide-ranging legal scholarship that is grounded in a mind comfortable with literature and unafraid to grapple with the serious social and political matters that bear down on us Americans, for all our nation's might and wealth. As I read his essay, I was not surprised by the moral urgency that informs the question that serves as a title for what follows—here is one academic scholar who knows the oughts and noughts of constitutional law, yet dares address his readers with an aroused conscience, alert to the travails of fellow citizens who are having no easy time of it. Look at those left behind, we are urged, and try to imagine significant, if not drastic, remedial recourse for what has happened over the generations in our American cities, where (in some neighborhoods) many poor and vulnerable people live hard-pressed lives.

The gist of this article is its answer to the question posed at its onset—a learned and privileged citizen's conviction that those who live in our urban ghettos be enabled (and thereby encouraged) to move out, lest they continue to be threatened by rampant social pathology, which is either explicitly mentioned or summoned by implication—as in references to “better neighborhoods” that are supposedly spared the errant, the fearful, the downright illegal and violent kind of life that the author hopes the African Americans who live in ghettos will have “left behind,” as they journey elsewhere. This proposal—that our government convert a present status quo (the passivity of being left behind) to the activity of deliberate departure—will, in effect, be subsidized by millions of taxpayers.

I must say that I was concerned on several scores as I read this spirited exhortation on behalf of a bureaucratically assisted realignment of neighborhood populations

across our contemporary urban scenes. We are asked to believe that the “better neighborhoods,” the “receiving communities,” are themselves without the problems that plague ghetto residents—common drug usage, willful gangs, a somewhat demoralized atmosphere. Some of us who work in the relatively well-to-do suburbs know all too well the serious difficulties to be found in those communities, though often certain aspects of psychological and moral pathology are kept under the table—the cheating and lying in big-deal schools, the widespread drug use, the bullying and intimidating by some youths of others, the drunken driving that proves fatal to those induced to go along (and alas, threatened if they don't agree to say yes, to put themselves in those recklessly mis-used cars given by parents all too self-absorbed by the demands of their jobs, by the preoccupations of their “successful” lives). One asks for *context*, for a close scrutiny of what takes place in economically privileged neighborhoods, and also, for a willingness to think of the serious neighborhood misfortunes, afflictions, disorders, and even calamities that afflict relatively impoverished white urban neighborhoods, or those populated by Spanish-speaking people.

I could take Owen Fiss to streets in Boston where gangs prey upon people down on their luck, where drugs are almost everywhere available, where a climate of futility, and even despair, is to be found, where some residents wish they could get out, though some stand fast and firmly live out a sincere loyalty to a given section of the city—and where, I suspect (in South Boston, say, or Chelsea, or parts of the North End or the South End) the lure of Quincy, of Everett and Marblehead, goes unnoticed, as well as the ever-present seductions of gentrification. (Talk about “better neighborhoods” that some working-class people, black and white alike, have no interest in joining!)

Speaking of the movement Fiss proposes, with his unfortunate talk of “tearing down” and “breaking up” certain ghetto neighborhoods, I have tape recorded another kind of plea for migratory possibility, albeit a distinctly qualified one, that ultimately leaves the matter of departure moot—spoken by an African American father as he contemplated the arrival of well-to-do white people not far from Roxbury streets that draw close to the South End: “They're all dressed up and they are always trying to be fancy, and it's antique this, an

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Our suburbs are not without common drug use, willful gangs, and a somewhat demoralized atmosphere.
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d antique that, and I worry that they are not interested in families—they are interested in *themselves*, in showing themselves off. That is not what I want my kids to see—I wish I could get us out of here, but hell, we were born here, my wife and I, and now our [four] children and us will stay and do our own showing off: we'll teach our kids what we believe is right and good, and we'll encourage them to act like good, God-fearing folks. It's nice to cut and run, but it's nice to dig in hard and long—to keep remembering that you stood up for who you are, and for what you think really matters in this life that the good Lord has leant you to keep.” ■



Creating Options

Jennifer Hochschild

Owen Fiss writes with elegance, moral urgency, and conceptual clarity. I agree with his premise—that wealthier Americans owe poor residents of poor ghettos a chance to pursue the American dream, whether because all Americans should have such a chance or because they are in the ghetto partly because the rest of us are not. I mostly agree with his strategy of offering all ghetto residents “an opportunity to leave” backed by real resources of money and appropriate attention. But I do not *fully* agree, for two reasons.

First, absent a revolution in most Americans’ preferences with regard to the race and class of their neighbors, Fiss’s proposal is politically hopeless. He knows that, and his essay can be read as a “what if” thought experiment. That is a worthwhile exercise, if only because it pushes readers to devise more feasible proposals. Nevertheless, a proposal with no foreseeable chance of enactment does little to benefit the people it so eloquently seeks to help, so it seems appropriate to explore slightly more realistic solutions.

The difficulty of Fiss’s proposal can be illustrated by reactions to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s experiment with the Moving to Opportunity program. In his brief discussion of this small relocation program, Fiss does not point out the enormous political opposition it aroused in communities targeted to receive relocated families. One example: according to the *Baltimore Sun*, Sen. Barbara Mikulski, an outspoken liberal, “spearheaded a congressional effort to kill [the] program, [which] has become a lightning rod.... Residents and politicians in . . . Baltimore County have attacked it, saying the program will push crime into their neighborhoods.” Congress eliminated the second year of funding.

HUD was politically inept in Baltimore, but the opposition lies beyond the reach of better political tactics. The idea that all ghetto residents might find a home in middle- or upper-class neighborhoods is almost certainly a nonstarter.

My second reason for demurring is substantive rather than political. Many

ghetto residents might prefer to remain in improved communities rather than to move. Fiss (and I) might disagree with their reasons—distaste for integrated living, fear of the unknown, inertia. Or we might endorse reasons such as pride in a black community, historical roots, friendships, love of urban living. But ghetto residents’ reasons for preferring to remain in an improved community are immaterial, because they are none of our business. Part of what it means to pursue the American dream is the right to choose where and how you want to live regardless of whether others approve your choice. (We don’t have movements urging the use of public funds to enable suburbanites to leave their sterile and morally corrupting split-level colonials.) In short, what ghetto residents really deserve is the right either to move or to stay in a community worth staying in.

That line of reasoning suggests a somewhat different use of Fiss’s \$100 billion per year. Let us accept his caveats about that figure and cut it in half, or in thirds. So how should we use \$30-50 billion a year? I would devote up to half to Fiss’s proposal to give families the opportunity to move out. *Gautreaux* and MTO show that most such families benefit enormously, as do receiving communities. But still, we cannot immediately extrapolate from those results to “the more the better.” Neither side will benefit if too many families move too quickly into the few communities that will accept them; that would simply split a few large ghettos into many small ones, which would improve matters but not as much as Fiss intends. Furthermore, *Gautreaux* and MTO show that families need substantial help in making the transition. It is likely that as we move further into the population of potential movers, we will find more and more families that experience great difficulties in moving and could even disrupt the program for others. So move some people, into as many communities as possible, with extensive services to help movers and receivers make the most of this new chance. Spend, say, \$20 billion a year.

What about the other \$20 or so billion a year? For both political and substantive reasons, it should be devoted to improving

the lives of the majority of ghetto residents who will remain there, at least for a while. I propose to split the funds evenly between jobs and schools. A few millions would take ghetto residents to the jobs that now exist in the suburbs, by dramatically improving public transportation or by providing van service regularly and frequently. The vans could also carry meals, tutors, social service workers; there are many good uses to which a willing, but captive, audience could put an hour or two a day. A few billion should be spent on high quality day-care facilities at the job location, whether within a single large corporation or at a spot near many smaller employers. Here too other amenities should be available—a pediatrician, tutors for parents, social services, and so on. Perhaps some employers could sponsor charter schools on or near their premises, so parents and children could continue to be near each other all day (and, not so incidentally, out of the ghetto).

An additional few billion could be used if necessary for subsidies to private employers (broadly defined to include nonprofits, community service groups, even faith-based charities) to enable them to hire as many ghetto residents as possible. I would allocate as little as possible, albeit as much as necessary, to public service employment. Public service jobs have a terrible reputation among Americans, despite their purported willingness to be generous in paying for “a handup rather than a handout.” And there is in fact a lot of room for waste, corruption, and sloth in a regime of public service jobs. So they should be reserved for the small minority of ghetto residents who are not employable in the (broadly defined, subsidized) private sector.

I would spend the remaining \$10 billion a year on schooling. Despite the stunning array of proposed and implemented educational reforms, we really know only one thing about how to improve education for poor children: teach them *with* middle-class children or *like* middle-class children. Moving ghetto residents to middle-class communities as Fiss proposes takes care of the first route. We need

to figure out just what middle-class children get in their schooling in order to follow the second route. Surely knowledgeable teachers, decent buildings, reasonably-sized classes, current textbooks, functioning computers and science labs, good playing fields, an assumption of safety and order are all necessary. Perhaps half of the billions reserved for schools should buy these resources and, more importantly, amply reward the small number of people who know how to sustain and replenish them. In short, I would take seriously educators' desire to be treated like professionals: give them the resources they need to practice their profession, pay them very well if they do it well, and subject them to at least some of the discipline of the market if they won't or can't do the job reasonably well. That is largely how we middle-class readers of *Boston Review* earn our living and choose our doctors and lawyers; children in ghettos deserve at least as well.

The other educational boost that middle-class children get and poor children in ghettos often lack is the kind of close personal attention that

encourages success, halts failure before it goes too far, and opens emotional, cognitive, and vocational doors. I would devote the remaining \$5 billion or so of schooling funds to ensuring this attention to each child in a ghetto. The "I Have a Dream Foundation" could be a model. It provides much of what middle-class parents provide—a guarantee of a college education if the child does well in school and frequent attention from an adult who cares for the child, takes him or her to museums and beaches, runs interference when the child gets into trouble, and otherwise looks out for the child's interests. The IHAD mentor cannot substitute emotionally for a parent, of course. But the combination of personal care directed toward educational success and a school system that has both resources and incentives to promote success will do a lot for ghetto children, even those who lack good parenting. Money is necessary, though not sufficient, to attain these goals.

If Fiss relaxed the caveats on his estimate of \$100 billion a year to move ghetto residents into middle-class neighborhoods, I would have no trouble budgeting more than \$40 billion. The next items on my list would include physical amenities in the ghettos such as housing and playgrounds (ensuring that both have grass and flowers) and better, not just more, policing. Other readers no doubt can add to, or even substitute items on, this wish list. But my basic point should be clear: ghetto residents deserve the same right as the rest of us to decide among decent options on where to live, and we have a responsibility to contribute the resources they need to do so. Fiss would encourage most or all to move out of the ghetto; I would encourage some to move while enabling others to sample the suburbs eight hours a day or to bring suburban amenities and opportunities into their own neighborhood. Owen Fiss and I do not, however, fundamentally disagree. If only the political debate in our nation revolved around such a relatively minor dispute over implementation! ■

Exit and Redevelopment

Gary Orfield

Owen Fiss argues that the ghettos and barrios of our metropolitan areas are profoundly harmful to their residents and to the larger community, and that there are radical policy alternatives that would produce much better results. I agree on both points. Genuine and supported choices to move out of inner cities in a way that avoided merely extending the ghetto could produce important gains in schooling, in community opportunities, and in bringing down barriers of prejudice and opportunity. The money we are already spending on often-counterproductive initiatives could be invested much more effectively, and we could be connecting many excluded families to opportunities that are critical to upward mobility in contemporary American society—better schools with better teachers, middle-

class peer groups, better networks for moving into jobs and higher education, and proximity to much stronger job markets.

In fact, we are already in the midst of a gigantic relocation program of poor families from the large housing projects that are being leveled in various cities. Very strong conditions and services of the kind developed for Chicago's famous *Gautreaux* program—providing counseling, support services, and housing-search help in outlying suburban communities for residents of Chicago Housing Authority project—should be attached to all of these moves. The alternative is to create new ghettos and to overwhelm and resegregate a number of fragile integrated communities as thousands of poor minority families with housing-subsidy certificates seek housing in discriminatory markets.

A truly massive relocation program would, however, require huge investments in new affordable housing and housing-subsidy certificates, as well as massive changes in land use controls and local rights to control housing types. And it is difficult to imagine how this could be done when both political parties are responding to suburban majorities who are hostile to such policies. Probably we would need a massive social movement, major political change, and a transformed judiciary to make such changes possible.

These steep political hurdles do not, however, prevent steps in the right direction. The first such step is to recognize that not all the positive mobility moves are outward. A significant number of our cities, for example, have areas of strong gentrification, where young urban professionals are eagerly turning previously neglected low-income areas and into

ultra-fashionable and expensive neighborhoods. With flexible tools and careful monitoring of housing conditions, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and state and local housing and development agencies, community groups, churches, and nonprofits could try to identify such areas early and obtain buildings and land for affordable and subsidized housing. With the right interventions, minority tenants could ride up with the boom.

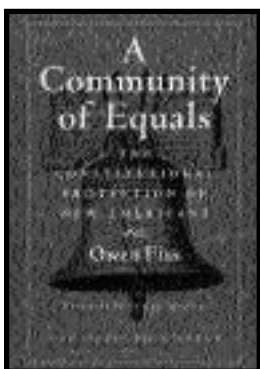
Funding for magnet and charter schools and other new school offerings could be tied to such a package in order to make certain that the new middle-class residents stayed in place when their children reached school age and provided the kind of opportunities that diverse schools offer to the children in the lower-priced housing. Another less costly strategy would be to intervene strongly to preserve and defend stable, middle-class integration in neighborhoods and inner-ring suburbs threatened by resegregation in their housing markets and schools. Such communities now rarely receive serious support, and there will be a vast increase in the number of such communities in the next two decades as racial change becomes overwhelmingly a suburban story. Large-scale black suburbanization began in a few metros in the 1970s, and is now occurring in many, but usually in the form of spreading segregation. The leaders of the relatively small list of successfully integrated suburbs and stable city neighborhoods that have broken the cycle of resegregation and enjoyed great economic and social success have very good ideas about what can be done at the local level and what kinds of support are needed from the schools and higher levels of government. We need a serious national debate on those issues.

Some constructive relocation initiatives are possible, then, and should be pursued. But most of us who have been engaged in the exit vs. redevelopment debates for a long time strongly believe that it is a mistake to pose these strategies as stark alternatives. The fact is that integration strategies are very unlikely to be implemented broadly enough or fast enough to solve the problems that Fiss describes. While there have been many ineffective efforts to break the cycle of decline and upgrade urban neighborhoods and opportunities, there have also been genuine successes and important possibilities remain open. The basic foci should be on targeting communities with substantial possibilities for stable and economically diverse populations and making strategic investments across various functions of government and private lending to reverse moderate decline or to take advantage of neglected but real possibilities. Such an approach would, for example, give high priority to provision of key resources such as competitive magnet schools and housing investment funds, which would keep middle class families in the community and attract more of them. It would also increase private investment and build upward moving spirals while securing affordable housing early in the process. This approach would be very unlikely to work in long-impooverished and isolated core ghettos or barrios, but it could be very helpful in other settings. For example, communities experiencing substantial change in real estate markets but still largely owner-occupied and with a good, well-located housing stock primarily have to deal with the initial fear of transition and the practices of real estate steering to aggressively fight appearances of urban decay that will stimulate the fears about the future. If confidence can be restored and demand maintained in the white as well as the minority mar-

kets, the negative self-fulfilling prophecy may be replaced by beliefs that can sustain integration.

Changing kinds of possibilities also come with massive immigration and the development of multiracial communities. Much of our growth in the next half century will be non-white immigrants, mostly Latino and Asian. Depending on the patterns that develop, these groups may provide economically productive enclave economies and revitalize deteriorated communities. There should be a great deal of attention given in the next few years to figuring out how to keep these neighborhoods open to low-income black and Latino families, and how to build stable multiracial neighborhoods and schools rather than new patterns of three- and four-way segregation. We are already very well into these changes in our two largest states and the other great entry points for immigrants. So far there has been almost no discussion or policy development about these possibilities. These are not cases of classic black-white ghettoization, and there are surely new possibilities for successful diversity.

I agree that the historic policies have failed and that others are badly needed and that genuine choices of the kind provided to almost all whites and middle-class Asians must be made available on a substantial scale to African Americans and Latinos. We have to think of our cities as having not only outward momentum of sprawl and spreading suburban rings but a variety of other trends and interfaces that offer both threats of growing problems and the possibility of much better outcomes. Fiss raises one of the most fundamental questions about the future of our overwhelmingly metropolitan society. After this year's presidential election, which is obviously being dominated by calculated appeals to white suburban voters and will carefully avoid any



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Relocation Works

James E. Rosenbaum

Owen Fiss provides a compelling analysis of the problem of low-income black families. If he is right, then other reform efforts are unlikely to have much success until families can escape from poor neighborhoods. Fiss offers a compelling argument for residential mobility. While I believe we may find other promising approaches, no other approach has such strong evidence of successful outcomes. The available evidence suggests that residential mobility is one of the most promising solutions for the multiple problems associated with urban poverty.

I have been studying Chicago's *Gautreaux* program for many years, and I have found that residential mobility can have truly impressive results in improving the lives of low-income families. In this program, low-income black families in public housing (or on the waitlist) were assigned to various neighborhoods in the city or suburbs by a quasi-random procedure. Participants circumvented the ordinary barriers to living in suburbs, not by their jobs, personal finances, or values, but by getting into the program and being randomly assigned to suburbs. The program gave them rent subsidies that permitted them to live in suburban apartments for the same cost as public housing. Participants moved to a wide variety of over 115 suburbs throughout the six counties around Chicago. Suburbs with more than 30 percent blacks were excluded by the consent decree, and a few very high-rent suburbs were excluded by funding limitations. Yet these constraints eliminated only a few suburbs.

The receiving suburbs ranged from thirty to ninety minutes driving time to their former homes. While all participants came from similar low-income, black city neighborhoods (usually public housing), some moved to mostly-white suburbs, while others moved to city neighborhoods, most of which were disproportionately black. In principle, participants had choices about where they moved, but, in actual practice, participants were assigned to city or suburb locations in a quasi-random manner. Clients were offered a unit according to

their position on the waiting list, regardless of their preference. Although clients could refuse an offer, few did so, since they were unlikely to get another. As a result, participants' preferences for city or suburbs had no effect on their placement location, and analyses indicate that the two groups were nearly identical.¹

This program had amazing results. Housing policy is usually narrowly viewed as providing shelter, but housing policy can radically improve people's lives. Studies of this program compared family outcomes in mostly white suburbs and mostly black city neighborhoods.² One study followed children who moved in this program and found that by the time that they were young adults, those moving to the suburbs were much more likely to graduate high school, attend college, attend four-year colleges, and (if they were not in college) to be employed and to have jobs with better pay and with benefits. A study of *Gautreaux* mothers found that suburban movers had higher employment rates than city movers, and the difference was especially large for adults who did not have jobs prior to the move. A recent study, using official records of AFDC receipt for all program

¹ A study of 330 families found the two groups were similar in age, education, marital status, long-term AFDC receipt, and second-generation AFDC receipt. See James E. Rosenbaum, "Housing Mobility Strategies for Changing the Geography of Opportunity," *Housing Policy Debate* 6 (1995): 231-70. Another study found no correlation between mothers' attributes (age and initial AFDC) and placement attributes (city/suburb, tract percent black, percent in poverty, percent unemployed, or percent low education).

² James E. Rosenbaum, "Black Pioneers—Do Their Moves to Suburbs Increase Economic Opportunity?" *Housing Policy Debate* 2 (1991): 1179-1214. Leonard Rubiowitz and James E. Rosenbaum, *Crossing the Class and Color Lines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

participants, found strong neighborhood effects on AFDC receipt many years after moving.

Critics have said that most families would not remain in white suburbs. Yet recent research, which located 1,506 out of a sample of 1,507 families, found that over two-thirds of suburb-mover families remained in suburbs seven or more years after entering them. Others have argued that such a program cannot serve large numbers of families. In order to have low impact on receiving communities, the program avoided moving more than two or three families to any neighborhood, and in fact it succeeded in this goal. Still, the program could be greatly expanded without having large impact on any neighborhood. About four million people live in Chicago's suburbs, and the vast majority of suburbs are over 80 percent white. Even if all Chicago's public housing families were widely scattered among these suburbs, they would reduce the white proportion in any suburb by less than 2 percent.

If it is done poorly, however, residential mobility will not help families. Not all moves are beneficial. Under a federal mandate to tear down public housing, housing authorities across the country are moving thousands of families to other housing. In their haste to empty buildings, officials are not giving much thought to where families are moving. A recent study finds that families are being moved to low-income, mostly black areas, which are very similar to the neighborhoods they left. These moves are displacing families into equally bad neighborhoods that will have little benefit. In contrast, the *Gautreaux* program shows that a well administered program can move low-income black families to neighborhoods that have positive influences, but this must be done carefully, not in a willy-nilly fashion in a short period of time.

Another limitation is that some families may not be prepared to benefit. The *Gautreaux* program had three selection criteria that were intended to assure landlords they would get good tenants and make it more likely that

participants would be able to remain in these apartments. The program tried to avoid overcrowding, late rent payments, and building damage by not admitting families with more than four children, large debts, or unacceptable housekeeping. None of these criteria were extremely selective. Because 95 percent of AFDC families have four or fewer children, the overcrowding restriction eliminates only a few eligible families. Moreover, *Gautreaux* administrators estimate that about 12 percent of applicants are rejected by the credit check or rental record and only 13 percent are rejected by counselors who find property damage on a home visit. Thus, all three criteria reduced the eligible pool by less than 30 percent. While these three conditions were not highly restrictive and they allowed a large proportion of low-income families to be eligible, some families were excluded.³

In contrast, a front-page article in the *Chicago Tribune* recently described a residential mobility program that included some families with histories of property vandalism and crime who were being moved into private apartments. Even though such families may not be typical of housing project residents, landlords will be reluctant to lease to families in that program. Failure to screen out families who are unprepared for the move, or failure to give them appropriate preparation, may doom many families to failure while stigmatizing the entire effort. Social poli-

cy cannot simply gloss over these difficulties. Families with poor housekeeping skills, poor rent-paying histories, large outstanding debts, destructive family members, and/or active criminal involvement will make poor tenants and will be evicted. Programs that go to great expense to move such families and compel landlords to accept them will waste money and waste political support. Residential programs must have appropriate selection criteria.⁴

These programs can be combined with other programs to address these problems: courses to teach housekeeping skills, credit management, etc. Moreover, if low-income families see incentives for meeting the selection criteria, they will have reason to alter their behavior. If such steps are taken, programs may not need to compel landlords to accept program participants. After a few years of operation, Cincinnati's HOME program reports that landlords telephoned to request participants whenever they had a vacancy. The program became a preferred provider of tenants. While landlords knew that program participants were low-income blacks, they knew that they were screened on appropriate criteria and that prior participants had turned out to be good tenants. Landlords could not get such assurances from strangers who answered their newspaper ads.

The *Gautreaux* experience suggests that if residential mobility programs are careful to select (or prepare) families and to place them in appropriate areas,

they can have truly impressive benefits. Just as Fiss indicates, residential moves lead to remarkable changes of life circumstances, and these changes have dramatic benefits on people's behavior. Housing policy can do more than provide shelter—it can radically improve people's lives. ■

³ *Gautreaux* participants are similar to a random sample of Chicago AFDC recipients in their length of time on public assistance (about seven years) and their marital status (about 45 percent never married, 10 percent currently married). S. J. Popkin, "Welfare: A View from the Bottom," unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988. But *Gautreaux* participants are less likely to be high school dropouts (39 percent pre-move vs. 50 percent), tend to be older (median age of 34 vs. 31), and have fewer children (mean of 2.5 vs. 3.0). Still, they are more likely to be second-generation AFDC recipients (44 percent vs. 32 percent). In sum, although *Gautreaux* participants may be of slightly higher socioeconomic status than the average public assistance recipient, most differences between them are not large.

⁴ James E. Rosenbaum and Shazia Miller, "Certifications and Warranties: Keys to Effective Residential Integration Programs." *Seton Hall Law Review* 27 (1997):1426-49.

Beyond Ghetto Gilding

Alexander Polikoff

By the time the civil-rights revolution of the early 1960s petered out in white backlash, black power, urban rioting, and Vietnam, truly important gains had been achieved. *De jure* segregation and Jim Crow were dead. In schools and other public facilities, in voting rights and jury service, revolutionary change had been wrought.

Not so in housing. Even in 1964, the high point of the federal commitment to civil rights, when the nation's first southern president in a century was intoning, "We shall overcome," the National

Committee Against Discrimination in Housing said: "Today, in the very eye of the storm of the Negro revolution, the ghetto stands—largely unassailed—as the rock upon which rests segregated living patterns which pervade and vitiate almost every phase of Negro and Negro-white relationships."

Four years later, after black rioting in over two dozen cities had rocked and frightened the nation, the Kerner Commission Report warned that the underlying forces leading to civil disorder were continuing to gain momentum. The

"most basic" force, it said, was "the accelerating segregation of low-income, disadvantaged Negroes within the ghettos of the largest American cities."

Then, for a brief, unbelievable moment—under, of all people, newly inaugurated President Richard Nixon—the nation seemed poised to do something. In January 1970, George Romney, Nixon's first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, pronounced that it was vital for subsidized housing to be dispersed more broadly than it had been in the past. That April, Nixon supported Romney's

emerging policy. "There must be an end," said the President's Report on National Housing Goals, "to the concentration of the poor in land-short central cities, and the inaccessibility to the growth of employment opportunities in suburban areas." The objective was to achieve "open communities" that provided jobs and housing for families of all income levels and races. To that end, legislation would be introduced to prohibit local governments from discriminating against federally subsidized housing. Whereupon, as "a necessary first step in ending the ominous trend toward stratification of our society by race and by income," Romney sent to Congress a proposal to empower the federal government to override local ordinances that excluded federally subsidized housing.

But the unbelievable moment was just that. The inevitable local opposition appeared, Nixon ducked, Romney was defrocked, and the proffered legislation was deep-sixed. In a televised press conference, followed by a formal Presidential Statement on Equal Opportunity in Housing, Nixon told the country, "I believe that forced integration of the suburbs is not in the national interest." By choosing the "forced integration" phrase, said the *Wall Street Journal*, the President knocked the props out from under George Romney and "draped the dreaded race-mixing shroud over the entire Romney effort to move subsidized housing beyond city limits."

Thus ended the first and last serious effort of the executive branch of the federal government to deal with what Romney (and the Kerner Report and Gunnar Myrdal before him) had called the nation's most serious domestic issue. The legislative branch, increasingly dominated by white suburbia, was never—absent presidential leadership—a candidate for dispersing the ghetto. And, in 1974, the door to the judicial branch was shut when

the Supreme Court ruled (in a five-to-four decision) that suburban school districts could not be required to help desegregate Detroit's nearly all-black schools.

There we were. And there we remain. In the intervening decades, instead of enabling "them" to escape their entrapment by moving to "our" better neighborhoods, we have tried to fix up the ghetto, "gild" it as it used to be called, by attracting development and services to it—thus, model cities, enterprise zones, community development corporations, empowerment zones, the inner city as "untapped market." But experience tells us we are kidding ourselves. This is trying to break up the ghetto on the cheap—by leaving ghetto residents in place—and it doesn't work.

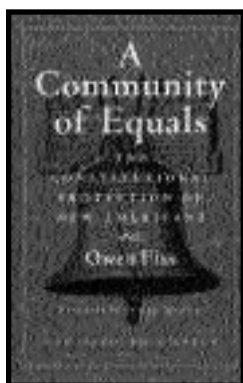
Now Owen Fiss adds his voice to the chorus of those who say that "housing mobility" is the way to deal effectively with the concentrated poverty and racial segregation of the black ghetto. The only way, says Fiss, is to give ghetto dwellers an opportunity to leave. "[M]ove poor people into rich neighborhoods," says another urban analyst. "For the ghetto kid, making it, 99 percent of the time, goes with getting out of the ghetto," says a third. "Get them out of the ghettos. This is the most powerful way," says a fourth. (Some others do carp unpersuasively against what is called "ghetto dispersal" or "housing mobility." See the work of Jon Powell, a leading scholar of concentrated poverty, for a comprehensive look at the debate and a rebuttal to those critics.)

Fiss rightly emphasizes the issue of justice. White society, including white governments, created the black ghetto. ("White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it," said the Kerner Report.)

Therefore, says Fiss, white society, including its governments, must in justice undertake all action needed to end the near-caste structure of American society.

Yes, but how? Fiss tells us we should use federal rent subsidies, enough of them to enable all ghetto residents wishing to move to do so. And we should require realtors and landlords in designated receiving communities to accept the subsidies (and the families who accompany them), rendering it impossible for local communities to thwart the relocation. But how do we move beyond where Richard Nixon positioned us thirty years ago, when he told us that forced integration of the suburbs was not in the national interest? If anything the nation is now dug in more deeply than ever. Residential segregation of blacks has *intensified* since the Nixon era. Despite an economic boom, black ghettos in our largest cities are worse than ever and bigger than ever. Against the rising economic tide the ghetto still stands, unassailed. A few years ago, when political opposition surfaced, a democratic administration killed a modest proposed expansion of a small HUD experiment to try out the very rent subsidies Fiss recommends. Republican or Democrat, Nixon or Clinton, when it comes to white suburbia accepting black ghetto dwellers as neighbors, it doesn't seem to matter.

So, what to do? Actually there is a tiny gleam of hope, not for doing the ghetto dispersal job Fiss demands, but for taking a first small step in that general direction. A part of the black ghetto in big cities consists of neighborhoods dominated by public housing, frequently the infamous high-rises. The buildings are now thirty to 45 years old. Never having been adequately maintained, they are now badly deteriorated and would cost a fortune to repair. A few years ago, Congress decided



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not to throw good money after bad and required public housing authorities to close the worst of them. Miraculously, Congress also said don't replace today's ghettos with tomorrow's. Instead, it told the housing authorities to create mixed-income communities that include public housing. And it changed some laws to help make it possible to achieve the mixed-income objective.

This is not the same as ghetto gilding. The goal is not the chimera of revitalizing a poverty community but the very different goal of transforming a poverty community into a mixed-income community. It can't be done everywhere. The site must be near an existing amenity, such as an attractive waterfront or university or medical center. Bargain rents may be required, at least initially. And so on. Things must be done which can attract working, non-poor families to reside in the community that is to include public housing families. But in some places it is doable. For example, in part of Chicago's Cabrini-Green redevelopment, 20 percent of a group of \$250,000 townhomes are actually public housing. Housing mobility is an integral part of the technique, for reducing dense concentrations of impoverished families is a precondition to attracting working families.

This is a prescription for breaking up some parts of some ghettos. Putting aside discussion—it would require a separate article—of exactly how and where it can be accomplished, and how the efforts, begun in the mid-1990s, are faring, the question remains, where do the displaced families go? The answer is in four parts: some go to other ghettos (that is, other

public housing developments); some “disappear”—that is, faced with involuntary departure they choose to leave public housing and move in with family or friends, rent in the private market, or become homeless; some go to the low-rise replacement public housing built on-site as part of the new mixed-income community; and some relocate into private housing using the rent subsidy program Fiss espouses. This last group affords us an opportunity to try to learn how to do on a small scale what Fiss recommends.

Though the scale is small, the task is formidable, for two reasons. First, without some mechanism for providing units in tight rental markets, many families will find there is simply no housing available in better neighborhoods at rents the government is willing to subsidize. Second, even where vacant units in such neighborhoods exist, many landlords are unwilling, for reasons of racial discrimination or disinclination to become involved in the red tape of a government program, to rent their units to ghetto dwellers bearing government vouchers.

But we can and should try to overcome the obstacles. Good counseling can produce families who can be “certified” by reputable agencies as acceptable tenants. Red tape can be cut. HUD can permit higher “exception” rents to be paid in certain sub-markets where market rents are high. Here and there around the country small scale mobility programs are being tinkered with and fine-tuned. Because of the imperative of families who by congress-

sional directive must perforce go somewhere, there is a new impetus for this tinkering and fine-tuning. Undoubtedly we will learn more about how to “do” mobility, and some ghetto families will as a result be enabled to take the traditional American route to social and economic advancement—moving to a better neighborhood. And so will the ghetto families who are lucky enough to get the public housing units in the new mixed-income community, though theirs is not a spatial move but a “move” to a transformed neighborhood.

Perhaps, if we are really lucky (though history testifies against the possibility), these small steps will lead the country and Congress to understand that mixed-income and mobility can both be made to work. In that event these small beginnings in public housing ghettos will become stepping stones on the path to justice that Fiss rightly says we must take. But let us not close on a feel-good note of false uplift. We should remember Tom Wicker's original judgment on the 1968 Kerner Report, that the urban rioters of the 1960s were “the personification of [the] nation's shame, of its deepest failure, of its greatest challenge.” Twenty years later, in his introduction to the 1988 edition of the report, Wicker added, “In the teeming ghettos that persist in our cities, the lot of their children is little changed.” If, after a dozen more years, a tiny gleam of hope can now be perceived, let us acknowledge that it emanates not from a willingness to do justice but from a reluctance to throw good money after bad.

A Task Unfinished

Owen Fiss Responds

The issue is not housing, nor even segregation. It is the underclass. The ghetto is not just another neighborhood that happens to be poor and black, but rather a social structure that created the black underclass and threatens to perpetuate it across generations.

Since this nation's founding, we have struggled with the issue of racial justice. The Civil War was a turning point, but even those who emerged victorious from that calamitous experience knew full well

that true equality could not be achieved by simply declaring an end to slavery. Uncorrected, the vestiges of that institution would live on, and a new caste structure would emerge, making a mockery of freedom.

The arduous process of reconstruction began in the years immediately following the War. By 1875, that effort had collapsed and by the end of the nineteenth century the nation had embarked on a very different course. Jim Crow, a state-supported system of separation, ex-

clusion, and disenfranchisement, spread like wildfire, and turned the newly freed slaves into second-class citizens.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century we were frequently reminded of the constitutional commitment to equality and how far we have departed from it. Then, on that fateful day in 1954, the High Court issued an edict condemning Jim Crow, and called on us to renew the process of reconstruction. Many resisted, and some even took up arms. But through the deter-

mined but diplomatic use of judicial power, the support of the coordinate branches of the federal government, and the mobilization of multitudes of citizens, largely spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr., the most blatant forces of resistance were overcome.

My essay begins with a recognition of the fact that the Second Reconstruction—as the period begun by *Brown v. Board of Education* is known—has come to an end, if not in the mid-1970s, then certainly in August 1996, when Congress enacted and President Clinton signed into law the welfare reform bill. My aim was to reflect on the achievements of that extraordinary era of reform and define the challenge ahead. Though we must, of course, remain ever vigilant against the continuation and resurgence of Jim Crow-type discrimination, and press for the full enforcement of 1960s civil rights laws, we must also recognize that the issues of racial justice have changed, in part due to the specific policies of the Second Reconstruction.

At the time of *Brown*, the caste structure had a decidedly racial character. Most blacks were poor, and although their poverty posed significant obstacles to their upward mobility, we understood their subjugation principally in racial terms—first, because racial discrimination acted as an independent constraint on their lives and, second, because the enormous economic disadvantages blacks suffered could be traced directly to their race.

Today, however, the hierarchical structure initially engendered by slavery and perpetuated by Jim Crow is no longer simply racial. Blacks as a class are not the worst-off group. Many blacks now enjoy so-called middle-class status and participate in almost all walks of American public life, including some of the most prestigious. Rather, the most disadvantaged group is the black underclass, a group that is defined by both race and class and that now shoulders the legacy of centuries of racial oppression.

To see the black underclass, as I do, as a manifestation of the caste structure set in motion by slavery and continued by Jim Crow is not only to acknowledge the utterly deplorable conditions that individual members of this group must endure, but also to underscore the structural constraints on their upward mobility. This form of stratification is an affront to the

egalitarian ideals that animated the Second Reconstruction and that so define this nation. It represents a moral and constitutional betrayal that demands swift and effective remedial action, not as a matter of public policy, but as a requirement of justice.

None of the participants in this debate—for whose responses I am grateful—deny the conflict between our egalitarian ideals and the maintenance of the black underclass. Nor do they deny that the ghetto is an institution that isolates and concentrates the worst off, thus magnifying their disadvantage. Indeed, James Rosenbaum, a pioneer in this field, once again provides detailed documentation of the relationship between the underclass and the inner-city ghetto of today.

Basing his argument on studies of the *Gautreaux* program, Rosenbaum points to improvements—he here describes them as “amazing”—in the lives of ghetto residents of Chicago who were given an opportunity to move to better neighborhoods. He concludes, “Housing policy can do more than provide shelter, it can radically improve people’s lives.” To this, I add that even more than improving lives, housing policy aimed at dispersal or deconcentration can, if adopted on a broad enough scale, help eradicate caste, and thus deepen and extend the process of reconstruction begun more than a century ago.

No matter how stark the evidence, Robert Coles and Phillip Thompson are reluctant to embrace deconcentration. They want to begin with all that is good and decent in the ghetto, and build from there. Thompson favors what he calls “in-place” remedies such as job creation. Coles is silent on the remedial issue, but like Thompson expresses a faith in the capacity of ghetto residents to shelter themselves from the many destructive forces that engulf their neighborhoods. In the closing passages of his essay, Robert Coles shares with us the testimony of an African American father of four in Roxbury who admits, “I wish I could get us out of here,” but finally concludes: “It’s nice to cut and run, but it’s nice to dig in hard and long—to keep remembering that you stood up for who you are, and for what you think really matters in this life that the good Lord has leant you to keep.”

I was deeply moved by this man’s evident courage and determination. Yet on

further reflection, I wondered whether he would make it, even with the help of the local churches, community organizations, and clubs Phillip Thompson celebrates. Even if he beats the odds, it is doubtful most others will. Wouldn’t it make more sense, indeed, wouldn’t it be more just, given that society put him in his predicament, for the state to provide him the resources to move if he so chooses? The decision to stay put requires courage, but we cannot read the dictates of justice out of every act of courage.

Other respondents, most notably Jennifer Hochschild, Alexander Polikoff, Richard Ford, and Gary Orfield, endorse the idea of providing those trapped within the ghetto with the resources they need to move to a better neighborhood. They too see the ghetto as an institution that perpetuates the underclass and acknowledge the rightness of deconcentration, but take this strategy in new directions. I welcome their proposals. Fashioning appropriate remedies will require all the imagination we can muster. Still, two aspects of their recommendations concern me.

One arises from the fact that much of what they offer are half-measures. Hochschild, for example, recommends cutting the amount allocated for relocation in half and using the remainder for improving life within the ghetto or for transportation systems that might get ghetto residents to jobs in the suburbs. Polikoff proposes to tie deconcentration to the process of demolishing obsolete public housing projects. Both of these ideas have great appeal, yet I fear that if we limit deconcentration in the ways they recommend, we may make even more miserable the lives of those who will inevitably be left behind—for example, those living in privately owned tenements or those who remain on the waiting list because there are not enough funds to go around.

The ghetto of today is not just a product of the containment policies of Jim Crow; it also takes its character in part from the fact that in recent decades those most able to move out have in fact done so. This exodus improved the life chances of those who moved, but also enhanced the concentration and isolation of the most disadvantaged. Richard Ford rightly points out that my proposal might intensify this very same dynamic of isolation. Some of the most dis-

advantaged may not take the subsidy I would offer and choose to stay behind, thereby threatening to create what he calls a "super-underclass." Aside from providing information to enable residents to weigh adequately the advantages of a move, I see no way of eliminating altogether the danger Ford describes—at most, it can be minimized. I fear, however, that the risk of creating a "super-underclass" would be magnified considerably by the proposed half-measures.

My second concern stems from the acknowledged motivation underlying some of the proposed alternatives—"political feasibility." Phillip Thompson, for instance, rejects deconcentration on the ground that it will not be acceptable to what he calls "white suburbia" and throws his support behind Wilson's job-creation proposal because it is "a lot more politically realistic." Speaking more generally, I was struck by the spirit of defeatism that so pervades all the responses. So many of my interlocutors hesitate to embrace deconcentration in all its fullness because they fear it is not politically feasible.

Buckminster Fuller once said that it is a virtue to be naive. I second that sentiment, but I also believe it is a virtue to be realistic. Our task is to describe what justice requires, but we must be aware of the forces that resist the delivery of justice, regardless of whether they arise from incompetence, from a narrow regard for self interest, or from a difference of opinion about the requirements of justice. We need to take account of the mood of Congress, the interests served by the containment, and the hostility deconcentration is likely to engender in the so-called receiving communities.

At the same time, we must never confuse feasibility with rightness. Moreover, we must take care not to exaggerate, in the name of realism, the forces of resistance or the barriers to

implementation, which vary city to city. The pockets of goodwill that exist in this country—and that hopefully may soon be enlarged by the prosperity and sense of triumphalism America is now experiencing—must be nourished and developed to the utmost.

We must also be aware that sometimes self-interest can be put to service for justice. Throughout the debates surrounding the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the advocates of reform often explained how opening public accommodations and jobs to blacks would be good for business, and I imagine that the eventual passage of that law could be seen as a triumph of both justice and economic interest. Polikoff's strategy of linking deconcentration to the demolition of obsolete public housing projects is in this same tradition, though with an odd twist.

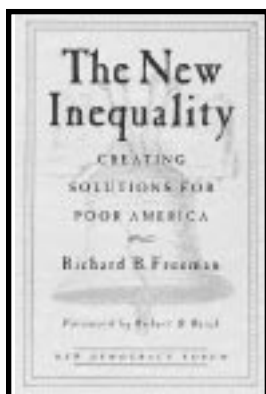
As Polikoff explains, the maintenance of a number of public housing projects would at this point require additional investment, but such an investment would not make economic sense. As he put it, it would only be throwing good money after bad. He reports that in the end Congress required that some of the worst public housing projects in fact be closed. Polikoff celebrates the result, calling it "a tiny gleam of hope," and then adds, somewhat gratuitously, "let us acknowledge that it emanates not from a willingness to do justice but from a reluctance to throw good money after bad." Why? What is the point of such an acknowledgment? What is to be gained by disavowing justice? The experience with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 leads me to imagine the possibility of reform motivated by a confluence of justice and economic interest.

Finally, no matter how fierce the resistance, we should not regard it as fixed nor the opponents of reform intractable. Housing integration has al-

ways been intensely difficult. Even after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, opening to blacks places of public accommodation and jobs in the private sector, Congress refused to heed the voices demanding a fair housing law. It took as horrendous an event as the assassination of Dr. King, and perhaps a week of riots, but ultimately Congress came to its senses, and did what simple justice required.

Residents of upscale neighborhoods, whether they be white or black, may well try to fence out poor blacks from the ghetto. Some might fear a diminution of property values, or a re-emergence of the very problems they sought to avoid by moving to a better neighborhood. We should not ignore these concerns, but neither should we capitulate to them. So we must choose the receiving communities carefully, and support the changes that inevitably will take place in them. As Gary Orfield wisely counsels, we must not only set changes in motion, but also shepherd communities through these changes. We must not create new ghettos.

We must also be clear about our purposes. Deconcentration is not just based on a desire to secure for ghetto residents a right to choose one's residence, which would only pit the associational liberty of one group against another, but derives from a desire to eliminate a horrible inequality. In attempting to tear down the walls of the ghetto, we are trying to dismantle an institution that continues, in a different and more calibrated form, the caste structure that has disfigured our nation from the very beginning. "We must come to see," King once said, after the long march from Selma to Montgomery, "that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience." ■



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