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

Owen Fiss

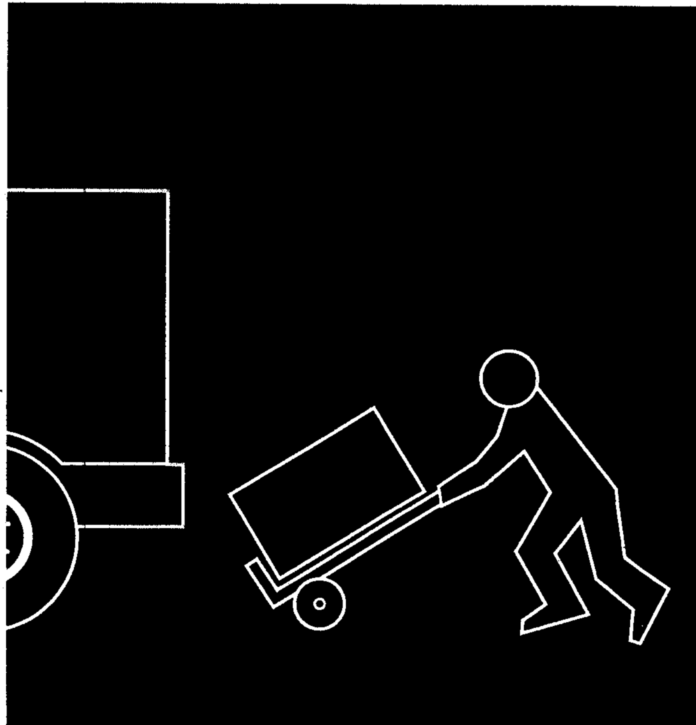
The gods have been good to America. The political system has remained stable, and the country is prospering economically. More and more Americans are enjoying a standard of living that is the envy of all the world. Improvements in our economic well-being have brought with them the sense of freedom and 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 dynamics 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.


Nick Jehlen

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 14, 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 daycare 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 organiza-

tions might have greater potential than do churches to serve as parents' surrogates. 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 shortchange 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 extreme. 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 fail-

ure, 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. ■