



Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

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Gunnar Myrdal: The Death of White Liberal Sociology

There have been few texts on U.S. racism which have been more influential than Gunnar Myrdal's classic, "An American Dilemma". Initially published in 1944, the study was cited as the major scholarly source refuting the existence of Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. Supreme Court's Brown decision ten years later. Myrdal's death last month at the age of 88 marks the passage of a great liberal economist and sociologist. But the contradictions and severe shortcomings of his intellectual legacy must also be addressed, if there is any possibility of achieving his humane social and racial ideals.

Born in Sweden, Myrdal was originally trained in law and classical economics. But as a young scholar, he wisely broke with his profession to condemn social and economic policies which contributed to class inequities inside Swedish society. Myrdal's 1931 text, "Monetary Economics," urged politicians to combat the Great Depression by accelerating government spending. Many of his liberal concepts foreshadowed the work of economist John Maynard Keynes, the intellectual architect of the modern welfare state in both Western Europe and the U.S.

In 1938, Myrdal was invited by the Carnegie Corporation to conduct a two year, \$250,000 research project on U.S. race relations. Accepting the challenge, Myrdal coordinated a capable team of scholars, including Black liberal intellectuals Ralph Bunche and Kenneth B. Clarke. The massive research project culminated into a large, two volume work, which represented a landmark of American social analysis. In Myrdal's view, the essential "American dilemma" was the vast distance between the nation's democratic ideology and its adherence to rigid racial segregation and other forms of social injustice. He challenged white leaders to extend Constitutional rights to Blacks, and predicted that racial prejudice would gradually subside as trade unions, political parties and business would move to dismantle Jim Crow. For over a generation of social scientists, "An American Dilemma's" basic prescriptions formed the intellectual foundations of white liberal social policy on the "Negro Question".

But despite Myrdal's political ties with European social democracy and similarly liberal political currents in this country, his grand social vision was profoundly flawed. Theoretically Myrdal attributed racial prejudice and conflict to the existence of what he termed America's "caste system," which supposedly paralleled the Hindu caste social system of India. The problem with this analogy was that "caste" in India was tied to strongly religious rituals, inflexibly rigid social norms, and rooted in several thousand years of social history. These social conditions had nothing to do with Ameri-

can Jim Crow, which arose out of the destroyed slavery system and the collapsed Reconstruction era reforms. Technically, a "caste" system is static, and permanently binding upon all society's members. Racism, in stark contrast, is a dynamic set of institutional arrangements—political, cultural, social and most decisively economic—which perpetuate the subordination and exploitation of people of color by others. Myrdal mistakenly attributed most of the Negro's chief problems not to institutional racism but to caste: "The measures to keep the Negroes disfranchised and deprived of full civil rights and the whole structure of social and economic discrimination are to be viewed as attempts to enforce the caste principle.

... Caste consigns the overwhelming majority of Negroes to the lower class."

This mistake in social theory became a major error when applied to actual political relations. The Swedish liberal saw no important links between the economic exploitation of both poor Blacks and Whites, and the perpetuation of racism. White workers and the poor were certainly the most hateful enemies of Black equality, he suggested. Conversely, the white upper classes, those who directly benefited from the low wages, political disfranchisement and terrorism experienced by millions of Afro-American people, were described in benevolent terms.

Given this distorted perspective, Myrdal committed other errors. He urged Blacks not to challenge racism directly, but to look up to white liberals for leadership. He never anticipated the rise of the civil rights movement after World War II, the successful utilization of nonviolent protests, or the white middle class backlash against integration in the 1970s. He also believed that Blacks were victimized by white racists because of the "sexual threat" of contacts between Black males and white females—thus he implied that Blacks come out against interracial marriages! Myrdal never comprehended that Southern sexual myths were employed as a crude justification to carry out class exploitation and social subordination of the poor of both races.

In later life, Myrdal became uneasy with his ties to white liberalism. In 1969, he condemned the Johnson administration's antipoverty programs as "spurious, badly administered and underconceived." Myrdal began to recognize that liberal piecemeal reforms engineered from above couldn't overturn America's social problems. "I don't think America can stand a defacto apartheid too much longer," he predicted. Despite his humanistic instincts, Myrdal failed to chart an effective political strategy to uproot racism in capitalistic America. Unfortunately, his failure is generally shared by virtually all white mainstream politicians.

Assembly Improved Economic Outlook

When the 64th Legislature Assembly departed Salem late last month, it left behind some solid blocks with which Oregonians should be able to build a stronger economy.

Acclaimed by some as the most productive regular biennial session in decades, it was one that was approached with trepidation by those concerned about the state's lackluster climate for business.

Although there were tentative signs of recovery from years-long recession, many were skeptical about the Assembly's ability to make the hard decisions to accomplish much that would continue an upward economic spiral.

The House of Representatives was precariously divided among 29 Republicans and 31 Democrats. The situation was ripe of counterproductive partisan gamesmanship.

Senate Republicans had gained another seat in that chamber, becoming a significant 13-member minority to the 17 Democrats in the majority caucus.

Democrats in both House and Senate were wary about new Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's ability to work with the legislative and biennial budgetary processes.

And major issues, such as school finance, the liability insurance crisis and high cost of workers' compensation insurance had all faced lawmakers before without satisfactory resolution.

There were some positive signs apparent, however. This was an experienced body—fewer freshman lawmakers than ever before. And both parties in each chamber re-elected that same leaders who guided them last session.

On top of that, the returning leadership appeared united in intentions to achieve solutions for major problems.

That unity was put quickly to a surprise test when Gov. Goldschmidt requested speedy resolution of eight issues on his agenda by mid-March. As lawmakers complied, tensions eased and the process moved steadily ahead.

Another indication of an impending successful session was adoption of a plan to keep schools from closing and solid approval from voters during referral to a special election in May. Then came a revenue-neutral reconnect to the federal tax code—along with a reduction in the corporate tax rate—permitting corporations to save an estimated \$20 million annually and sending a positive message to out-of-state business interests.

Another early accomplishment was passage of an extensive revision and simplification of laws dealing with creation and operations of corporations. Enacted with only token opposition, that law became effective even before the Legislature adjourned and is expected to pro-

duce long-term economic benefits.

As is often the case, some of this session's major issues were not resolved until the last minute, producing a return of pre-session apprehension even as adjournment gavels were poised to fall one last time.

The sessions' final weeks, however, saw resolution of environmental issues—including extension of pollution control tax credits and practical regulation of use and disposal of hazardous materials without reducing the viability of the job-producing manufacturing community.

The state's No. 1 job producer, the forest products industry, also achieved sweeping reform of land use regulation as the session neared its end. The change bolstered regulatory powers and responsibilities of the State Board of Forestry, pre-empting both counties and the Land Conservation & Development Commission from regulating forest practices.

Lawmakers also saw fit to limit liability of landowners opening their property to recreational use—a major step toward preserving public access to outdoor pursuits.

Preservation and maintenance of the state's system of highways and bridges were enhanced as the Assembly finally concurred on a six-cent gasoline tax implemented over a three-year period.

Almost throughout the session there was additional emphasis on economic development, with substantial appropriations for construction projects, more funding for promoting tourism and targeted use of lottery revenue for specific projects.

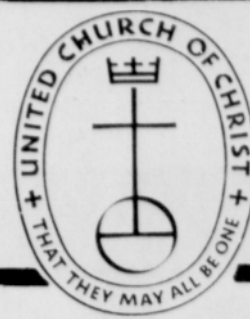
Then, in the final hours before adjournment, compromises were struck in both chambers that permitted enactment of major reform of both tort law and the Workers' Compensation System. The first should make liability insurance both more available and affordable. The second is hailed as a step that will remove Oregon from the top rungs of the ladder by which employer costs are measured nationwide.

In all, the session saw passage of somewhere near a dozen more than 1,000 measures—a record eclipsing the 996 approved in 1981. The productivity rate, based on measures passed out of the 2,715 considered, is near 85%, highest since 1945.

It lasted a little longer—by about a week—than the 1985 session, concluding mid-way through the first hour of its 168th day on Sunday, June 28.

A footnote during post-session frivolity tended to characterize the session's achievements and lay to rest pre-session concerns about Oregon's economic future.

Lawmakers and lobbyists conspired to confer upon Democrat Goldschmidt this session's award for outstanding achievement by a freshman Republican Legis-



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Stephen James: Responsible Male Role Model

The headline of New York's Daily Challenge read, "BRONX BUS DRIVER AWARDED HARVARD FELLOWSHIP." The story was about 34-year-old Stephen James, a high school drop-out, who has been given a six-year, \$57,000 fellowship to Harvard's Ph.D. program in American literature. After talking with Mr. James, one realizes that he is more than a scholar. He is, in fact, a committed African American man whose determination and sense of family refute the racist stereotype of the Black male in the United States.

Stephen remembers James Meredith's attempt to attend Ole Miss. (the University of Mississippi) in 1963. As he watched Meredith being barred from entering the all-white university, he was mystified, though only 10 years old at the time. He wondered what was so precious about education that someone would prevent African Americans from taking full advantage of it. He vowed to find out why.

Mr. James talks of his love of learning, of the challenge of new ideas. He remembers devouring the books which his mother made available to him after their television broke. He talks of dropping out of high school during the 10th grade, but of continuing to read books such as THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X and the writings of Du Bois and of African authors. When asked why he dropped out he replies that no one in the school took any particular interest in him. He wasn't a discipline problem and so, no one seemed to notice him. As he says, "The school system is not geared to keeping Blacks in school. Many teachers believe that Black kids are hopeless. Particularly, if you're a discipline problem, they're glad to see you go."

But even while he was out of school he never lost his love for reading. And he never lost self-esteem

He always believed he could do whatever he set out to do.

James later entered New York's Lehman College in its Adult Degree Program. To support himself, his wife and three children, he often worked two jobs. But he never stopped studying. And he never failed in his obligations to his family. As he said, "I worked seven days a week and worked overtime when I could get it. Sometimes I wasn't with my family on holidays, but they were with me all the way and they understood." He was a carpenter, then a bus driver. He studied before and after work, and even read or listened to taped lectures between runs.

Though he loved learning, his obsession to finish school was not only for his own benefit. He says, "The only reason I want to teach is to give the knowledge back to my community. And Black people need to see that teaching is as much a profession and as important as being a bus driver or an entrepreneur. I've become a role model to those who've watched my long journey."

And long it was. Between holding down two jobs and leaving school to work full-time, it took James 8 years, but this June he graduated from Lehman, summa cum laude. What gives him almost as much pleasure as his degree is watching his children follow in his footsteps. His youngest son, 4-year-old Elliott, recently completed a listing of the African countries—all spelled correctly. His daughter, Joy, vows that she, too, will one day attend Harvard. And his mother, a registered nurse, now also attends Lehman College for a degree in nursing.

At a time when the image of the Black male in this society is constantly put down, Stephen James provides a visible role model for young and old alike.

Letters to the Editor

Genocide From Without

Concerning "Pieces of a Dream" 6/24/87. Like Black Slaves "fastened together in the holds of Slave ships, Black people today are fastened together in the holds of Amerikan Racism. We are fastened together by our history, by the myriad of oppressive events and circumstances with which we must constantly contend, and by the extent to which Racism makes health a luxury only the rich can afford or obtain. The painful truth which we must face is that poor people are ignored, mistreated, abused, and brutalized by the current health care delivery system in the United States.

It is essential that we define health. Negatively, health is a condition associated with the absence of disease. Positively, health is that state in which the body, the mind and the spirit function in an optimal manner. Whether defined positively or negatively, health for Black people today is only a minor improvement over the conditions under which thirty to fifty percent of our people died in the holds of Christian Slave ships. To be poor in Amerika is to be handicapped and to be short-changed in the essentials and necessities of health. To be poor and Black is to be assailed by a whole range of health problems that mean the shortening and the brutalization of Black life. People deprived and oppressed by racism in Amerika are less healthy than most other Amerikans. We suffer from higher mortality rates, higher incidences of major diseases, and lower availability and utilization of medical services.

I'm inclined to believe the quality of life is not determined exclusively by what happens before birth; it is equally determined by what does not happen before birth, as early as before conception. Fastened to the holds of Amerikan Racism and poverty, Black Mothers at the moment of conception suffer from a host of illnesses which they pass on to their offsprings.

Malnutrition is perhaps the most serious of these illnesses, and malnutrition has perhaps the most widespread damaging effects on the life of the Black Child. Malnutrition results in two major effects upon children, and since Black children suffer from malnutrition more than caucasian children, it is true that Black children suffer more from loss of learning time and interference with learning during the critical periods of development.

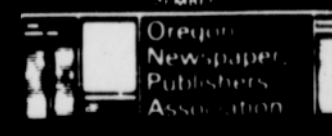
Annually, malnutrition destroys the minds of hundreds of thousands of poor children, regardless of color, who were born into the world malnourished and who remain malnourished because they remain in poverty-stricken areas. The Roman adage that a battle is won through the full stomachs of the soldiers should be replaced with a more significant and relevant statement of fact: Life is won and learning is acquired when the stomach is full and the body is nourished. Poor children whose lives are tragically marked by their mothers' health and continuing malnutrition suffer from school failure, social deprivation and early death.

Mental retardation and social dysfunctions are, in fact, preordained by the Amerikan system of Racism and health brutalization. Arguments about genetic material and genetic potential are absurd in the face of these facts. To speak only about better schools for the masses of poor children is to overlook the necessity of bringing into existence healthy children who will remain healthy. To ask for compensatory education for poor children in this nation's schools is to be fooled into believing that anything compensatory can ever completely make up for that which is basic—the presence of and the right to health.

Now why are older unemployed Blacks having such a hard time? Let's concentrate on the major murderer: hypertension. This is not meant to suggest that other, very serious, disorders are not prevalent among poor people. With respect to race, at any age, the prevalence of definite hypertension is roughly twice as great as among caucasoid people. The effect of "not making it" financially on the unemployed poor population has an effect on the problems with high blood pressure. The incidence of strokes among poor people has doubled in the last ten years.

Racism weakens and kills physically and mentally. Schizophrenia is about twice as frequent among the unemployed poor. We must act and counter-act and build so that this brutalization comes to an end. And, fastened together in the struggle, we must act against the forces that would make us "obsolete" or extinct, alternatively awaiting the inevitable—suicide or fratricide from within, genocide from without.

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