

Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

Drugs, Alcoholism and Suicide

Whenever I have lectured before a large audience in recent months, inevitably I am asked the same question. Essentially, it goes something like this: "The Black community is in the midst of an unprecedented social crisis. Unemployment, bad housing, reductions in health care and education programs, police brutality and other factors are undermining the social stability of Black neighborhoods. Given the state of affairs, why aren't Afro-Americans rioting in the streets? What is keeping a check of Black urban militancy, when the material and social conditions which gave rise to the riots in the 1960s are actually much worse today?"

There is no precise chemistry which can reliably predict the creation of an urban explosion, even though critical volatile elements are currently present. But social discontent and rage can be channeled away from meaningful public protests into purely self-destructive activity. The energy and dynamism of Black urban youth may be manipulated for destructive and self-defeating purposes.

The struggle against illegal drugs is being lost in most of this country's major innercities. Recent federally-financed studies state that the major group which has turned off from drugs such as cocaine in the past five years is the well-educated, white upper middle class. Many Hispanics, Blacks, low income people and those with less than a high school education have continued and/or increased their collective drug dependency. The crack epidemic continues in poor urban communities virtually unchecked. In one recent study of heroin addicts in New York City, it was determined that Blacks and Hispanics comprised about 75 percent of all the city's addicts. Another 1982 survey of data on drug dependency, based on material from over 30,000 treatment centers, showed that 44 percent of all addicts were Black; 20 percent were Hispanic, and only 36 percent were white.

There was no recognized "drug problem" in this country until the crisis of illegal drugs began to claim thousands of victims among the daughters and sons of the white upper middle class. As long as cocaine was identified with Black musicians, street people and/or prostitutes, no real social problem was said to exist. Recent data illustrates that illegal drugs not only serve to diffuse Black collective action for development; but that also the drug issues may receive less governmental and media attention as its victims become once more predominately Black and poor. As Dr. Mitchell S. Rosenthal, head of Phoenix House, a network of drug treatment centers, states: "In the heroin crisis of the late 1960s and again with crack in recent years it was the threat to the middle- and upper-middle-class kids that put pressure on Legislatures and Congress. There is a danger that if they feel less of a threat, the resources won't stay with the problem."

Another continuing social problem for Blacks, as well as other Americans, is alcoholism. There are conservatively as estimated 6 to 9 million confirmed alcoholics in the U.S. Blacks, essentially those with lower levels of income and education, have a disproportionately high rate of alcoholism. There's also evidence that alcoholism is a rapidly growing problem for Black women. Statistically, most Black women are more likely not to drink alcohol than are white females. However, the proportion of heavy or "problem drinkers" among Black women is about three times the proportion of white females classified as heavy drinkers.

There is also growing evidence of an unprecedented rise in the suicide rates of Blacks, especially younger Blacks since the civil rights era. Between 1950 and 1977, for instance, the annual suicide rate of Black males soared from 6.8 per 100,000 to 11.4 per 100,000. Also in these years, the Black female suicide rate more than doubled, from 1.6 per 100,000 to 3.5 per 100,000. Nearly one-half of all suicides among Afro-Americans occur today among young adults, between the age of 20 to 34 years. Within the more narrow age group of 25 to 29 years, the suicide rate among Black males is higher than that for white men and women living in urban areas, their suicide rate is also higher than the white average. Why are Black young adults killing themselves in record number?

You don't need an occupying army to wipe out a spirit of resistance among any oppressed people. You simply pump unlimited supplies of cocaine, heroin and other drugs into their neighborhoods. You burden them with an unemployment rate of 20 percent and higher. You give them poor schools, few health clinics, and reinforce white corporate standards of beauty and materialism in the media and popular culture. Drug dependency, alcoholism and suicides are the logical result. The worst manifestation of oppression is that which is generated internally, not externally.

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Letters to the Editor

Are Black People Indeed Invisible?

The uses of scientific knowledge cannot be separated from the society in which those uses occur. The myth of "pure" science, of science as a detached, ivory tower pursuit, has been exposed. Science is enmeshed in the prevailing social ideologies. The choice of what subject to investigate, which experiments to undertake, what methods to employ, which results to emphasize as important, to whom to report results, how to use results, etc., all these and countless other decisions made by scientific investigators are colored by ideology. Ideology is not simply a nebulous cloud hanging in the social atmosphere. It is the assumptions underlying scientific education and training; it is the prod held by the public and private bureaucracies which fund research; it is the personal ambition of scientists who live in a bourgeois materialist society.

Consequently, it comes as no great surprise that Black people have been largely excluded from the world of science and technology—both as practitioners and as factors relevant to decision-making. Of course, there have been outstanding Black scientists and inventors, and their achievements are worthy of emulation; but the reality of racism has excluded most of us from the pursuit of science. Regarded as degraded beings, prisoners of undisciplined emotions and suitable only for manual labor, Black people have for generations been barred from caucasoid institutions of scientific training.

Moreover, racism has meant that caucasoid scientists have regarded us as an undifferentiated part of the environment: a given, rather than a subject active in changing the environment. Our cranial capacity and social institutions may be investigated from time to time, but our brain power and social needs are seldom considered relevant when important scientific and technological decisions are being made. To the caucasoid world of research and development, We Are Indeed Invisible.

I was invited to speak at Stanford in Palo Alto, as well as the Univer-

Letters to the Editor

sity of California in Berkeley. Being an investigative thinker, I've always had a sort of fascination with science. Unfortunately, our agrarian heritage and general exclusion from the world of science has generated an anti-science, anti-intellectual attitude among many of us. In colleges today many young Black people regard the pursuit of scientific training as "coping out": as individual "tripping" at the expense of the struggle. Certainly it cannot be denied that some Black scientists and technicians have dropped out of the struggle, but this must be attributed to their subservience to the individualist, and materialist values of this society; it is not a result, per se, of being a scientist.

It is imperative for us to realize that, despite its abuses in this country, science is key to the material development of society. Industrial advancement and social progress would be impossible without scientific research and development. While it is true that science cannot be separated from ideology, it is also true that ideologies can be changed and, hence, the uses of science can be redirected. It is no accident that the developing countries of the so-called Third World have given highest priority to building scientific and technological institutes and training young scientists and engineers. Their future is developing a culture that encourages science and makes it truly serve the people. (And it is with the intention of undermining their struggle against underdevelopment that the capitalist West has instituted a "brain drain" of scientists and technicians from these so-called Third World nations.)

I'm inclined to believe scientific training and well-informed input into the process of technological decision-making can be a progressive addition to the general struggle for Black liberation. This is the message that must be taken to Black youth today. We are oppressed by our exploiters. But to the extent that we remain ignorant and apathetic, we are accomplices in our own oppression. No struggle can be undertaken without knowledge, and it is not enough to simply blame others for our ignorance. Like our Brothers and Sisters in Afrika and the so-called Third World, we must encourage the pursuit of useful knowledge—physical, biological and social—that will enable us to intelligently take command of our own destiny.

Science today is property, and, therefore, like all property, it is used for the benefit of those who own it. In the U.S.A. and in other imperialist nations, the major part of scientific effort is dedicated to the twin purposes of (1) extraction of profits and (2) the maintenance of the control with permits that extraction.

Dr. Jamil Cherovee

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL
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COMMISSION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., Executive Director

Our Best and Brightest

I have been involved in the Civil Rights Movement for more than 25 years. And through all those years of struggle I have rarely felt as rewarded as I do at this moment. I have just returned from a leadership development summer camp in North Carolina. It was set up for the young people of New York City's "welfare hotels." The camp ran the whole month of August and was attended by 50 youngsters, aged 7 to 16 years.

It is sometimes thought that the best and brightest of our young people can only be found at the top of their class in school or as star athletes for their school teams. Not so. Some of the brightest of our children are also in the shelters for the homeless and the "welfare hotels" of this country. And many of them, because of the oppression of their situation, attend school infrequently.

In New York these children are housed, with their families, often 5 or 6 to one room. The environment, both outside and inside the hotels, is exploitative—rife with drug abuse, abject poverty and daily violence. Yet, somehow, the innate intelligence of the children has not yet been completely dulled.

I was constantly amazed by the incredible math skills of the children. For example, as we travelled on the bus to King's Dominion amusement park, 10-year-old Jackie was asked how many more exits we would pass before we reached our destination. Without skipping a beat, she answered, "17!"—the correct answer. These are children for whom math is a survival skill and calculators are a luxury they cannot afford.

Still in my mind is the African awards banquet, held the last night of camp. It was great to see so many young brothers and sisters, dressed proudly in traditional African clothing and shouting "Umoja," the Swahili word for "unity." Using homemade drums, several of the youth precisely picked up the African drumbeats which were taught to them—and with great excitement.

I was particularly impressed by the impromptu speeches of the youngsters. There was 14-year-old Lateef who urged the other to "... try to help other young sisters and brothers who try to act hard and who think they can go for themselves and they can't—they need some kind of support." He then added, "Even those who didn't come to camp we should try to talk to them so they can learn the ways of God or Allah the way we learned it here, the way we learned to stand together."

As Atty. Rose Sanders, the dynamic leader from Alabama's Black Belt, said as she left the camp, "These children have an incredible potential. If that potential isn't developed, it's not their fault, it's ours." There are now over 10,000 children in New York's welfare hotels. We are told that this number will jump to 30,000 children in the next fifteen years.

Both the National African Youth Student Alliance and the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, which co-sponsored the camp, are committed to working with these children over the long haul. We also plan to run the camp again next year. For our children go beyond mere blood ties. All our children are our responsibility.

INVESTMENT IDEAS

Getting the Most From Your Life Insurance Dollars

Have you even wondered if you have enough life insurance at the right price?

Let's assume that you own a traditional whole life policy—the type that offers a fixed death benefit of \$100,000. Let's also assume you bought the policy in the early 1980s, when interest rates were in double digits.

Back in 1981, if the insured individual died, his or her spouse could expect that \$100,000 benefit to generate monthly income of about \$1,000 to \$1,083 (after tax). Now however, your benefit of \$100,000 would gener-

rate just \$500 to \$583 (after tax) in monthly income for your spouse, assuming the principal is invested in today's fixed-income market.

In the early '80s, when interest rates were in double digits, a fixed-rate policy may have provided needed coverage at an attractive price. Today however, many buyers of life insurance are comparing fixed-rate policies with variable-rate policies.

Variable-rate policies let you select how your life insurance dollars are invested; you can move your accumulated value among several mutual funds. Your choices usually include an equity (stocks), bond and government securities fund as well as a fixed-rate account. Over the long term, life insurance dollars diversified between equities and fixed-rate investments should provide greater growth potential than having all money invested at a fixed rate.

In addition, some of today's new policies offer liquidity through policy loans. Over the years, your cash value builds on a tax-deterred basis, and you can borrow money from the policy if you need it.

To make sure you have as much coverage as you need and to determine if the new variable rate policies may be the answer, the best place to start is a policy review. Many investment firms and insurance companies offer these reviews at no cost. You may find that if you are under-insured, you can significantly increase your coverage without greatly increasing your premium costs.

This article was provided by A.G. Edwards & Sons of Salem, 1-800-523-1031.

by Gov. Neil Goldschmidt
GOVERNOR

News From Neil

Earlier this month, I was pleased to announce the members of the Governor's Commission on School Funding Reform. They are an outstanding group of Oregonians, representing every region of the state.

The commission has three major goals: 1) Find ways to reduce the reliance on local property taxes for funding elementary and secondary education in Oregon, 2) Bring stability to state and local revenue for school districts, and 3) keep local involvement in local schools.

The final report of the commission, with recommendations for the 1989 legislature, will be presented to me by September 1, 1988.

The commission is one of a number of initiatives adopted by the 1987 Legislative Assembly and designed to begin a major overhaul of a troubled and troublesome system.

About one third of Oregon's 304 school districts must now go to voters each year with operating levy requests because their tax bases are inadequate.

Oregon's level of state funding for our public schools ranks 48th in the nation, at not quite 30 percent. Local taxes make up over 67 percent of the costs, second highest in the nation.

Since 1968 voters have considered and rejected 19 proposals that would have changed Oregon's system of financing elementary and secondary schools primarily from property taxes.

For years now, the focus of talk, of debate, of action has been on the sales tax, and the response from the electorate could not be more clear—they do not want any part of it.

I believe that the situation requires that we adopt a new approach. What we do not need is another round of unachievable solutions. What we need is a series of doable steps to raise the level of basic school support.

Several steps have already been taken. The legislature passed and voters approved a safety net that will guarantee that no school will close because local voters failed to approve a levy.

As I have said many times, passage of the safety net was only a first step toward solving the larger problem of providing stable and adequate funding for our schools without bankrupting the taxpayers of this state. The safety net should not be used to justify a no vote on a budget levy.

The legislature also added \$30 million to state support for local schools, increasing the state share of local costs by a full percentage point.

And we are proposing to the voters that they amend the Oregon Constitution to allow more flexible investment of the Common School Fund, which will increase state earnings for local schools.

But perhaps the most important step we have taken is the establishment of the school funding reform commission.

Governors by themselves can fix very little. But what I enjoy most about this job is the opportunity I have to put exceptional people into positions where they can fix things. And if anything even needed fixing, it's our method of financing public schools in this state.

I am confident that the people I have appointed to this commission will arrive at an equitable solution to our school funding problem. The stakes are no less than to ensure that Oregon remains economically competitive in the future. A healthy education system is the key to the growth of the economy and the preservation of our standard of living.

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