

Problems in the Black Community

Final

In chapter 2, Employment, Poverty and Welfare, the authors discuss the progress, or lack thereof, of the black community toward incorporation and assimilation, cultural pluralism or toward the construction of a separate but viable system. Due to the gains by most people, regardless of race during the Regan administration, many began to believe that the issues of racism and discrimination had passed. Those same misinformed individuals forwarded a theory by Paul Blumberg called a class convergence theory. Proponents of this theory believe there is a minimization of class differentiation or a convergence of the classes. Opponents of that theory, which also happen to be those who apparently less likely to have the wool pulled over their eyes are able to acknowledge the advances that everyone may have made, but it did not diminish the differences between the classes. The rich continued to get richer creating and an even larger divide between the haves and the have not's.

The authors examined employment and the level of occupational distribution. The authors used what Sethard Fisher calls "a process of halt, progress, and retardation", to describe blacks in the labor market. Before emancipation there were classes of black artisans, after emancipation there were more education opportunities for blacks. This continued until several years after the Civil War. The authors described three factors that they believed explained the situation. The first was the destruction of the black artisan class, the displacement of blacks by white artisans during the post-Reconstruction period and the rise of the sharecropping and tenancy system. Blacks began in indentured servitude, became field hands then sharecroppers. Blacks never had the opportunity to be in control of their own lives nor did they have the opportunity to be debt free. They were consistently in a position of owing someone.

The authors focus then went into describing the occupational distribution. They stated that there was a trend toward a broader representation of blacks in jobs more than just

agricultural. They described how the disparities still persisted between races in respect to employment opportunities. They also described the types of jobs blacks as opposed to whites would have, the numbers in the work force and the differences between the sexes. Blacks were under-represented in all professions. The two areas that blacks were able to excel in were in sports and entertainment; and that was extremely competitive. They may be outstanding playing basketball in their neighborhoods or all-stars on their high school football teams but only a few are even selected for college scholarships. There are thousands of great athletes in college, many of which who are not even seen by scouts, so again the number of college athletes who get drafted by professional sports teams are reduced even further. But even for those who are drafted, the average career in professional sports is approximately 10 years and that depends on the sport and the position being played. So while blacks have the opportunity to excel in professional sports, it may be a short lived occupation or left behind all together.

The authors also discussed blacks in the mass media industry. This is another area where blacks have the opportunity to excel. However, the same competitive nature of professional sports is the same competitive nature of the entertainment industry. There are still instances of racism and discrimination that prevent blacks from getting jobs in front of and behind the cameras. There is also under-representation of writers and producers which help contribute to fewer "black" movies being made. Not to say that black actors and actresses do not have the fortune of being employed in "white" movies but again the numbers are small. The authors listed a number of black actors in the chapter that accounted for almost all the ones known to the public, which speaks volumes to the number of blacks who represent the industry. That number is reduced even further when only accounting for women. There is a large disparity in the

salaries between white actors and actresses and black actors and actresses. There are many barriers that prevent blacks from being on the same level as their white counterparts.

Another aspect of the mass media employment the authors discussed was blacks in the television industry. Blacks again are under-represented in all aspects of the television industry. Unless of course blacks are being portrayed as something negative on television. Again, the authors did make mention to programs that blacks play a leading or prominent role but again, if they were able to list them in only a few lines, it's far too small of a number.

So even though occupations in sports and the entertainment industry provide blacks with the chance to have lucrative careers the competitive nature of it makes it such to where their chances of making it are slim.

The authors went on to discuss corporate and union employment. They made the observation that blacks often gained positions of power and influence in institutions as they are in a phase of decline, which was evident in the case of labor unions. (62). Blacks did not begin to outnumber whites in union membership until the late 1980's when whites were begin leaving. Blacks were loyal to unions because they believed they were responsible for gains in wages. The authors discussed in great detail blacks were involvement in corporate America and how it had a great deal to do with tokenism. The "hidden" corporate culture helps to illustrate the actions of whites in corporate America. Corporate and department heads have their own ideas of what it takes to move up. Not surprisingly, since they themselves got ahead, they look for people who have characteristics similar to their own. They feed better information to workers with these characteristics, bring them into stronger networks and put them in fast track positions. With such advantages, these workers perform better and become more committed to the company. This of

course confirms the boss's initial expectation or stereotype. But for workers who don't look like them (black) the opposite happens. Thinking of them as less capable, the bosses give them fewer opportunities and challenges. When the black workers see others get ahead and realize that they are working beneath their own abilities, they lose morale, become less committed to the company and don't perform as well, bringing to fruition the self fulfilling prophesy that they blacks have internalized. It also confirms the stereotypes the bosses had of them. They will on occasion give Black's opportunities (Condoleezza Rice) to make the masses think they blacks have the same opportunity as everyone else.

The types of jobs that would be available to Blacks were also examined by the authors of the chapter. They made sure to point out that race and gender discrimination would continue to block underpreferred groups from many jobs, much like the hidden corporation, and consequently sustaining a situation of structural inequality throughout the United States. They proposed that the fastest growing jobs would be in technology but there would be a continued need for lawyers, nurses and accountants. They also anticipated greater automation but they didn't appear to really understand the impact of automation alone would have. The impact automation is having on not only the American society but everywhere is massive. There are problems with not only unemployed people but the permanently unemployed. The unskilled workers are not the only workers being displaced. Now it is skilled and even middle management jobs that are being done away with. Bank tellers and customer service agents are losing their jobs also. They mentioned universities would be hiring in the future and blacks would have opportunities there. Now with the corporate universities they are about maximizing profit. What that means as far as jobs are concerned is that they will be hiring adjunct instructors instead of full time faculty so those jobs will not be as they may have thought.

The authors did a complete overview of the income distribution and unemployment by race. As expected, the gap in income between blacks and whites have blacks substantially behind. Black's positions in the labor force were then and still are much weaker than their white counterparts. The goal of capitalism is to maximize profit. In that light, the rich continues to get richer and the poor is getting even poorer. The percentage of single parent families is below the poverty level while the top 5 percent continue to see maximum profit. The polarization between the races is particularly apparent in the median income of blacks and whites and it has not changed accounting for "progress". They also reviewed the median incomes by region and blacks though it varied how poor they were across the United States one thing held true, they were always more poor then their white counterparts. The authors pointed out that even though the income disparity between blacks and whites is enormous; blacks have a \$300 billion consumer market. So even though blacks are not making the money, they are definitely spending the money. It goes back to the idea of sharecropping. Blacks were always in debt because they would never make enough money to own anything. The ruling class is still controlling blacks through credit. Even though they cannot afford it, they keep spending. However, the black dollar does not garner any influence because they do not understand the power they have.

The authors revealed that blacks are about three times as likely to live in poverty as whites are. However, about 66% of all poor people in the United States are white and 30% are black. Although more whites than blacks are poor, blacks are overrepresented among America's poor. (91). In general, the authors attest, most attention is focused on the urban poor, but blacks as well as whites in rural areas suffer from debilitating poverty conditions. The media try's to paint poverty with a black face. When people think about poverty urban black people come to

mind because that is what Americans have been socialized to think. However, when the mine collapsed in West Virginia a few months ago, America was able to see that poverty indeed had a white face as well. So while the authors provided the statistics that make up an accurate description of poverty, the media, by way of the ruling class attempts to perpetuate that belief. The power that the ruling class has is to keep that division between the poor whites and blacks. As long as poor whites believe they are better off than blacks they have no desire to unify with them to overthrow the ruling class.

With poverty comes the need for assistance from the government. That comes in the form of welfare, both for the poor and the rich. The authors discussed governmental bailouts for major corporations which is something the government continues to do. The authors suggested that what was needed to effect more equitable income distribution and employment opportunities are sound programs organized and financed by public and private sectors. That unfortunately would only be putting a band aid on the problem and not eliminate the problem. The root cause is capitalism and until capitalism is done away with, the types of problems that put corporations ahead of individuals will continue to occur. So regardless of the special programs that have been and continue to be brought through legislation it will not matter because it will still be capitalism at work.

A very extensive look at employment, poverty and welfare was done providing statistics, explanations, causes and remedies to the problems that are plaguing not only blacks but all Americans. The remedies and explanations that were forwarded by the authors appeared to be of the perspective that if we work within the system we can fix the system. It is imperative to know the background, the history because only then will you begin to know who the real culprit is. Then there can be strategies to right the wrongs. So while they did an excellent job in outlining

the history of essentially money and the lack thereof in America, it would have been more meaningful through a different lens.

~~Employment~~ Contemporary Issues in Ed

In the chapter, Contemporary Issues in Education, the authors discussed many of the issues that were faced by African Americans from the pre 1954 period through the late 1980's. The chapter began with a foundation of hope for the future. They gave the statistic that by 1880 more than 700,000 black children were enrolled in school in ten Southern states and a million by the turn of the century. They went on to say, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that "blacks seemed headed toward full incorporation into the educational structure of American Society" (215). From there, the authors took the readers on the journey from the blow that crippled that hope to all the advances and set backs from that time.

The Supreme Court case that jeopardized Blacks incorporation into the educational system of the American society was Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896. The court decision upheld the principle of "separate but equal". The decision justified racial segregation and reestablished the traditions of white supremacy with black inferiority and structured privilege based upon color. The authors forwarded many ways that case created inequalities. For example, they discussed how new facilities were constructed for white students while black students inherited the deteriorated schools. They also mentioned how black students had to walk several miles to school while white students were bused to school. They went on to state that the dual educational system often led to separate curricula for black and whites which was constructed to maintain a system of segregation and patterned superordinate -subordinate relations between the races. Whites therefore were better prepared for college while black students were only prepared for trades and skilled labor. That of course, affected the types of jobs both races had the opportunity to received, with black getting lower paying jobs. That also, by the way, negatively affected black males getting jobs and being able to support their families. That consequently led to the dysfunction of the African American Family. (217).

The measures that were taken to correct Plessy v. Ferguson and its damage were made primarily by the NAACP. They put a relentless amount of pressure on the educational institutions. There were five cases being argued that directly butted heads with the separate but equal decision. In the lead case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS, the court decreed that the segregation of black and white children was unconstitutional and that the separate but equal doctrine did not apply to education. The fallout from the decision was severe for white southerners because it "dealt the southern way of life a death blow". It was not as much of a concern for the northern whites. Another set of people that it created fallout for surprisingly were the black administrators at black colleges and universities because if students would start going to white colleges instead of their black colleges it would interfere with their livelihood. It's unbelievable how something as pivotal as being allowed to choose an educational path would be hindered by those for whom it affected most. It is synonymous with the metaphor crabs in a barrel. Southern whites, although being dealt what was considered the death blow, did not give up without a fight. They instituted several stall tactics in response to the court's decision to desegregate "with all deliberate speed". For the fear of integration and desegregation would be too devastating. (217).

Support for both integration and desegregation swung back and forth. However, the Civil Rights Act in 1964 in combination with the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 destabilized the segregation advocates and eroded the resistance to compliance with the law. Funds were cut off from any school that refused to comply with desegregation regulations. However, the fact that schools who had still been embracing segregation were still getting funded in the first place is ridiculous. Not to be outdone, segregation advocates were still not giving up and were more than willing to provide misleading information. The Supreme Court

had already decided on a number of cases that would establish a legal framework for implementing court-ordered desegregation. In 1969, the Court reminded the nation that the 1955 mandate of “with all deliberate speed” was no longer “constitutionally permissible”. School systems had to eliminate dual school systems immediately. (219).

Now that the country was transitioning toward desegregation, for real this time, the authors discussed several dysfunctional consequences of the transition. The first consequence was resegregation. What that meant was within the school that had been desegregated maintained within school segregation practices such as portable classrooms, segregated libraries and cafeterias. Another consequence to desegregation was displacement. In instances of displacement many blacks loss their jobs. White less prepared teachers were sent to inner city schools and receive “combat pay” while better prepared black teachers would lose their jobs. Some black administrators were demoted to janitorial staff in some instances. Drop-outs and suspensions, yet another consequence, became an issue among blacks at a considerably higher rate than for white students. It was also referred to as push-outs because, though difficult to substantiate, a disproportionate number of black students were victims of discrimination by white administrators or by blacks who bend too far to accommodate white students and teachers. Students at all levels from elementary school to high school saw increasingly higher numbers of suspensions with those having been suspending in elementary school having a higher propensity of being suspended in high school. Just because someone is a teacher, unfortunately, does not mean they always treat children fairly. When they have “problems” with kids they talk to other teachers and the negative stigma follows them because they tell the other teachers. The students do not have a legitimate opportunity to succeed. They are set up for failure before they are even allowed to get started. The final consequence to desegregation was school environment and self