

THE BLACK POOR: HIGHEST STAGE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT.

Manning Marable (1983)

The economic relations of the ghetto to white America closely parallel those between third-world nations and the industrially advanced countries. The ghetto also has a relatively low per-capita income and a high birth rate. Its residences are for the most part unskilled. Businesses lack capital and managerial know-how. Local markets are limited. The incidence of credit is high. Little savings takes place and what is saved is usually not invested locally. Goods and services tend to be 'imported' for the most part, only the simplest and the most labor-intensive being produced locally. The ghetto is dependent on one basic export—its unskilled labor power. William K. Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 22.

The citadel of world capitalism, the United States, has never liked to admit that millions of its citizens are poor. Yet the hub of international financial markets, Wall Street, is only blocks from some of the worst urban slums in the world. Atlanta's Omni and glittering convention center is walking distance from dilapidated shanties that are mirror images of eighteenth and nineteenth century slave quarters. The White House and the posh residential district of Georgetown are respectively less than twenty city blocks from rat infested, crime filled squalor. The percentage of the total U. S. population defined as impoverished increased from 11.1 percent in 1972 to 13.0 percent in 1980, the highest figure recorded by the Bureau of the Census since 1966. 1.3 million New York City residents were defined as poor in 1978, 18.7 percent of the city's populace. Chicago recorded 667,000 poor persons in 1978, 18.4 percent of its total population, and Philadelphia had 336,000 poor people, 19.8 percent of the city's total population. There were 2.6 million Latinos, 7.6 million Blacks and 16.3 million whites who were classified by the Federal government as poor in 1978. In a racist society, poverty is allotted unequally: 31 percent of all Blacks in the U. S. are poor, 22 percent of all Hispanics, but only 9 percent of all whites.

Poverty must be understood properly as a comparative relationship between those segments of classes who are deprived of basic human needs (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, medical care) vs. the most secure and affluent classes within a social and economic order. It does relatively little good to compare and contrast the family of a Puerto Rican welfare mother in the South Bronx with a poor family in Lagos, São Paulo or Bombay. Black American living conditions may be superior in a relative material sense to those of working class families in Poland—but we are not Poles. The process of impoverishment is profoundly national and regional, and it is in the light of capitalist America's remarkable success in producing an unprecedented standard of living for the majority of its indigenous white population that Blacks' and Hispanics' material realities must be judged. The first dilemma confronting the researcher who explores the dimensions of American poverty involves the definition of class. Traditionally, American bourgeois social scientists have defined one's class status as a function of annual earned income, and not in terms of one's relationship to the means of production. Upper class Americans are not individuals who own the factories and the

corporations, and who live without selling their labor power in the marketplace for a wage. Rather, the capitalist elite is delineated by its annual income of, let us say, \$200,000 or more. Of course, this definition could include any number of persons who are not capitalists—from highly successful physicians to lucrative (and illegal) drugs dealers. Conversely, the Federal government has established a rather elaborate theoretical construct to define poverty, based again on an individual's or family's annual income—the sum of the amounts received from earnings; Social Security and public assistance payments; dividends, interest and rent; unemployment and workmen's compensation; government and private employee pensions, and other periodic income. Certain non-monetary transfers, such as healthcare benefits and food stamps, are not counted as income.

The Federal government makes a distinction between “nonfarm” and “farm” residence in determining poverty status, weighs its analysis according to the number of persons who are in a particular family, and even considers whether a female is the nominal “head” of a particular household. Thus, widely varying standards emerge on what constitutes “the poor.” An eighteen year old Black woman with a small child in Atlanta was considered poor in 1978 if her annual income was \$4,268 or less. If she and her child lived in rural Georgia, her “poverty threshold” was \$3,614. A Black family of seven persons in Chicago with both male and female parents would be poor at \$11,038 or less. If their father was killed by the police, and the family returned to rural North Carolina, its poverty threshold would be \$7,462; if it stayed in Chicago, \$8,852. A blind and partially crippled 66 year old widow living in a dangerous and drafty rowhouse in the slums of North Philadelphia, would not be considered poor if her yearly income exceeded \$3,253. Sensible people of all political persuasions would have to admit that no single person can survive on an annual income of under \$10,000 in a metropolitan area except at the precipice of despair and hunger. But as everything else in capitalist America, the state defines “poverty” to suit its own needs. Thus, the assertion that the percentage of all Americans who are “poor” declined from 22.4 percent in 1959 to 11.1 percent in 1973 must be viewed with a healthy degree of skepticism.

Even when one accepts the Federal government's definition of poverty, the general situation for millions of Americans becomes strikingly apparent. For the year 1978, there were 9.7 million children under the age of 18 who lived in families existing below the poverty level. 3.2 million persons 65 years or older were poor. 10.3 million poor persons, about 42 percent of the nation's total poor population, resided in the South. 62 percent of all poor people lived in metropolitan areas) and 62 percent of this population resided in the ghetto or central city. 5.4 million unrelated individuals over 14 years old, residing in the homes of non-relatives or living alone, were poor. Most of these unrelated persons, 4.2 million, were white. 1.4 million white families with no husbands present were classified as poor, 23.5 percent of all such families. 7 percent of all families, Black, white and Hispanic- who lived in central cities were below the poverty level. 38.5 percent of all married women age 25 to 44 whose spouse was absent from the home in 1979 were poor, and 80.8 percent of all American women over 65 who are widowed are poor.

Statistically, the poor Black family differs from the impoverished white family in a number of critical respects. From 1959 to 1978, the number of whites classified by the Federal government as below the poverty level declined from 28,484,000 to 16,259,000. In terms of percentage to the general white population in the U. S., the decline cut the white poverty rate from 18.1 percent to 8.7 percent. During the same period, the number of poor Blacks also declined both in real numbers and in terms of their percentage to the Black population, but not as much as the whites' figures—9,927,000 persons and 55.1 percent in 1959 to 7,625,000

persons and 30.6 percent in 1978. In real terms, the number of poor Blacks actually increased slightly after 1969, from 6,245,000 that year to the current level. The number of poor white males with families declined from 4,952,000 to 2,132,000 between 1959 and 1978, for a drop in percentage terms of from 13.3 percent to 4.7 percent of all such white families. For Black male households, the decline was more marked, from 1,309,000 to 414,000. Even so, 13.4 percent of Black household heads were poor in 1979, a figure that exceeds the level of white male householders twenty years before.

Black families throughout the U.S., in every region and city, assume the unequal burden of poverty. In suburban districts outside the ghetto, 21.3 percent of all Black families are poor, vs. only 5.9 percent of white families. In central cities Black and white families below the poverty level comprise 28.6 percent vs. 7.6 percent of their total populations respectively. Outside metropolitan areas, 39.1 percent of all Black families are poor, while only 11.2 percent of white families are.

When all American families are divided into fifths according to income, a much higher proportion of Blacks and Hispanics are located in the bottom two-fifths, and virtually disappear in the highest fifth of U. S. income earners. Using 1977 figures, 39.6 percent of all U. S. nonwhite families were in the lowest fifth of all income earners. 22.6 percent were located in the second lowest fifth. Only 9.4 percent of all nonwhite families earned yearly incomes to rank in the highest fifth, by way of contrast.

Although Blacks' incomes have increased over the past ten years, earners generally have not kept pace with inflation. One way of viewing the illusion of Black income mobility is by comparing Black median incomes between 1970 and 1977 in current dollars and in constant 1977 dollars. The median Black family income in 1970 was \$6,279. Seven years later, Black family median income was \$9,563, an increase of \$3,284. In constant 1977 dollars, however, \$6,279 was worth \$9,799. Thus, the median Black family income actually declined—2.4 percent in the period 1970 and 1977. Using constant 1977 dollars, a pattern of growing impoverishment becomes clear. The median Black family incomes in Northeastern states declined by 15.2 percent between 1970 and 1977, from \$12,132 to \$10,285 annually; in the North Central States, the decline was 11.2 percent, \$12,045 to \$10,690; in the West, 20.6 percent, \$12,487 to \$9,917. Those families that suffered most were located in urban metropolitan areas. In central cities in excess of one million persons, Black median family income declined 13.6 percent, from \$11,589 to \$10,012. Even in the suburbs of major cities, Black median family income dropped 7.1 percent, \$14,111 to \$13,104. For Black families with no husband present, median incomes increased marginally, from \$5,581 in 1970 to \$5,598. Simultaneously, white median family incomes between 1970 and 1977 increased in constant 1977 dollars by 4.8 percent, and white suburban families' median incomes passed the \$20,000 mark by 1977.

Although the majority of Black poor families earned something between \$3,000 to \$5,000 in 1978, a frightening number of Blacks exist on virtually no financial reserves or resources. 78,000 Black families reported annual incomes between \$1,000 and \$1,499; 45,000 families earned between one dollar to \$999 during 1978; 31,000 additional families actually had no cash income at all. For the most oppressed and destitute sector of the permanently unemployed, social services and public programs have provided little in the way of real additional income. Inside poverty areas, residential districts containing at least 20 percent of the population living below the official poverty level, 220,000 Black families survive solely on public assistance plus their meager salaries. 31,000 families in poor communities depend primarily on Social Security income. About one-third of a million Black poor families live in

public housing, which reduces the amount of money they must pay toward their rent. 770,000 other Black poor families, however, are forced to find private accommodations usually at exorbitant rates.

Demographically, Black poor people are distinguished from poor whites by certain social characteristics: they are largely more female, younger, and usually reside in the urban ghetto. At all ages, Black women are much more likely to be poor than white females, white males, or Black males. Several examples can be used to illustrate this. Consider four categories of unmarried persons between the ages of 15 to 19: white males, white females, Black males and Black females. For these groups, the percentage of their total populations who would have been below the poverty level in 1978 was the following: white males, 8.5 percent; white females, 14.8 percent; Black males, 36.0 percent; Black females, 40.0 percent. For divorced women between the ages of 25 to 29, the poverty rates are white females, 19.7 percent; Black females, 41.2 percent. Among married women who are legally separated but not divorced, between age 35 to 44 years, those below the poverty line are white females, 40.6 percent; Black females, 52.5 percent. Overall poverty rates for all household heads 15 years and over, by race are white males, 5.3 percent; white females, 9.5 percent; Black males, 11.8 percent; Black females, 31.1 percent. For all persons of both sexes, the percentages of those in poverty are white males, 7.3 percent; white females, 10.0 percent; Black males, 26.5 percent; Black females, 34.1 percent.

Subproletarian status for Black women creates oppressive social conditions that inevitably include an absence of adequate birth control information and support services for young children. In residential areas where at least twenty percent of all persons exist below the poverty level, both birth and infant mortality rates are exceptionally high. In impoverished central cities, the number of Black children under 3 years old per 1,000 Black women between the ages of 15 to 44 was 327.93. In rural poverty areas, the rate is a staggeringly high 441.66. Again, these rates must be contrasted with both white and Black women who live above the poverty level, 173.61 and 184.69, respectively. There is a direct relationship between the number of children that are within a Black family with a sole female householder and family's likelihood of being below the poverty level. Only 14.8 percent of all Black women householders without children are in poverty. That percentage increases with each dependent: one child, 42.2 percent in poverty; two children, 59.8 percent; three children, 63.4 percent; four children, 82.5 percent; five children, 86.0 percent.

Poverty is also reinforced within the Black community by educational underdevelopment and academic inequality. By 1978, as an illustration, 74 percent of all Blacks between the ages of 22 to 34 were high school graduates, with 12.6 median years of school completed. 86.1 percent of all whites in this age group were high school graduates, with 12.9 median years of education. For Blacks below the poverty level between 22 and 34, both figures were significantly lower—53.0 percent high school graduates, with 12.1 years of schooling. Overall educational statistics for poor Blacks are much worse. The average poor Black person has completed only 10 years of school. Only 26.8 percent have been graduated from high school. Impoverished Blacks between 45 to 54 years of age recorded only 9.3 years of education, and Blacks between 55 to 64 years of age have but 8.4 years. Not a single Black man between age 60-64 in 1978 who lived in poverty had a high school diploma. 118,000 Black poor people have never attended school in their lives, 491,000 completed under five years, and another 585,000 had only a sixth or seventh grade education.

The strongest roots of Black poverty are anchored firmly in the capitalist marketplace, contrary to the opinions of most social scientists. The process of income erosion for Black

families since the 1960s can be examined several ways. Perhaps the most effective is an assessment of the number of salaried workers per family by race, and the ratio of persons to income earners per family. In 1967, the Black families were significantly larger than white families (4.35 persons vs. 3.59 persons). However, the economic conditions of the period allowed a relatively larger number of Blacks to enter the job market to support family members. The percentage of families with two income earners that year was 41.8 percent for Blacks and 38.4 percent for whites. 11.1 percent of all Black families had three earners, and 5.3 percent had four or more. There were overall slightly more income earners per family for Blacks (1.76) than for whites (1.67). By 1977, both Black and white families had dropped in size (3.74 persons vs. 3.25 persons). The percentage of white families having no earners increased during the decade, from 8.2 to 11.8 percent. For Black families without salaried workers, the percentage jumped about 70 percent, from 10.2 to 17.2 percent. The percentage of Black families with one only wage earner increased from 31.6 to 36.2 percent, while the figure for whites dropped, 39.5 to 31.7 percent. The percentage of Black families with two or more earners decreased, 58.2 to 46.6 percent, whereas the whites' percentage increased 52.3 to 56.5 percent. Only 3.8 percent of all Black families had four or more income earners by 1978. Most significantly, the ratio of persons to earners per family had remained roughly the same for Blacks, while the ratio declined for whites. These figures imply that the recessions of 1969-70 and 1973-75 forced at least 550,000 Black workers permanently out of the job market; that Black families who depended upon a second or third job to maintain their homes lost the opportunity to acquire employment; and that whites took the places of Blacks in most of these jobs.

Unemployment statistics provide another key in explaining the steady deterioration of Black economic life. In 1961 the official rate of unemployment for nonwhites and whites in the U.S. was 12.4 and 6.0 percent respectively. In the mid-1960s, nonwhite unemployment dropped sharply for several reasons: the continued relocation of rural Blacks to the North and West, where more jobs at higher wages were then available; the collapse of legal segregation; the Federal government's implementation of affirmative action guidelines which made jobs available to previously qualified Blacks; and a generally expanding capitalist economy. By 1969 nonwhite unemployment was 6.4 percent, and the rate for nonwhite married men who lived with a spouse declined from 7.9 percent in 1962 to only 2.5 percent in seven years. The crisis of U.S. capitalism in the 1970s contracted the number of available jobs in the labor market, with Black workers usually the first to be dismissed. In 1972 nonwhite unemployment reached 10 percent, and by 1975 the figure was almost 14 percent. Nonwhite married men in 1975 had an unemployment rate of 8.3 percent, 170 percent higher than that for white married males. In 1975, 33 percent of all unemployed nonwhites were out of work for 15 weeks or more; 16 percent were jobless for more than half the year. Blacks below the poverty level were particularly victimized. Only 1.6 million of 4.7 million poor Blacks were able to work during 1978. Of this number, less than 950,000 were employed full-time. 508,000 of the employed Black poor held jobs for 26 weeks or less, and 689,000 more could only obtain part-time work. Hardest hit were poor, young Black men and women between 16 and 21 years of age. The mean number of weeks worked in 1978 for this group was a meager 17.2 weeks.

As the crisis of the capitalist economy became more severe, the rules for those unemployed workers, Black and white, to receive compensation became more restrictive. During the recession of 1973-1975, at least three-fourths of the unemployed received some sort of compensation. Workers losing their jobs because of foreign capital's growing shares of the U.S. consumer market were awarded a substantial share of their former wages for up to 18

months, with the passage of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program. As late as December, 1980, almost one-quarter of a million unemployed workers obtained funds through the program; by December, 1981, only 12,100 were allowed to collect benefits. By the beginning of 1982, only 37 percent of the jobless were receiving any kind of compensation. Officially, Black overall unemployment reached 17.4 percent in late 1981, a percentage which does not even include those whom the Federal government calls “discouraged workers”—unemployed persons who have not looked for work actively for four weeks. Conservatively, the real rate of Black unemployment in the U.S. in the early 1980s easily exceeded 20 percent, and might surpass 30 percent under certain economic conditions. In many ghetto communities, Black youth unemployment surpassed 80 percent.

The pain of unemployment is magnified still further by the growing personal indebtedness that traps the Black poor. Black families below the poverty level had a median income deficit of \$2,261 in 1978, compared to a median income deficit of \$1,753 for poor white families. 261,000 Black families owed \$3,000-\$3,999. 146,000 were in debt between \$4,000-\$4,999; and 182,000 were behind by \$5,000 or more. For Black families with related children under 18 years of age in 1978, the median income deficit was \$3,781. Black families with female householders were behind by \$2,440. 215,000 of these families owed \$3,000-\$3,999; 262,000 more female-headed households were in debt by at least \$4,000.

Summarizing these statistics, one obtains at best a limited insight into the nature of Black poverty in the United States. To grasp the fact that the median annual income of a Black family consisting of one female adult and two children under 18 years of age who are below the poverty level is \$3,260 does not and cannot tell us how she struggles every day to survive. Statistics report that 10,000 Black families in the U.S. that include a female householder, no husband, and three small children, reported no cash income in 1978. Beyond Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and beyond food stamps, how did these 10,000 impoverished Black families purchase school books, new clothing, shoes and other necessities? Did they have the luxury of going to the cinema on a Saturday afternoon, or jumping into the family automobile to take a leisurely ride down to the beach on a warm summer day? How did they cope when a sudden health problem struck one of the children in their family? What is the possibility of them ever overcoming their massive personal debt, and escaping the harassment of creditors and finance officers? Statistics cannot relate the human face of economic misery.

Oppressed people learn strategies for survival: if they do not learn, they perish. The profile above indicates that in 1978 only 10.8 million out of 18.1 million Black persons over 14 years of age could find employment. What do several millions of these workers—the 2.2 million persons who have only found part-time jobs, and the 412,000 Black workers who are unemployed for more than 26 weeks during the year—do to survive? How do the other 7.3 million Black adults provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care and some measure of security to their families in the age of Reaganomics and racism? At the highest level of underdevelopment, the daily life of the Black poor becomes a continuous problematic, an unresolved set of dilemmas which confront each person at the most elementary core of their existence. The patterns of degradation are almost unrelenting, and thrust upon every individual and family a series of unavoidable choices which tend to dehumanize and destroy many of their efforts to create social stability or collective political integrity. In recent decades, sociologists have described this growing social stratum as an “underclass” or “ghettoclass.” Perhaps the best example of the literature on the subject was written by Douglas G. Glasgow, professor of social welfare at Howard University. Glasgow's *Black Underclass* examines the innercity Black youth of Los Angeles, from the Watts race uprising

of 1965 to the late 1970s. Theoretically, he locates the center of Black unrest in the volatile group of 18 to 34 year olds who were unified by “their common condition”: They were jobless and lacked salable skills and opportunities to get them; they had been rejected and labeled as social problems by the police, the schools, the employment and welfare agencies, they were victims of the new camouflaged racism. Detached from the broader white society, even largely from the seemingly complacent working Blacks around them, they drank, gambled, fought a little, but mostly just generally ‘hung out.’ . . . They try to keep body and soul together and maintain a job, but they remain immobile, part of the static poor. Others who could make this adaptation fail to do so, often preferring to remain unemployed rather than accept a job that demands their involvement for the greater part of each day but provides only the barest minimum of financial reward. They seek other options for economic survival ranging from private entrepreneurial schemes to working the welfare system. Hustling, quasi-legitimate schemes, and outright deviant activity are also alternatives to work.

Glasgow separates the Black “underclass” from lower income Blacks by several rough social criteria: an absence of generational socioeconomic upward mobility, the “lack of real opportunities to succeed,” and widespread “hunger and despair” which “arises from contact with mainstream institutions, which, almost imperceptibly and very impersonally, reject them.” The author also believes that “racism is probably the most basic cause of the underclass condition.”

Conceptually, there are some problems inherent with the term “underclass.” Using Glasgow's criteria, literally millions of Black Americans would have to be included with the underclass, since as I have illustrated previously, they have absolutely no meaningful prospects for future work. Glasgow emphasizes the subjective and superstructural factors related to underclass status—lack of decent education, widespread alienation from white civil order and society, the disintegration of stability within family life, and so forth. But these factors in and of themselves do not make this massive stratum a “class” in a real and decisive sense. These “subproletarians” include both marginal elements of the working class as well as those of whom Marxists have traditionally termed the lumpenproletariat: pimps and prostitutes, small-time criminals, drug dealers and “numbers” runners. The “work” that these elements perform is defined by capitalist society as illegal, but the profits it returns for a few ghetto entrepreneurs can be monumental.

Moreover, the question of class must address the issue of consciousness. A class that is neither “self-conscious” nor acts collectively according to its material interests, is not worthy of the name. The general philosophy of the typical ghetto hustler is not collective, but profoundly individualistic. The goal of illegal work is to “make it for oneself,” not for others. The means for making it comes at the expense of elderly Blacks, young Black women with children, youths and lower-income families who live at the bottom of working class hierarchy. The consciousness of the subproletariat is not so much that of a “class,” but the sum total of destructive experiences that are conditioned by structural unemployment, the lack of meaningful participation within political or civil society, the dependency fostered by welfare agencies over two or three generations, functional illiteracy and the lack of marketable skills. The pimp is one typical representative of innercity underdevelopment within the subproletariat, the personification of the individualistic hustler. He accumulates petty capital by brutalizing young women, who sell their sexuality on the open market to (usually white middle class male) “consumers.” Methods of “labor discipline” invariably include naked force-rape, threats, physical and psychological assaults. Women who are coerced or who accept these crude terms of “employment” are expected to deliver a certain

number of tricks with “Johns” per hour, day and week. Police in the ghetto are usually an integral part of the trade, and expect a regular cut from the women's profits for tolerating the traffic in their precincts. Local Black and white entrepreneurs in the inner city motel and hotel business find room to expand and even to survive by orienting services to accommodate prostitution. The profits are also used to underwrite other illicit activities, from the ghetto's omnipresent drug traffic in elementary and secondary schools to small-time fencing operations.

Black women with young dependents are invariably touched by the process of lumpenization. A very small percentage may be forced at some point into prostitution simply to put food on the table for their children. Many more, however, supplement their inadequate incomes by a variety of illegal acts which carry relatively low levels of risk. “Boosting” or stealing clothing, shoes, small appliances and food from retail stores has become a regular and common occurrence. Many poor people who maintain a high degree of public morality, and who actively participate in their churches, find little to no difficulty purchasing clothing, television sets, stereos, washing machines and even automobiles that they know are stolen. Children even below the age of twelve sometimes become numbers runners, or participate in marginal ways in the drug traffic. Teenagers who become skilled in drug transactions can accumulate literally thousands of dollars per month, and annual gross incomes above \$20,000 for some high school students are not rare in major cities. In some urban Black communities, and especially in Chicago, over one-fourth of all Black youth between the ages of 14 to 25 belong to gangs, which often deal in small robberies, drugs and prostitution.

A great many youth participate in gangs simply to survive daily life in urban high schools. Gang membership usually has little social stigma, and carries with it a limited guarantee of safety and security in their neighborhoods. The death of a gang member, the murder of a high school student during classes, or the random arrest of a young Black man by the police, are all integral factors of daily life. What is sad about the proliferating incidents of violence within the urban Black community's permanent reserve army of labor is that no one is surprised any more. Substantial elements of the Black elite do not discuss the unique problems of the “underclass,” either with whites or among themselves, because in doing so they would be forced to confront the common realities of racism that underlie the totality of America's social and economic order. They often do not like to be reminded that former friends and family members are on welfare, that their nieces may be prostitutes, or that their cousins peddle drugs, stolen fur coats and designer jeans. Even the expressions of popular culture among the Black ghetto poor are not seen as having any direct relationship to the Negro upper crust's aesthetics. In *Certain People: America's Black Elite*, author Stephen Birmingham recounts the acute embarrassment of one Black upper class matron from Washington, D.C. at the sight of a Black young man donning “Super Fly” pimp-type attire. “‘Disgusting’, she whispered. ‘There is the cause of all our problems’. Her friend, more perceptive, said, ‘No, that is the result of all our problems.’”

Many Blacks who advanced into highly paid positions in the corporate world intensely dislike the mass cultural expressions of the Black poor and working classes, and refrain from any social relations with Blacks who rely on “transfer payments” to make ends meet. For several generations, the Black elite of Harlem's “Strivers' Row” effectively created a cordon sanitaire around their neighborhood to protect themselves and their property from contact with the Black “underclass.” As late as the mid-1970s, the Strivers' Row's “two block associations (had) rigid rules which (were) rigidly enforced: no trash or litter thrown in streets; keep hedges uniformly clipped; keep brasswork polished; no children playing in the

streets; no peddlers or solicitors; beautify gardens and window boxes.” When well-heeled residents contemplated the plight of their distant relatives or neighbors outside Strivers Row, the nearly universal attitude was one of contempt. The Black poor were characterized repeatedly as “lazy, shiftless, and no good.” In employing low income Blacks as occasional domestic workers, the Negro elite can be every bit as paternalistic as the white ruling class. “One thing that can be said for the black upper class,” one affluent Negro lady informed Birmingham, “is that we’re always nice to our servants.”

A central focus of subproletarian life is fear. Black elderly and handicapped persons are afraid to walk or visit friends in their own neighborhoods at night or travel on public transportation because they are convinced (with good reason) that they will be assaulted. Young Black women are often uncomfortable going to parties or social gatherings by themselves because they will invariably be harassed by Black men and even male youngsters barely into puberty. Parents who live in innercities are reluctant to send their children several blocks to attend school or to play outside after dark because they are afraid they might be harmed. Black-on-Black crime usually victimizes the working and poor, but it can paralyze virtually all Black people of whatever social class or neighborhood. It produces for capitalism and the state a deep despair, a destructive suspicion we hold against each other. It thwarts Blacks' ability to achieve collective class consciousness, to build political agencies which advance our material and cultural interests, and develop ourselves economically. It forces Black innercity merchants to strap revolvers on their calves or shoulders, while serving poor patrons behind plexiglass shields. It stops Black doctors from making emergency calls to their patients who live in the midst of a tenement slum or ghetto highrise complex. It instills a subconscious apathy toward the political and economic hierarchy, and fosters the nihilistic conviction that nothing can ever be changed in the interests of the Black masses.

The permanent reserve army of Black workers, subproletarians or the “underclass,” is the latest social culmination of the process of Black ghettoization, economic exploitation and urban decay. In one sense, it represents the highest stage of Black underdevelopment, because it eliminates millions of Blacks from belonging to working class organizations. The existence of a massive “ghettoclass” disrupts the internal functions of the mostly working class Black community, turning Blacks in blue collar jobs against those who have never had any job. The social institutions created by working class Blacks to preserve a sense of collective humanity, culture and decency within the narrow confines of the innercity are eroded and eventually overturned. Subproletarianization and the extension of permanent penury to broad segments of the Black majority provoke the disruption of Black families; increase the number of Black-on-Black murders, rapes, suicides and assaults; and make terror a way of life for all Blacks of every class background who live in or near the innercity.