



Welfare 'reform' and poverty in the 1990s

Northern Ireland

THANKS FOR ANOTHER EXCELLENT issue. This time on the “winds of peace” in Northern Ireland. I want to add to the Corrymeela article that our mutual friend and mentor, the late Very Rev. H.C.N. Willams, Provost of Coventry Cathedral and founder of the International Community of the Cross of Nails did much to bring healing, reconciliation and trust to the Corrymeela community. It was through his vision back in the 1970s that many of us in this country led our congregations in reaching out in faith and hope that the winds of peace could gather strength.

Thanks for keeping the church on the cutting edge of the issues. It was Wm. Sperry of Harvard, 50 years ago who cautioned us:

“Give to us, Lord, a right discernment between that which comes first in our faith and that which follows after. When we would make much of that which cannot matter much to Thee, recall us to the heart of our Christian profession, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The Witness comes like clean, icy water to a church which seems to prefer luke-warm, saccharine, toxic tonics. Keep up the good work. Your publication gives us hope!

Gordon Price
Dayton, OH

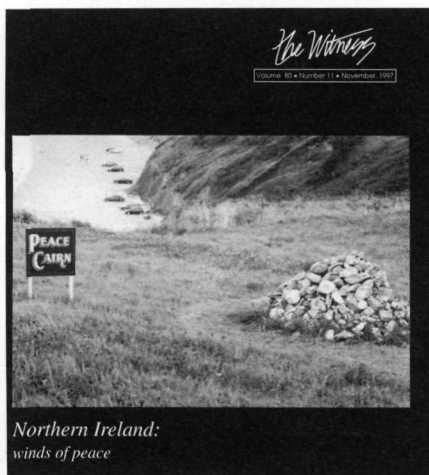
JUST A NOTE TO THANK YOU for sending on the November issue of *The Witness*. Thanks also for featuring the photo of our “Peace Cairn” on the front cover.

We receive a lot of visitors here at this “Centre of Peace & Reconciliation.”

John O’Keefe, OFM
Rossowlagh, Co. Donegal

Diana’s funeral

HAVING BEEN IN ENGLAND at the beginning of September, I have some things to say about Douglas Theuner’s comments on the funeral of Princess Diana [TW 11/97].



First, considering that Archbishop Runcie betrayed Diana’s confidences about her failing marriage to a journalist, and that the official C of E, as I saw when I lived there, virtually ignored her during her lifetime, preferring to whither about whether Charles could still be its defender, it was probably just a little late for “the church” to start preaching about its special knowledge of life or death to Diana’s family and friends.

Second, Westminster Abbey is no more George Carey’s “house” than it is Doug Theuner’s, or mine. To suggest that Carey’s “worldview” is devalued because the Princess’s gay friends are seen to enter an Anglican place of worship is insulting nonsense. The camera’s eye showed us lots of people going into the Abbey, including Baroness Thatcher, whose politics and beliefs are brutally antithetical to what Diana stood for in many people’s minds and hearts.

Last and most important, “the church” was there for people who mourned Diana’s death. Services were held in many denominations and faiths all over England — and elsewhere! Pastors and rabbis did double duty responding to the pain and questions and puzzlings of the public, not just their parishioners.

If we take seriously our commission as Christians, we surely must realize that the gospel message is not to be judged by a single funeral — least of all a state one. The family has the most right to decide what kind of funeral they want, or — in this case — can put up with. People within and without the Abbey — of all faiths, or of none — needed to say goodbye to Diana, not be subjected to the conservative Anglican take, however sincerely offered, on salvation and resurrection. Far too

many people have used Diana’s suffering and death to promulgate their own agenda — bishops, it seems, among the rest.

Mayne Ellis
New York, NY

Death penalty

I’M AN INMATE on “Alabama” death row. Will you please donate me a copy of your September issue featuring the death penalty?

The enclosed is a back issue of one of our “Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty” newsletters that I thought you might find interesting and enlightening. “Project Hope” is an organization created and established by a group of us here on death row in a common cause and in a sworn commitment to fight to stop this terrible evil killing. If you feel in any way we can be of some service to you toward the issue of the death penalty and enlightening the public, please don’t hesitate to contact me or any member of our board.

Arthur Lee Giles Z-394
D.R. 5-U-6
Holman 3700
Atmore, AL 36503

Greening prayer

I HAVE LOVED YOUR WORK for years — the combination of art and poetry and variety in articles on a theme and plainspeaking re: church issues, and your unique persons as you have been revealed. I hope this prayer will reach you as the one-by-one souls who work together to create *Witness*. A check accompanies it to subscribe and help. Wish it could be more, but as an unwaged professional chaplain at the University of Iowa hospital, I am in fact paying myself and enjoying my chosen ministry on survivor benefits. My specialty is geriatric spirituality.

A Greening Prayer

Godde
keep me always
greening

keep me rooted
in the dark
keep me turning
into light

*keep me well
and deeply watered
keep me bending
with the winds*

*keep me growing
beyond fences
keep me leafing
budding blooming*

*keep me fruiting
keep me yielding
ever blessing
everything*

*keep me healing
calm and able
keep me still as
stillness calls*

*keep me always
greening
Godde*

*Blessing me as I am
this day blessing what I do
drawing me into your ways
of love*

LET IT BE SO

**Nancy Cogan
Iowa City, IA**

Not renewing

I AM NOT GOING TO RENEW my subscription this year but I may resubscribe in the future. There are two reasons. The first is that I am "weeding out" excess paper from my life and only keeping the subscriptions to magazines I can't live without. The second is that your political stance is difficult for me — not that I don't agree, because in most cases I do, in theory, but because my own view as a Christian requires me to look for the common ground and seek unity and communication rather than polarization. So while I may agree with your point of view, your method of expressing it is difficult for me.

**Zabeth Adams
Hartford, VT**

Witness praise

THE MOST USEFUL GIFT my sister-in-law ever gave me.

**Mary Beth Summer
Cincinnati, OH**

ENCLOSED IS A CHECK for a year's subscription to *The Witness*. The magazine has an excellent format and themes. It's great to have a publication in the church that's so interesting, thought-provoking and inclusive.

**Paul Winters
Framingham, MA**

EXCELLENT, THOUGHT-PROVOKING, stimulating. Addresses itself to relevant issues in a very helpful way.

**William B. Kerner
Richmond, VA**

YOUR MAGAZINE KEEPS ME ALIVE! So often when I despair over the state of the church, the superficiality and indifference, something you write says, "keep on trucking." It's so personal and warm. Thank you.

**Mary K. Goode
Milwaukee, WI**

WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG for me to hear about this publication? It makes me sad because of what I've missed.

**Marybeth Jorgensen
Evanston, IL**

continued on back page

Corrections

David Ota, the subject of our December 1997 profile, writes to say that his father's two brothers-in-law, not brothers, were Episcopal priests. He also notes that the non-Anglo population of Foster City includes persons of Chinese and other Asian heritages. The Vietnamese priest he worked with is Duc Nguyen. He adds that while the Episcopal Church continues to allocate inadequate resources to Asian ministries, there are now several Episcopal Church congregations or ministries that are Vietnamese.

In the same issue we neglected to note that the photo by Jim West on page 22 was supplied by Impact Visuals, although the other Jim West photos in that issue were supplied by Jim West directly.

Classifieds

Communication/evangelism training

Communication consulting and evangelism training for progressive parishes and organizations. The Rev. Walt Gordon has 8 years experience as a diocesan communication officer and editor of the award-winning diocesan newspaper SOUNDINGS, and 10 years parish ministry experience. References, evangelism brochure available. 612 874-6887, <walt@storytellers.com>, 230 Oak Grove St. Suite 115, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Parishfield research project

I am looking for material (papers, photos, etc.) and people willing to be interviewed pertaining to history of Parishfield, including planning and inception. All materials will be returned or donated to Parishfield archives at Bentley Library of University of Michigan. Please contact Sara Winter, Lang College, New School for Social Research; 65 W. 11th St.; New York, NY 10011; tel. 212-229-2653. E-mail: <winter@newschool.edu>.

Episcopal Urban Intern Program

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1998-99 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301. 310-674-7700.

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Dept. W, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Due 15th of month, two months prior to publication.

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8 Welfare 'reform' and poverty in the 1990s

In 1996 a new welfare law wiped out the public-assistance safety net for the very poor that had been in place for more than 60 years. Was this for the poor's own good or "legislative child abuse"?

14 'Yo' Mama's Disfunktional'

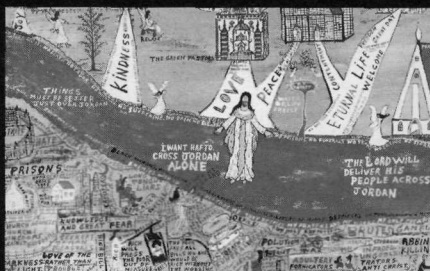
by Robin Kelley

Scholar Kelley condemns and analyzes blaming-the-victim rhetoric in the welfare debate. He says government and corporate policies are the real villains.

16 America's new welfare capitalists

by Christopher D. Cook
*U.S. corporations say welfare reform
has created "the business opportunity
of a lifetime" with \$28 billion
available to privatization of state
public assistance programs.*

20 Fighting poverty by weaving spiritual communities of hope by Victor Kazanjian
Touring India, Kazanjian found inspiration in communities organized by women that combine political processes and spiritual practices.



22 Refugees and welfare reform by Thomas Robb

Refugees affected both by welfare and immigration "reform" are facing special problems, says Robb, who works at a Bosnian refugee center.

Cover art: "The Lord Will Deliver His People Across Jordan (Panel one of three)," by Howard Finster, 1976, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr.

The Witness offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

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Poverty needs ‘off the grid’ approach

by Julie A. Wortman

Witness readers may remember that Maine experienced one of the severest ice storms in its history this past January. We living here on the St. George peninsula were spared the storm’s worst damage, but inland a few miles the sound of chain saws filled the air and most households were without electricity for many days — some for up to two weeks.

Despite the hardships, Mainers felt good about how well they weathered this calamity. People pulled together in hundreds of reassuring and heartwarming ways, noting that Governor Angus King’s impassioned plea that we all take time to check on the safety of our neighbors — the rural elderly, especially — was just the right thing to ask of us.

A remarkably popular governor, King, an Independent, is no liberal. In the welfare reform debate his position has been to insist that the poor should help themselves. How strange to hear a person with such views insisting that our mutual well-being depended on an aggressive alertness to one another’s needs!

My guess is that trying to exercise leadership in a state so massively off the public utility grid momentarily caught the governor off guard. Certainly, all the normal assumptions about the essentials of existence were for a time called into question for all of us — the long absence of television alone, some said, was a bracing shock to the system.

Unless we occasionally get jolts like this, how easy it is to accept, unquestioned, the assumptions behind the way our society chooses to operate. As the articles in this issue make abundantly clear, the so-

called “reform” of the welfare system we are experiencing is a sickening sleight-of-hand maneuver to cut our human “losses” as ruthlessly as CEOs do when they are trying to improve corporate profits. Decades of misinformation and malicious, racially motivated stereotyping by politicians catering to the interests of big busi-

*We will do well to remember
that the powers count on
our sense of urgency.*

ness and the rich, however, have gradually persuaded a wide spectrum of Americans that welfare programs cause rather than limit poverty; that people of color in urban ghettos, most of them teenaged and unmarried mothers, are the chief users and abusers of the welfare system; that, left to themselves, most poor people won’t look for work; and that the private sector would do a much better job than our inefficient, fumbling government in getting poor people off the welfare roles.

Thanks to the work of social scientists like Rebecca Blank (see p. 29), Lucy Williams (p. 10) and others, we have access to information that shows that such assumptions are wrong — and that, as a result, most of the assumptions behind welfare “reform” are wrong, too. Our national trickle-down mantra that the availability of jobs will eliminate poverty no longer holds. Poor people today — most of whom are white and live in economically mixed communities — are working more for less money.

Blank stresses that policymakers truly serious about combatting poverty must avoid facile characterizations of the prob-

lem. “There is no single cause of poverty,” she writes, “and there is no easy way to abolish it.”

Chewing long and hard on the realities of who is poor in this country and why — all the while resisting hasty judgment — will not be easy. People are losing their lives, afterall.

But we will do well to remember that the powers count on our sense of urgency. In our eagerness to save lives *now* by a single-minded focus on ways to ‘fix’ welfare reform’s obvious flaws, we are much more likely to leave unquestioned the larger systems that work to widen, not lessen, the gap between rich and poor. The powers also count on our inability, however strongly our intuitions tell us something is amiss, to extricate ourselves from the default assumptions of the current systems of power, privilege and profit.

I think of our recent ice storm and a feisty Rockland woman who reminded a journalist that the fact she was without electricity did not mean she was powerless. Such insights might have a chance of sticking with us longer if we would intentionally go “off the grid” more often and in every way possible — from converting to solar power or confining one’s diet to foods available locally to bartering goods and services or adhering to a discipline of observing sabbath time each week no matter how large one’s workload.

Going off the grid, we are engaging in a spiritual exercise that will help us loosen the powers’ grip on our lives, both individually and collectively. In doing so we might, like Governor King, be flooded by surprising clarity about where our mutual salvation truly lies.

TV

editor's note

Julie A. Wortman is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness* (<julie@thewitness.org>).

Mentors passing over

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

As 1997 drew to a close, *The Witness* received word that members of the generation that blazed the way for us were dying. Within the month of December, we learned of the deaths of war tax resister Ernest Bromley, 85; poet Denise Levertov, 74; long-time activist and community builder Maurice McCrackin, 92; and Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder, 70. Bromley and McCrackin were friends, both rejected by the Protestant churches which had ordained them in the middle of the century, who went on to preach peace, to cross lines in social protest and to build community. Only eight years ago, McCrackin and Bromley scaled the White House fence to protest the Gulf War. Their indomitable spirits are captured in the *Cincinnati Enquirer's* cartoon shown here.

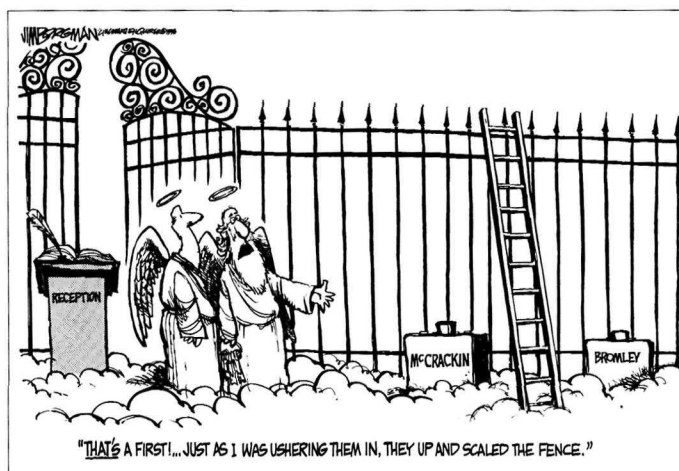
Maurice McCrackin

I met McCrackin in 1983 when he helped a group of us prepare for a civil disobedience action outside the gates of a cruise missile manufacturer. He talked easily about resisting jail by "surrendering the body" which was, it seemed, the only part of McCrackin that the authorities could hope to capture. McCrackin preferred to go limp, refuse legal representation and often declined meals. He sometimes proved indigestible to the system; he was hard to keep

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness* (<jeanie@thewitness.org>). She is returning after a three-month sabbatical during which she enjoyed the first respite from monthly deadlines in 12 years by spending time in the woods, with her family and in solitude.

and no fun to punish [TW 11/91].

McCrackin, who founded the racially integrated Community Church in Cincinnati after being rejected by the Presbyterian Church in the 1960s for war tax resistance, spent his life fighting for the homeless and prisoners, fighting against gentrification and participating in protests. The Presbyterian Church restored his orders in 1987 and



Jim Borgman/Cincinnati Enquirer

apologized. McCrackin's life is chronicled in *Building the Beloved Community* (Temple, 1991).

McCrackin died December 30 in a nursing home. Friends report that he was seen not long before — at midnight, in his wheelchair — in a drumming circle.

Denise Levertov

On December 19, poet Denise Levertov, 74, died in Seattle. Levertov chronicled the political upheavals of our times, writing, "I choose revolution" [TW 11/91].

Levertov juxtaposed vivid images of street confrontations with police against descriptions of the world's beauty. In a poem about Berkeley's People's Park, Levertov described students and neighbors when police razed the park. She

concluded, "there comes a time when only anger is love."

Yet, she could also write:

*Have you ever,
in stream or sea,
Felt the silver of fish
pass through your hand-hold? Not to stop
it, block it from going onward, but feel it
move in its wave-road?*

*To make
Of song a chalice
Of time,
A communion wine*
Ernest Bromley

Ernest Bromley finished his life on December 17 in hospice care with good friends. In 1946, Bromley left a Methodist pastorate in North Carolina after an uproar about both his decision to perform a marriage for an African American couple and his willingness to go to jail rather than pay war taxes. The following year, he participated in the first freedom ride.

Bromley joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation where he met his wife, Marion. They moved to Gano, Ohio, setting up a peace center and editing *The Peacemaker* for 25 years. The IRS seized title to the property in 1975, but within a year reversed itself.

In 1992, Bromley celebrated his 80th birthday by bungee jumping.

John Howard Yoder

John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite theologian, died at Notre Dame at the age of 70 on December 30. In *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), Yoder helped define a Christian ethic that embraced pacifism and offered a critique of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. Yoder taught that Jesus brought a vision, not of a new ethic, but of a new community, one that embodied forgiveness, self-sacrifice and love. He also believed that rather than trying to convert the world, the church must live its vision. **TW**

The dream of the suburbs

by Mary Minock

In those days
in the neighborhood
was the dream
of leaving it:
escape to the northwest side —
brick houses with working screen doors,
aluminum curlicues
would stop them bellying,
a mailman would work the beat
and birds would chirp quietly.

The dream of Dearborn —
the streets would offer more than plumbing
supplies
and used furniture;
there would be dress shops
and diversions —
bowling alleys and miniature golf
a youth center
a little city hall
with a cornice like an A & P
a swimming pool;
the houses would be laid out for normal
people —
no dark hallways
no oversized bathrooms

and undersized kitchens
no climb up the steep stairs
no buzzers to let the callers in
that confused the callers.

A three-bedroom ranch home in Inkster —
a picture window
all for ninety nine ninety nine dollars,
and ninety nine dollars moves you in.

The bliss of the suburbs —
the reasonability
the shopping plazas
where you could go from store to store
a fat green Cunningham's on the corner
bigger than the Cunningham's on Junction
withered and shrunken to hold tightly
the little we had to buy.

No warehouses at the end of the street
no pounding out of tin at Timken's
no smell of tobacco in the early morning
from the Scotton-Dillon plant
no trucks shuddering down the street
no closures of swimming pools
for lack of chlorine in polio season
no cutting of trees in the park

no taking down of a perfect copper
umbrella
over a nonworking drinking fountain
no tearing down of a band shell
because a simple-minded girl
was murdered there.

No migrations of new people
no threat of the poorer moving in
to replace the ones who got their dream
no bums from skid row coming our way
down Vernor Highway
after the expressway was built.

Oh ranch house
oh wall-to-wall carpet
oh three doors to open directly
on three separate bedrooms
oh laps of three bright-colored
wall-to-wall carpets
oh vacuum cleaner of many implements
oh windows that work
oh fenced back yard with two disciplined
little trees
oh suburb
oh sameness, no peeling paint
no passageways, no junk rooms to hide.

There would be new dresses with price
tags
to show to the neighbors;
the women would have time for coffee
the women would talk about sales on
lamps
stockpiles of canned goods and Saran
Wrap

the women would be wise about colors
the women would have painted nails
the women would use mops and electric
mixers
in Loretta Young skirts
instead of hands and knees
in rosebud zippered house dresses
the women would wait for men
who worked in suits and were gone all day
no split shifts
no afternoons
no night shifts
no heavy wrists holding beer cans on the
table;
oh suburb — dinner at six
the man, the newspaper, the boys on
shiny bicycles
arrive at once
hungry and civilized and feedable.

The dream of the suburbs:
after they were gone
we were lonely
we kept our time by the seasons
we rose in the morning
we settled in the evening
with the sparrows and the pigeons
and looked to the river.

— *Love in the Upstairs Flat*,
Mellen Poetry Press,
Lewiston, N.Y., 1995

Poetry

Welfare 'reform' and poverty in the 1990s

by Camille Colatosti

*In the squares of the city, by the shadow
of the steeple*

*Near the relief office, I saw my people
And some were stumbling, and some were
wondering if*

This land was made for you and me.

— Woody Guthrie (1944)

In October 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. As he did so, he ended the safety net that had existed in this country since 1934, when, in response to tremendous suffering and to poor people's protests, the government determined that families with incomes below a certain poverty level should receive public assistance. In 1996, the poverty level was \$13,330 for a family with one parent and two children. That year, 38.1 million people, or 14.5 percent of the population, lived in poor families. Approximately one-third of these families received welfare.

Clinton told the country that he was doing this for the poor's own good. As he explained, "A long time ago, I concluded that the current welfare system undermines the basic values of work, responsibility and family, trapping generation after generation in dependency. ... Today we have a historic opportunity to make welfare what it was meant to be: a second chance, not a way of life."

This rhetoric did not convince everyone. When the new welfare law was

passed in 1996, Frances Fox Piven, City University of New York professor, poverty expert and co-author of the 1973 classic *Regulating the Poor*, criticized the assumption that welfare itself is responsible for poverty. She said, "Never mind low wages and irregular work; never mind the spreading social disorganization to which they lead; never mind changes in family and sexual norms occurring among all classes and in all western countries. The solution is to slash welfare. But slashing welfare does not create stable jobs or raise wages."

Others saw Clinton's act as a political ploy, a chance for him to take the welfare debate out of the presidential race and seal his victory over Republican candidate Bob Dole. In October 1996, Representative Charles Rangle (D-NY), said, "My president will boldly throw one million into poverty. This is a political bill. It should not be passed into law."

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney urged Clinton to veto the bill. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader called the act a "betrayal of the American people." Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the

*The federal government puts
few restrictions on states,
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programs as they choose.
This means that there are
no national standards to
alleviate poverty.*

Children's Defense Fund, the most influential children's advocacy group in the country, conceded that Clinton's act was a "moral blot on his presidency."

Today many economists and advocates for the poor remain critical. As Mary Cooper, associate director of the Washington Office of the National Council of Churches, explains, "Poor people are being blamed for being poor, as if it is something that they chose for themselves. Our belief is that people are on welfare because they have no other choice."

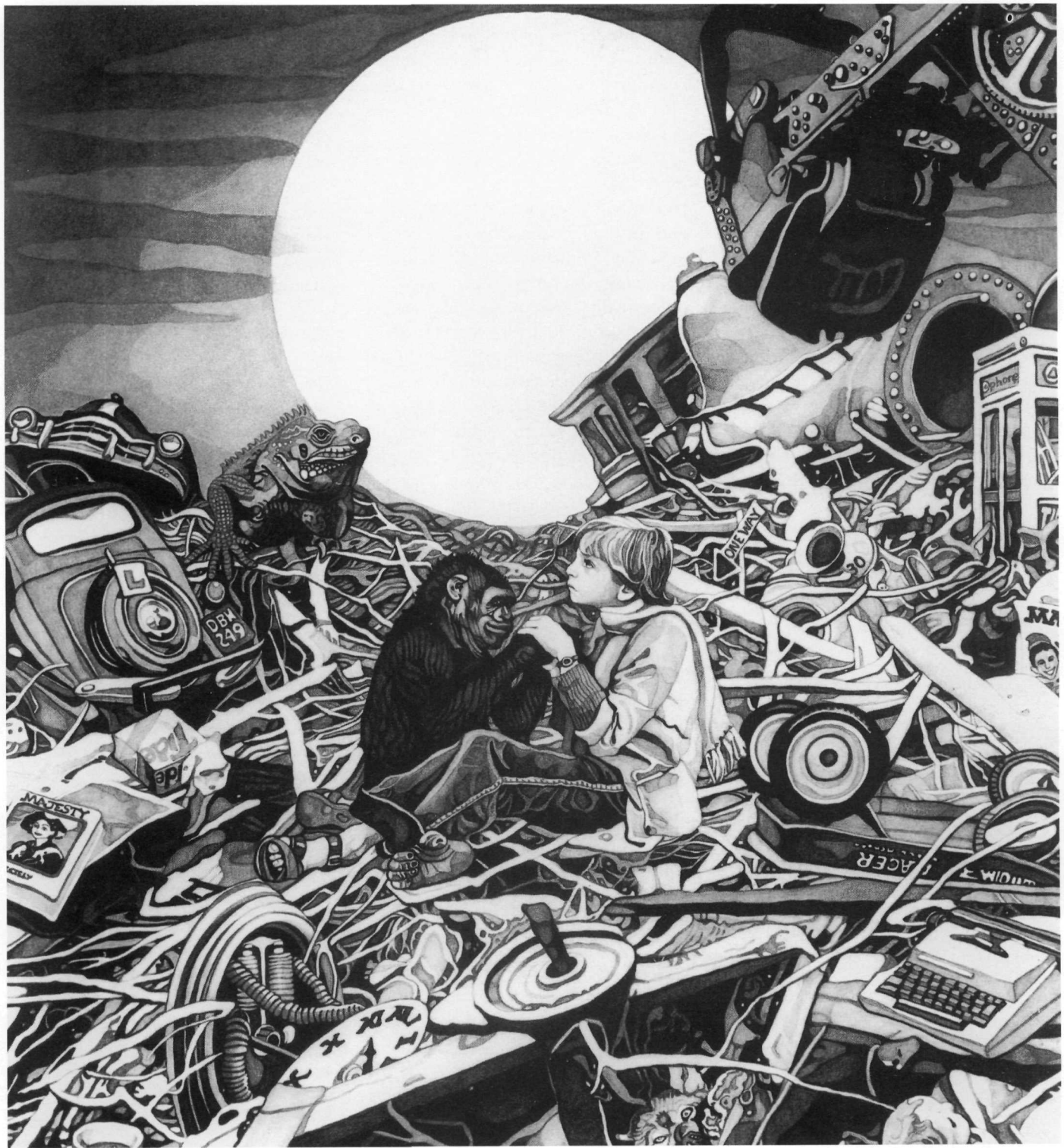
Replacing AFDC with state grants

The new welfare law was implemented on July 1, 1997. On that date, state departments of social services began providing public assistance funding through a new federal program — Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) — instead of the former program — Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

The new law put in place a six-year plan designed to save \$55 billion. Forty percent of the savings comes from cuts to food stamps and 44 percent from cuts in public assistance to legal immigrants. States now receive block grants based on previous years' spending on AFDC, job training, basic skills education and emergency assistance programs. (In 1996, approximately 5 percent of the U.S. population received AFDC grants averaging \$6,000 annually for a single mother with two children, the standard family size for AFDC recipients.)

The federal government puts few restrictions on states, allowing them to design programs as they choose. This means that there are no national standards to alleviate poverty; the U.S. may soon have 50 different welfare programs in place. As National Council of Churches' Cooper explains, "The states can decide if they're going to help people or just let them sink."

Camille Colatosti is a professor of English at the Detroit College of Business. Artist **Dierdre Luzwick** lives in Wisconsin.



Brothers

Dierdre Luzwick

Each state has the right to define who is eligible for TANF. No one is guaranteed funding. In fact, the federal government prohibits states from helping some people who had been eligible in the past. For instance, families cannot receive TANF aid for more than two consecutive years, or a total of five years. (Thirty-seven percent of AFDC recipients received aid for less than two years and 25 percent received aid for more than eight years.) Teenage parents who do not live with their parents or go to school are also prohibited from receiving TANF. In addition, the federal law gives states the option to deny assistance even to teen mothers who comply and to deny assistance to children born while the mother is already receiving benefits. The law categorically denies cash aid and food stamps to anyone who has, at any time, been convicted of felony drug charges.

Strict work requirements

Strict work requirements are the heart of the new legislation. Single parents can receive a maximum of two years of TANF

while unemployed, only if they are seeking or training for jobs. States may deny not only TANF grants but also Medicaid to adults who do not comply. They may, however, allow hardship exemptions for 20 percent of their cases.

There are also new restrictions on food stamps. In recent years food stamps have made up about 25 percent of a working family's aid. Now, able-bodied 18 to 50 year olds without children may receive only three months of food stamps in a given three-year period if they do not work at least 20 hours a week. (If a working recipient is laid off, but has used the three-month maximum, he or she can be granted a three-month grace period for a new job search.) Child nutrition programs — such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) — will be cut \$2.9 billion in the next six years.

Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) has called the new law “legislative child abuse.” The Urban Institute estimates that the law will increase child poverty by 20 percent.

Perhaps most important, says National Council of Churches' Cooper, is the issue of whether mothers of young children should go to work at all. While funding for child care is necessary, and child care is a huge issue for families who are trying to get out of poverty, it also seems as if poor mothers have lost their right to stay home with their children. “If the well-being of children is a priority,” says Cooper, “then the issue of forcing mothers into the labor force strikes me as a misguided piece. We need to consider welfare in terms of what it does to children and what it does to future generations.”

Challenging myths

According to advocates for the poor, the battle over preserving the social safety net was lost, in part, because progressive people acquiesced to a 30-year effort by the Old and New Right to set the agenda, according to a recently released report by Northeastern University Law professor Lucy Williams through Political Research Associates, an independent research cen-

The deserving poor

The U.S. has always been ambivalent about assisting the poor, unsure whether the poor are good people facing difficult times or bad people who cannot fit into society.

Public welfare programs in the U.S. originated as discretionary programs for the “worthy” poor. Local asylums or poorhouses separated the deserving poor, such as the blind, deaf, insane, and eventually the orphaned, from the undeserving, comprising all other paupers including children in families, with wide variation and broad local administrative discretion.

“Traditional” family values have always been part of the discourse. There have also always been those who

thought poverty was caused by individual fault and that the receipt of any governmental assistance was debilitating.

The Social Security Act of 1935 emerged from the Great Depression, when the massive unemployment of previously employed, white male voters made it politically impossible to dismiss the poor as responsible for their own situation. The AFDC program, only a small part of the Social Security Act, covered children living with their mothers. The legislative history of the Social Security Act allowed the states, which administered the AFDC program, to condition eligibility upon the sexual morality of AFDC mothers through suitable-home or “man-in-the-house” rules. These behavioral rules were often intentionally used to exclude African Americans and children of un-

wed mother from the rolls. One Southern field supervisor reported: “The number of Negro cases is fewer due to the unanimous feeling on the part of the staff and board that there are more work opportunities for Negro women and to their intense desire not to interfere with local labor conditions. The attitude that ‘they have always gotten along,’ and that ‘all they’ll do is have more children’ is definite.”

However, in the 1960s, the civil rights and welfare rights movements resulted in the inclusion of many who had been excluded from the original AFDC program. Aggressive lawyering on behalf of poor people removed many of the systemic administrative barriers used to keep African American women off the welfare rolls. As a result, the number of African

ter which analyzes the political Right. The Right sought to diminish support for welfare among white Americans by focussing the welfare reform debate on racially stereotyped images of “welfare queens” who accept government “give aways.” As Douglas Dobmeyer, publisher of *Poverty Issues ... Dateline Illinois*, explains, “Reform means something positive. I won’t call these changes reform, but everyone else does, even liberals. Everyone has accepted the conservative rhetoric.”

The first step toward shifting the direction of reform — or ending the repeal of welfare — involves changing the terms of the debate by distributing accurate information about poverty, welfare, and the new law. Dobmeyer explains, “Unless people state the truth, we will continue in soundbite language saying that people need to work. But if there are no jobs, how can people work? If there is no training for jobs that do exist, how can people work?”

Reg McKillip, a field organizer at

NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby, agrees. “The legislation is directed at every myth regarding people on welfare: People on welfare have lots of kids; they don’t want to work; they are lazy. These are myths. The facts don’t show this.”

Indeed, according to an Urban Institute Policy and Research Report, there is no correlation between benefit levels and women’s choice to have children — states with higher benefits do not have higher birth rates. Likewise, many welfare recipients work and have significant employment histories. But, like most poor people, welfare recipients move in and out of low-wage, unstable jobs. These

“I won’t call these changes reform, but everyone else does, even liberals. Everyone has accepted the conservative rhetoric.” — Douglas Dobmeyer

Americans on the AFDC rolls increased dramatically, by approximately 15 percent between 1965 to 1971, although the vast majority of those receiving welfare continued to be white.

Racism and wage work

A racist stance is also evident in the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, which for the first time placed mandatory work requirements on AFDC recipients. As more white women moved into wage work, at least on a part-time basis, and that became more acceptable, and as the states were finally required to open the welfare rolls to women of color, the image of “productive” became more complicated. In the rhetoric of the Right, “good” (i.e., white) women were still relegated to their calling as mothers and homemakers; although for many “lib-

eral” women, their self-definition and the resulting partial societal understanding of them now included a career.

However, African American women had always been expected and required to do wage work in U.S. society, predominantly as domestic and agricultural workers. Thus as the new image of welfare recipient was constructed as African American, it was only to be expected that they (unlike white women) should be required to work.

Thus the images in the Congressional debate were of unmarried illiterate women with a massive number of children and a lack of appropriate parenting skills. Most of these women lived in inner-city slums, particularly the largely African American neighborhood of Harlem.

This is only one example of the Right’s

jobs often cannot sustain families.

Keeping track of the poor among us
Contrary to what many believe, most poor people are not isolated from the non-poor, but instead live in areas of mixed and diverse income. While poverty rates are higher among minority groups than among whites, the largest group of poor are white people. A growing number of poor families are headed by women, as are a growing number of families at all income levels.

“Americans think that the poor are very separate from them,” says Barb Beesley, a staff member of Groundwork for a Just World, a Detroit-area organization founded by women religious over 20 years ago. “They don’t realize that the poor are among us.”

The Children’s Defense Fund and a number of other organizations have instituted a new monitoring project tracking people removed from welfare rolls to document the effects of the new legislation. Arloc Sherman, the monitoring project’s director, explains, “The notion

two-sided attack on women. On one hand, a woman’s “natural place” is in the home; she finds dignity and security beneath the authority of her husband; and day care is opposed because it keeps children away from their mothers. On the other hand, a woman without a man (i.e., a single mother welfare recipient) should be in wage work.

A similar tension exists between the Right’s commitment to limited government intervention in individual’s lives and the recommendations regarding welfare policy as a mechanism for economically mandating “intact marriages.”

— from *Decades of Distortion: The Right’s 30-Year Assault on Welfare*, by Lucy Williams, Political Research Associates, Somerville, Mass., December 1997

is that there are going to be a lot of people at the local level who will see what is happening with the law before researchers and politicians will.”

As people’s assistance is cut, they will become harder and harder to track. “One of the first things that will happen,” Sherman says, “is that the phone bill goes unpaid. People become hard to contact. Then families may seem to disappear as they are made homeless or are pushed into precarious housing situations — maybe doubling up with relatives.”

Is work enough?

The new welfare reform legislation is based on the premise that once people are removed from government assistance, they will get jobs and their lives will improve materially. But is this true? Many economists fear that the low-wage labor market — the likely entry point for people moving off assistance — cannot absorb a sizable increase in new or returning workers. Former welfare recipients, they conclude, will face long periods of unemployment between periods of insufficient and low-paid work. A survey conducted by the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies reveals that there will be large increases in competition for low-wage jobs. In Illinois alone, “approximately 285,459 unemployed workers and welfare recipients will be competing for only 68,645 entry-level jobs. There will be six job seekers for every job in Chicago.”

Increased competition will reduce wages. The Washington, D.C.-based Economic Policy Institute report, *Flooding the Labor Market*, explains, “For the economy to absorb almost one million more workers: nationally, the wages of low-wage workers (defined here as the bottom 30 percent of workers — about 31 million men and women who earn less than \$7.19 an hour) will fall by 1.9 percent. Wages for low-wage workers in

states with relatively large welfare populations will have to fall by even more: in California, 17.8 percent; in New York, 17.1 percent.”

Greg Duncan is the deputy director of the Poverty Research Center at Northwestern University and a professor of economics. The mission of his center is to evaluate the impact of the new welfare provisions.

In the past, explains Duncan, when there have been state-level welfare reforms with time limits and so on, poor people have worked more and received less aid. “But they do so without a net

“We have a \$5.25 an hour minimum wage. It doesn’t even begin to come close to support a family even if someone gets full-time work.”

— Jean Ross

change in income. They receive more from employment and less from welfare, but the level doesn’t change much, and if you add together other benefits like the health insurance they lose from the state, their resources actually decrease when they work.”

Duncan remains unsure of what the future holds. “It’s impossible to characterize what is happening now and what is going to happen with any single kind of story,” he says. “It is almost certain,” he adds, “that in ten years there will be fewer families receiving welfare. Whether that will reduce the numbers of the poor we don’t know.”

Duncan also wonders what will happen when economic conditions, which he now characterizes as “robust,” return to normal levels or even to some kind of recession.

Rebecca Blank, author of *It Takes a*

Nation (Princeton 1997) and a member nominee of the Council of Economic Advisors to the Clinton administration, clearly explains why forcing poor people to work will not — in and of itself — end poverty [see p. 29]. She argues that welfare reform, even as it mandates work, does not take into account important labor force changes. “The primary change in the lives of the poor over the past 20 years,” explains Blank, “has been the deteriorating set of economic opportunities available to less-skilled workers. The favorite solution to poverty among most Americans has always been overall economic growth that creates jobs and helps the poor escape poverty through work and wages. Unfortunately, wage rates have declined steadily in the jobs available to less-skilled workers, which means that employment has become progressively less effective at reducing poverty.”

Blank says “poverty remained stubbornly high through the 1980s and 1990s, despite overall economic growth. The problem wasn’t behavior. It was jobs.”

Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project, a non-partisan policy, research and education organization based in Sacramento, Calif., says the current federal poverty standard are probably too low. It doesn’t subtract unavoidable expenses like child care and taxes and it makes no adjustments for differences in the cost of living.

Her organization calculated what they believe it really costs a family to live. Ross’ model is a single mother with one preschooler and one second grader, who lives in a modest two-bedroom apartment. When you add in child care costs, explains Ross, “this mother would need to earn about \$28,000 a year just to get by. This is about \$14 an hour. We have a \$5.25 an hour minimum wage. It doesn’t even begin to come close to support a family even if someone gets full-time work.”

Solutions

Economists and advocates for the poor expect the studies currently being conducted to point to directions for future change. However, there are common ideas about what should be done now. First, restore what was cut, says the National Council of Churches' Mary Cooper. "Get back food stamps for legal immigrants and able-bodied 18 to 50 year olds without dependent children.

These cuts are a big mistake. There is no reason to discriminate against immigrant families. And why discriminate against people without children?"

The National Council of Churches is also lobbying the government to fund safe, quality, affordable child care. "This is what makes it possible for people to go back to work or to work for the first time," says Cooper. Other measures, such as an increased earned income tax credit, may also

help. Likewise, it is necessary for all workers to have health insurance, whether this takes the form of national health care or expanded Medicaid.

Ed Kraus of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs notes that "effective welfare reform is expensive." But if the country is serious about moving people to be self-sufficient, then the nation needs to be willing to spend money.

Kraus notes the need to increase funding for education and job training. Currently, many states enforce a "work first" provision in their welfare programs. This means that recipients must leave education and training programs to seek work, even if they lack qualifications for jobs that would remove them from poverty. Kraus points to a poor, single mother he knows. "She is a very bright person committed to a degree program. She has no family to turn to. Under the new law, she has to choose between continuing in her program in radiology — a career that makes sense — or dropping out of the program in order to find work to pay the rent."

Creating jobs that pay more than poverty wages is crucial. Despite the economic recovery of the 1990s and the decrease in unemployment nationally, poverty rates continue to rise, reports the Economic Policy Institute in *The State of Working America 1996-7*. Like others, Philip Harvey, associate professor at Rutgers University School of Law and co-author of *America's Misunderstood Welfare State* (Harper Collins 1992), does not believe that the 1996 law, as currently structured, will reverse this trend. He suggests that solutions will come only when the goals of welfare reform are redefined.

"The focus now is on finding ways to get people off the welfare rolls," says Harvey. To that extent, reform is successful.

"That may be the battle, but not the war. What about ending poverty? Isn't that what it should be about?"

TW

Restorers of hope

Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-based Ministries that Work, by Amy L. Sherman (Crossway Books, 1997).

The seven church-based social welfare ministries studied in the preparation of this book are described by its title: They are restorers of hope. They range from Phoenix to Richmond, from multimillion-dollar enterprises to small operations constantly in the red, from organizations focused on a targeted population to ministries serving an entire community. All are committed to witnessing to God's love in the world.

And all believe that outreach to the poor and needy is not only a matter of obedience to Scripture, but also a necessary component of spiritual growth.

Sherman, who serves as Director of Urban Ministries at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Va., describes the way restorers transform urban street culture, reform thinking and behaviors, and counteract the structural causes of poverty in the inner city. A central portion of her book contains instructions for developing a congregational ministry to the poor. Ten specific steps are described: A church should assess its strengths and weaknesses; learn about the community; identify what others are already doing; begin building relationships; gather together a core

community team; determine its unique niche; learn from other models; decide on basic organizational policies; establish a system for recruiting, screening, training, placing, and affirming volunteers; and establish an evaluation system.

Finally, Sherman looks at the benefits and potential pitfalls of collaboration with government, urging a model of collaboration that builds on the cost effectiveness of faith-based ministries but also recognizes their unique strengths as religious organizations ministering holistically — building relationships and educating and demonstrating commitment and faith.

Restorers of Hope offers specific, strategic advice to congregations seeking involvement in ministry, buttressed by the experiences of congregations that have transformed lives and reclaimed communities. Sherman warns that "being a RESTORER is long, hard work that requires tremendous patience and perseverance." Her book is particularly appropriate as the church explores faith-based ministries in anticipation of Jubilee 2000.

— Judith Esmay,
from ENEJ (Episcopal Network for
Economic Justice) newsletter;
<CalifonNH@aol.com>.

‘Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!’

by Robin Kelley

These days, as a professor at New York University, Robin D.G. Kelley can afford to live “downtown,” in Greenwich Village. He’s an acclaimed scholar of the black working class, whose four books bring to light the everyday acts of resistance to racism that historians usually disregard. But Kelley grew up in West Harlem. His mother and his two sisters, he writes, “all spent a brief moment of their lives on welfare.” He wrote his new book, Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!, in defense of his mother, his grandmother, his daughter, and the many, many other black women reviled in Right-wing lectures on welfare.

— Jane Slaughter

I grew up in a world in which talking about somebody’s mama was a way of life, an everyday occurrence. Whether we called it “snapping,” “ranking,” “busting,” or simply “the dozens,” most of it was ridiculous, surreal humor bearing very little resemblance to reality: “Your mom’s so fat she broke the food chain.” You would think that as a kid growing up in this world I could handle any insult, or at least be prepared for any slander tossed in the direction of my mom. But academics, journalists, policymakers, and politicians have taken the “dozens” to another level. In all my years of playing the

dozens, I have rarely heard vitriol as vicious as the words spouted by Riverside (Calif.) County welfare director Lawrence Townsend: “Every time I see a bag lady on the street, I wonder, ‘Was that an AFDC mother who hit the menopause wall — who can no longer reproduce and get money to support herself?’” I have had kids tell me that my hair was so nappy it looked like a thousand Africans giving the Black Power salute, but never has anyone said to my face

*Black neoconservatives
(or “negrocons”) have
placed much of the blame
for the current state of affairs
on racial preferences.*

that my whole family — especially my mama — was a “tangle of pathology.” Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has been saying it since 1965, and Moynihan’s “snap” has been repeated by legions of analysts and politicians.

Old images of the lazy, irresponsible Negro endure in the form of “the underclass,” “matriarchy,” “welfare queens,” “criminals,” and “dysfunctional,” to name a few. We have been consistently marked as dysfunctional; we have been the thing against which normality, whiteness, and functionality have been defined. Whether we are short on cognitive ability or long on sexual drive, it all adds up to a merciless attack on black mothers specifically, and black families more generally.

Why do so many people believe that barriers to black progress have been removed? If racism is essentially a thing of the past, as conservatives and many

neoliberals now argue, then the reason for the failure of the black poor to lift themselves out of poverty has to be found in their behavior or their culture. In short, the problems facing the vast majority of black folk in today’s ghettos lie not with government policy or corporate capitalism, but with the people themselves — our criminally minded youth, our deadbeat daddies, and our welfare-dependent mamas.

Today sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists compete for huge grants from foundations in order to get a handle on the so-called underclass, the newest internal threat to civilization. In *The End of Racism*, Dinesh D’Souza, boy wonder of the Far Right, says in no uncertain terms that African Americans have ushered in “a revival of barbarism in the midst of Western Civilization.” Terms like “nihilistic,” “dysfunctional” and “pathological” have become the most common adjectives to describe contemporary black urban culture. “I think this anthropology is just another way to call me a nigger,” observed Othman Sullivan, one of many informants in John Langston Gwaltney’s classic study of black culture.

[Back in the early 1970s,] Richard M. Nixon was in the White House, attacking welfare mothers and blaming the black poor for their own poverty. Nixon’s domestic advisor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, passed on a confidential memo proposing that “the time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of ‘benign neglect.’” Much of the white middle class agreed. They believed that African Americans received too many government handouts. They were tired of “paying the bill,” especially now that racism had allegedly been eliminated with the Civil Rights movement.

Sounds a lot like the 1990s, with one exception: 25 years ago black people still had reason to be optimistic. The Civil Rights movement had made remarkable gains. The black middle class expanded, as col-

Reprinted from *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* by Robin D. G. Kelley. Copyright © 1997 by Robin D. G. Kelley. By permission of Beacon Press, Boston, Mass. Jane Slaughter is a freelance writer who lives in Detroit. Artist Robert Shetterly’s “Blake and Shetterly Series” is available on cards from Borealis Press, 39 Hancock St., Ellsworth, Maine 04605.

lege-educated professionals moved to newly built suburban homes. And black politicians won mayoral races in several major cities, including Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans, Newark, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

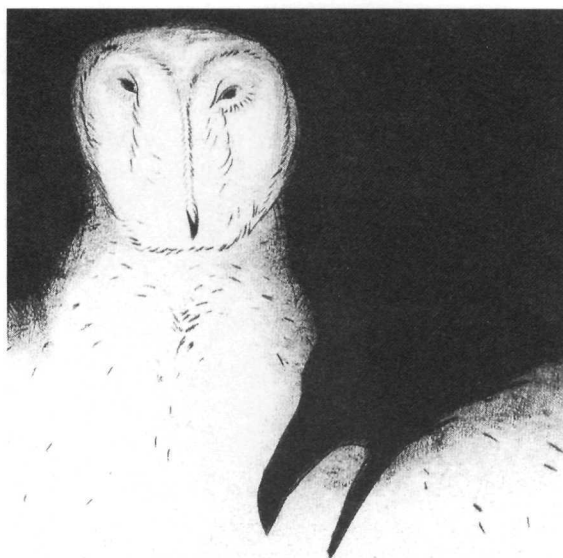
We did get our "piece of the rock," but at what cost? For many urban residents left behind in the nation's "chocolate cities" while the upwardly mobile fled to "vanilla suburbs," once the victory parties were over they had a difficult time obtaining city services, affordable housing, or improved schools. The decade of hope was marked by the disappearance of heavy industry, the flight of American corporations to foreign lands and the suburbs, and the displacement of millions of workers across the country. Permanent unemployment and underemployment became a way of life. A few years after the War on Poverty had been declared a victory, the number of black poor grew dramatically.

Black neoconservatives (or "negrocons," as I like to call them) have placed much of the blame for the current state of affairs on racial preferences. Economist Thomas Sowell, for example, has insisted that the problem of poor African Americans can be attributed to a lack of moral values and a work ethic. Welfare and affirmative action must be eliminated since they undermine middle-class values of hard work and thrift, and make African Americans dependent on government assistance.

Calls for color blindness and *laissez-faire* economic strategies camouflage the critical role the state has played in reproducing inequality and creating an "uneven" playing field. Tax laws and social welfare, retirement, and housing policies have impaired the ability of African Americans to accumulate assets while facilitating white access to wealth.

For most people, the key to wealth accu-

mulation is home ownership. White homeowners in the post-World War II era enjoyed a dramatic rise in property values, which served as the basis for the baby boom generation's upward mobility. The return on their investment enabled them to pass on wealth as well as educational opportunities to their children.



The crow wish'd everything was black, the owl that everything was white.

Robert Shetterly/Borealis Press

For most black folk, however, segregation shut off much of the post-World War II housing market. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) policies of giving mixed and African American neighborhoods lower ratings, racial discrimination by lending institutions, redlining, white flight — you name it — put black folks at a disadvantage. As a result, by 1988, 63.8 percent of whites owned their homes compared to 41.6 percent of African Americans. The median home value among blacks was \$31,000 compared to \$45,000 for whites.

Race impacts zoning laws as well. A 1987 study estimated that three out of five African Americans live dangerously close to abandoned toxic waste sites and commercial hazardous waste landfills. A 1992 study concluded that polluters based in minority areas are treated less severely by

government agencies than those in largely white communities. Federally sponsored toxic cleanup programs take longer and are less thorough in minority neighborhoods.

Government policies generate racial inequality in other ways as well. We can point to the billions spent for highways, water, and sewage facilities for white suburban communities while inner city infrastructures crumbled.

Just as jobs began to disappear, so did federal funding, particularly after Reagan took office. Reagan reduced aid to cities to a fraction of what it had been under Nixon. City governments were forced to cut their budgets, leading to massive layoffs. Since African Americans held many of these jobs, they were hardest hit. To make matters worse, many cities experienced a "tax revolt" from suburban communities that no longer wanted their property taxes to fund urban schools or city services.

Middle-class and affluent white Americans have benefited from certain kinds of "affirmative action" under a different name, i.e., government supports and subsidies. Many of the benefits white workers and students receive are not merely the product of thrift and hard work but outcomes determined largely by government policy.

The fact is, we do not have a free-market economy and never completely had a free-market economy. Instead of avoiding the state, we need to recognize it as an extremely important site of struggle. All the self-help in the world will not eliminate poverty or create the number of good jobs needed to employ the African American community. A well-paying, fulfilling job and a strong "safety net" in troubled times should be a basic right, not a handout or an entitlement. Whether we ever create a state that puts working people's needs before corporations will depend on which vision of society we embrace.

TW

America's welfare capitalists

by Christopher D. Cook

America's 60-year-old commitment to the poor ended last July, when President Clinton's repeal of public-assistance entitlements took effect. Sure to be a symbol of Clinton's legacy, the law limits U.S. citizens to just five years of assistance. Most immigrants, "legal" or not, get nothing. Aid recipients must accept any job, no matter how low-paying, temporary, or hazardous. City-run "workfare" programs are forcing recipients to sweep sidewalks, pick up trash, and clean subway cars for sub-minimum wages, with no safety protections. This has proved fatal in at least one instance, reported by the *Village Voice*, when a recipient with a documented heart condition died while hauling heavy garbage bags in the hot sun.

On paper at least, welfare repeal has produced the nation's lowest caseloads in a quarter century. But while Clinton heralds the drop-off as proof of success, officials acknowledge they have no way of knowing where the 1.4 million recipients who have "left welfare" over the past year have gone; the federal law penalizes states that fail to slash their rolls, but doesn't require any follow-up to determine whether people are getting jobs. The law's "caseload reduction credit" requires states to cut caseloads by a full 50 percent by the year 2000 in order to maintain federal funding. But even in today's relatively strong economy, numerous studies show that the number of people being kicked off welfare outstrips available jobs by the millions.

Christopher D. Cook is a freelance investigative journalist based in San Francisco. He has covered welfare for *The Nation* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Artist **David Adams** lives in Lima, Ohio.

Advocates for the poor are seeing red, but U.S. corporations see vast green pastures of profit. Welfare reform, they say, has created "the business opportunity of a lifetime" — a booming market with "massive growth potential." Lending new aptness to the term "corporate welfare," the law enables wholesale privatization of \$28 billion worth of welfare administration programs — turning public assistance into a private, profit-making venture.

"This law is a boondoggle for corporate America," says Cecilia Perry, a public policy analyst with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Em-

"We envision people getting \$7 an hour with few benefits and no training, under pressure to push through as many people as possible and give out as few benefits as possible." — Lynn McCray

ployees (AFSCME), which represents public-sector employees. It provides new contracts and new opportunities for them to make money. ... Welfare is a program to benefit poor people. If you're going to take that money and give it to large corporations that are designed to make profits, there's a huge contradiction."

'Cherry picking'

The corporate rush to control welfare will exacerbate the deadly effects of the new welfare law, which replaces aid guarantees with highly flexible block grants sent to the states. Advocates warn that for-

profit welfare operators will "cherry-pick" recipients who are easiest to move off the rolls and into the workplace, while neglecting or discarding people who require more social work and training. The government typically pays job-placement contractors about \$5,000 for each recipient placed in a job; the law now adds incentives for these contractors to reduce their caseloads as rapidly as possible. "There should be incentives for getting people employment," says Ellen Bravo, executive director of the National Association of Working Women (known as 9 to 5), "but instead there are incentives for throwing people on the street."

These reverse incentives are already taking their toll, according to Maurice Emsellem, staff attorney with the National Employment Law Project in New York City. At a privately run job center in Boston, Mass., he says, "they're not serving the people with the greatest needs because it's just more expensive. ... It has to pay for them to do it. There's no financial motivation for them to serve those who are hardest to serve, who need lots of education, who have disabilities, who need transportation from the inner city."

Rural welfare recipients are also ending up on the wrong side of the bottom line. Texas State Representative John Hirschi, a Democrat representing a mixed rural-urban district where 10 percent of the population is on Food Stamps, says for-profit firms, with their zeal for cost-cutting, may avoid rural recipients who are more difficult to reach. "When you contract out to somebody who's doing this for profit, there's an inclination to make convenient services available. There's a disincentive to serve rural areas," where transportation is more costly, says Hirschi, who has opposed efforts to privatize \$2 billion worth of welfare programs in Texas. "There's some concern that these for-profit companies would tend to skim those that are most easily employable, and would be less inter-

ested in taking care of special needs clients, who we worry would fall through the cracks."

Losing public sector union jobs

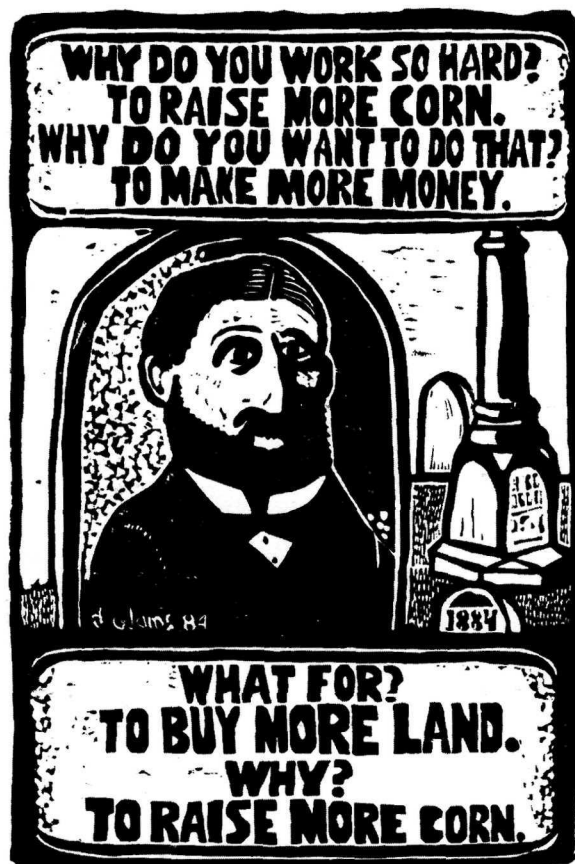
Also at risk of falling through the cracks are tens of thousands of public-sector employees (the nation's most highly unionized workforce), many of whom will lose their jobs due to welfare downsizing and outsourcing. In the name of "efficiency," private firms plan to severely reduce staffs, putting public workers on the unemployment lines — and, quite possibly, on welfare.

"We envision people getting \$7 an hour with few benefits and no training, under pressure to push through as many people as possible and give out as few benefits as possible," says Lynn McCray, organizing coordinator of the Texas State Employees Union. McCray's union represents some 5,000 welfare-system employees who could lose their jobs due to privatization. She warns that in the name of cost-cutting, firms will provide bargain basement services for the poor. "We feel that a corporation whose chief motive is profit won't be hiring the people with the right skills, and won't pay well enough to attract people who are trained enough to know what welfare recipients need and what they can get."

Privatization also endangers public information and accountability. There is an enormous amount of misinformation that results in recipients being disqualified," says Bruce Bower, an attorney with the Texas Legal Services Center. "This will be exacerbated by private corporations. ... Rather than state officials accepting responsibility, they'll say it's the contractor's problem, it's not our doing."

The arrival of corporate titans on the welfare scene also threatens to drive away

non-profits which have historically been the government's welfare subcontractors of choice. Non-profits can't compete with these corporations on bids," Perry observes, noting that huge corporations bring to the bidding table state-of-the-art technology and superior economies of scale — not to



David Adams, 1984

mention heavyweight political connections. Beyond the prodigious competition, says Cecilia Perry, some non-profits and charities may be dissuaded by the rules promoting speedy caseload reduction. "Non-profits aren't necessarily going after the eligibility [review] function, because they don't want to turn people away."

Corporate greed

Corporations, meanwhile, are hardly masking their eagerness to capitalize on

this opportunity for new profit-making ventures. At a conference in Washington, D.C., brazenly titled, "Welfare Privatization: Government Savings and Private Earnings," corporate executives hob-nobbed with state welfare officials and received tips on how to "capitalize on

the massive growth potential of the new world of welfare reform" and "gain a leading edge in the market while it is still in its early stage," according to a conference brochure. For a \$1,295 fee, they could "establish a solid network with key [government] players and decision-makers," and "identify future strategies in this new booming market." The conference also helped government officials "identify 'targets' for privatization," and develop strategies to "manage union opposition."

With welfare privatization well underway, corporations are now pushing to privatize more pieces of the U.S. social-service pie. Eyeing this emerging market, corporate executives and their government allies in Congress are pursuing privatization of Food Stamp and Medicaid programs which, for now, require public administration. "The federal government is under pressure to waive Medicaid and Food Stamps" from privatization restrictions so that for-profit firms can take over these functions, says Perry. A similar flurry of welfare waivers preceded — and hastened — Clinton's 1996 welfare rollback. The ultimate aim, says Perry: to create corporate-run, one-stop shopping, in which "you go to Lockheed for every type of government assistance you need. How does that sound to you?"

Jockeying for welfare contracts

Indeed, the ever-expanding Lockheed is snapping up government programs at an alarming rate. Best known as a contrac-

tor for the U.S. Defense Department, Lockheed's spin-off, IMS, now collects delinquent parking-ticket fees for the city of Los Angeles, and is retained by several cities and states to track down "deadbeat dads" who have failed to pay child support. Now, despite its well-documented trail of massive cost overruns and poor performance, Lockheed is leading the race for lucrative welfare contracts.

The biggest public purse up for grabs is in Texas, where Republican Governor George W. Bush (the former president's son) is pushing the largest welfare privatization plan in the country. In their aggressive jockeying to feed on the public trough, Lockheed and other corporate giants such as IBM and Electronic Data Systems (EDS, once owned by presidential aspirant Ross Perot) have hired well-connected former public officials to lobby for welfare contracts.

A feisty bidding war is being waged over a five-year, \$2 billion contract to run the Texas Integrated Enrollment System (TIES), a statewide service determining eligibility for nearly a dozen welfare-related programs. The system coordinates and computerizes eligibility reviews in "one-stop shopping" centers where people can apply for several benefits at once. Texas Health and Human Services Commissioner (HHSC) Michael McKinney trumpets TIES as "a program which will serve as a model for the rest of the nation." It's also a cost-cutting plan that would consolidate dozens of programs and could mean layoffs for about 5,000 state workers. As HHSC official Charles Stuart acknowledges, "The majority of the savings are in personnel."

In their heated race to gain mega-contracts, corporate bidders have tapped high-ranking former Texas officials who, critics say, helped pass legislation hastening the privatization of welfare. State Representative Hirschi finds this public-private hopscotch disturbing. "These high-ranking of-

ficials would be of great value to these companies. ... I just don't know about the propriety of this situation, where officials are trying to leapfrog from a destructing state agency into profitable firms."

To get a leg up on the competition, Lockheed Martin IMS hired Governor Bush's chief welfare lobbyist and legislative director, Dan Shelley. Now lobbying for Lockheed, Shelley was Bush's "point man" in convincing the Texas Legislature to pass measures in 1995 promoting the outsourcing of welfare to private firms. A call to Mr. Shelley produced a revealing response from Lockheed consultant Bill Miller. "Welfare reform, of course, is privatization," he said. "That was part of the governor's initiative. As his legislative director, of course, it was [Shelley's] responsibility to get the bill passed."

"The whole notion of serving this population is not just to get them on a computer screen." — Rick Levy

After mounting allegations of conflicts of interest and backroom deal-making, Governor Bush signed a bill last June calling for public hearings and legislative oversight of the privatization process. The reform came just one month after the Clinton administration disallowed the Texas plan, saying it privatized too much too quickly (because it proposed privatizing Food Stamps and Medicaid, programs which must be run by public employees). But federal officials softened the rejection, affirming that, as regards most welfare programs, the state "can use non-public employees without limitation." Rest assured, the letter stated, "significant opportunities exist for the State to take advantage of the efficiencies and expertise available through the vendor [business] community."

Paralleling privatization is another TIES

initiative — part of a growing U.S. trend to distance government from the poor: the automation of welfare eligibility reviews and benefits payments. TIES documents call for "automated screening" to determine eligibility for individuals and families, and "automated financial assessment" of "programs that require financial information to determine eligibility."

The automation of welfare has generated yet another new profit niche for businesses. Cities in 26 states across the U.S. dispense some welfare and food-stamp funds through "electronic benefit transfer" (EBT) systems with ATM-style cards and cash machines — most of which are operated jointly by Lockheed Martin IMS and Citibank EBT. These electronic welfare kiosks create a new business opportunity for banks, while causing numerous headaches for recipients.

Meanwhile, EBT malfunctions have left welfare recipients high and dry, with no access to cash or Food Stamps, and no recourse. One day in 1995, half of the EBT computers in Texas went down, recalls Bower. Tens of thousands of people using the "Lone Star Card" couldn't get their benefits. "When people got a message saying there was no money in their account and called the help desk, that help desk didn't respond." As it turned out, the "desk," run by Transactive Corp. had moved to Florida. Recipients were given a toll-free number to call an office in Florida for help.

The move to automate benefits marks a departure from hands-on, interpersonal assistance. Rick Levy, legal director of the Texas AFL-CIO says the EBTs are part of governments' increasing "reliance on technology as a cost-cutting mechanism." Explains Levy: "The ultimate goal is to have recipients get all their assistance from an ATM machine, which is absurd given the population you're dealing with. ... The whole notion of serving this population is not just to get them on a computer screen. You really have to work with people." **TW**

Sharing the wealth through a fair economy

by Daniel Moss

Is laughing a first step towards narrowing the widening income and wealth gap in the U.S.? The folks at United for a Fair Economy (UFE), formally called Share the Wealth, think so. UFE is a Boston-based national organization that places issues of economic inequality squarely in the public eye. "We are known for our lively theater and educational training," said Chuck Collins, one of two co-directors of UFE.

UFE's first annual Economic Inequality Comedy Cabaret featured the "Corporate Soup Kitchen," with an aproned cook serving up hand-outs not terribly useful to a dejected homeless man. A CEO elbowed him aside and carted away platefuls of corporate subsidies (including \$160 billion a year in timber subsidies, foreign tax credits and other tax loopholes).

A similar point is comically made in another skit, "The Economic Insecurity Rat Race," which amplifies the real changes in income in the last 20 years. The wealthiest top 5 percent gallop to victory, the middle 20 percent run in place at the starting line and the poorest 20 percent actually run backward, reflecting a real decline in their income.

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Street theater is just one tactic that UFE uses to provoke serious debate on economic inequality issues, though humor is sprinkled liberally throughout UFE's legislative campaigns to eliminate subsidies for America's wealthiest corporations and individuals, what some call "Wealthfare" or "Corporate Welfare". In 1997, UFE launched the Wage Gap Campaign, a national effort to reduce the growing gap between the highest and lowest paid workers.

One component of the campaign is the Income Equity Act (HR 687). The legislation has already attracted 60 co-sponsors and would limit the ability of corporations to take tax deductions on paychecks that exceed 25 times the wages of a firm's lowest-paid workers.

Is such legislation necessary? Felice Yeskel, UFE's other co-director, points to the fact that in 1997, CEO earnings were 209 times the average workers' earnings, far in excess of the reasonable allowance for executive salaries that the U.S. tax code allows to qualify as tax deductible. Last year, a quick count of revenues lost through this loophole from just the top 365 firms cost U.S. taxpayers \$514 million.

A cornerstone of UFE's work is "Growing Divide" workshops. Last year, over 25,000 people participated in 700 training sessions for religious congregations, labor unions, business associations, schools and community organizations across the U.S. The format encourages honest, participatory conversations about

money and class, weaving in the perspectives, traditions and values of the sponsoring organization. The newly formed Episcopal Network for Economic Justice is working with UFE to design programs tailored for Episcopal congregations.

UFE public hearings on economic insecurity have also played a key role in furthering economics education, advocacy and political action. On Superbowl Sunday '97, 1,000 people packed Boston's Faneuil Hall to testify before six U.S. Congressional representatives from Massachusetts. Similar hearings have taken place across the country.

Looking to further magnify their message in the halls of power, UFE has recently spun off a project called Responsible Wealth. It is spearheaded by a group of business leaders and wealthy individuals (among the top 5 percent of income earners and asset holders) alarmed that "the growing economic divide is eroding our sense of community and shared responsibility and weakening the fabric of our society." On Tax Day 1998, the group is planning to publicly redirect the savings from the 1997 Tax Reform Act whose tax cuts were tilted toward the wealthy, to programs and priorities that restore fairness to the nation's tax code.

"Very little of what we're seeing in Congress and the media is an honest debate on welfare reform and how these changes feed growing inequality," Chuck Collins said, tapping a finger on UFE's study entitled "Executive Excess." "Until corporate welfare is put under the same microscope as some of these admittedly flawed welfare programs and dismantled, reforms to welfare will amount to no more than a cynical scapegoating of the poor."

Fighting poverty by weaving spiritual communities of hope

by Victor Kazanjian

This past December, as I sat waiting for the sun to rise over the Ganges River as it winds its way through the ancient city of Banaras (now Varanasi) in India, a phrase from Diana Eck's *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Beacon Press, 1993) became my constant prayer: "Hope is the heart leaning forward towards the horizon of dawn, ready for sunrise."

I had come to India as part of a delegation of activists and academics, led by Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Arun Gandhi and his wife Sunanda, to explore the contemporary use of Gandhian principles of grassroots organizing in addressing poverty in urban and rural communities. The Gandhis are founders of the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, located in Memphis, Tenn., an organization dedicated to the understanding and practice of nonviolence as a way of resolving personal and public conflicts.

I had also come to examine the possibility that religion and spirituality can be a resource rather than a barrier to the process of progressive social change. As a youth worker and community organizer in the South Bronx and Boston, I had become wide awake to the oppressive realities of economic injustice and the transformative power of grassroots community organizing as a strategy for progressive social change. In my current role as an administrator, teacher and coordinator of religious

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life at Wellesley College, I have seen religious pluralism and spirituality free a community from the oppressive bonds of religious exclusivism and move it in the direction of justice and peace.

External process, internal practice

One of the many great gifts that Mohandas K. Gandhi gave to the world was the insight that the desire for peace and justice must include both an external (political) process and an internal (spiritual) practice. "In Gandhi's mind, nonviolence was not simply a political tactic which

Marketplace/Share clothing and crafts collaborative now employs women from across the region. Their work is about political and personal transformation.

was supremely useful and efficacious in liberating his people from foreign rule," Thomas Merton wrote. "On the contrary, the spirit of nonviolence sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself." For Gandhi, the transformation of political systems was simply the outer reflection of the transformation of the human spirit within.

I found this transformative spirit alive and well in Dharvi, a vast impoverished area just outside of Mumbai/Bombay, which houses over a million people from every region of India. This was not my first experience with poverty, but the sheer magnitude of the poverty here was stagger-

ing. We were led through a maze of tiny alleyways to the central meeting place of the Marketplace/Share women's collective. Here we were greeted by the leaders of an amazing group of women who, despite their outcast status, had managed to found, through a massive grassroots organizing effort, a clothing and crafts collaborative which now employs women from across the region. This is far more than an economic development project, however. It is a kind of womb giving life to the community. Their work is about political and personal transformation. Dignity and development are linked in a program which provides as many tools for nurturing of the spirit as the production of material goods.

Hope amidst squalor

Throughout India it was in organizations such as this that we found the most vital aspect of the legacy of the Gandhian movement. Amidst squalor and physical ruin, we would discover communities of hope, mostly organized by women, created by weaving together political processes and spiritual practices.

At the Annapurna Mahila Mandel in New Bombay, a "family" of 80,000 illiterate and below-poverty-line women had formed an organization dedicated to overcoming socio-economic exploitation through organized grassroots efforts leading to economic independence, self-reliance, spiritual fortitude and self-respect. What started as a food preparation collaborative has become an organizing and training center for poor women under the leadership of freedom fighter and trade unionist Mrs. Prema Purao, who has developed a program that includes education around economic literacy, gender, health, child care and environmental issues.

At the Kasturba Savodaya Mandal, a community-based organizing project situated in a small rural village "Madhan" in the Amravati district of Maharashtra, we discovered a safe haven and justice center

dedicated to outcast girls and women still run by its mother/founder Taraben Mashruwala, who as one of Gandhi's close associates, created the center in 1946. Here health and social services are intermingled with economic development activities and environmental justice projects. Here Gandhi's dream of a community where all people—regardless of caste, regional background, or religion—could live in harmony, has been realized. Here Gandhi's vision for the empowerment of rural India lives on.

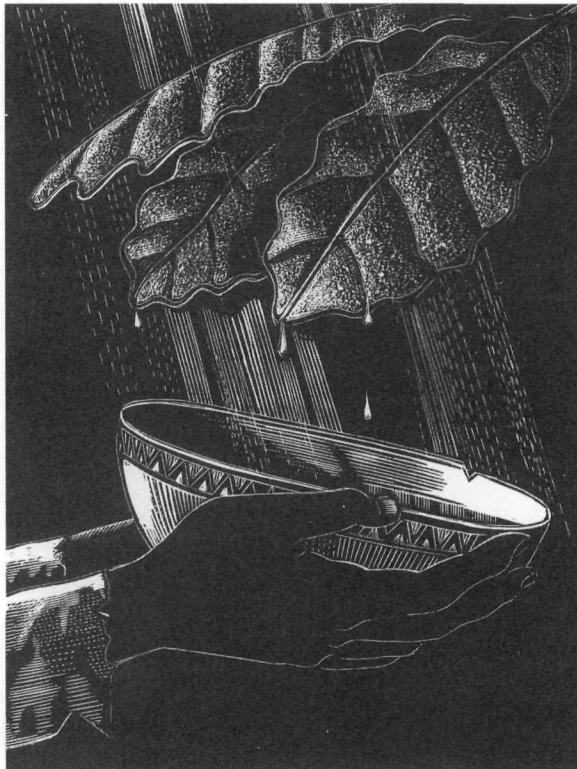
Women's strength

And, finally, at SEWA (the Self Employed Women's Association) in Ahmedabad we experienced the full flowering of Gandhi's vision of social liberation through economic independence and his belief in the inherent leadership and strength of women as the natural leaders of the nonviolence movement. Founded as a trade union in 1972 to mobilize women in the unorganized sector of the Indian economy, SEWA is now both an organization and a movement of more than 200,000 members of all religious and regional backgrounds working towards the full employment, self-reliance and empowerment of women.

In each of these places the movement towards a vision of justice and peace involves both inner and outer transformation and the cultivation of the seeds of dignity and self-respect, watered by love and compassion, bearing the fruit of liberation and filling participants and observers alike with hope. Political and spiritual liberation are seen as a part of one movement. This is the essence of the Gandhian philosophy of social transformation.

Back home, waiting for the sun to rise over Lake Waban in the suburban town of Wellesley, Mass., I continue praying that hope is the heart leaning forward towards

the horizon of dawn, ready for sunrise. This time, however, I repeat this prayer in defense against the despair that I see gripping a country sick from the toxic environment created by the excesses of a culture of materialism. Having seen hope in the eyes



Michael McCurdy

of those living amidst poverty in India, I now recognize despair in the eyes of those living amidst plenty in America.

Specter of despair

Cornel West writes in *Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America* (Beacon Press, 1997), "A specter of despair haunts late twentieth-century America. The quality of our lives and integrity of our souls are in jeopardy. Wealth, inequality and class polarization are escalating—with ugly consequences for the most vulnerable among us."

If we are to confront the despair and emptiness that lie just beneath the polished exterior of this country, we must be willing

to learn from those women and men engaged in Gandhian style grassroots organizing in India, and take on not simply the external processes of change but the internal practices of transformation as well.

There are stunning examples in the U.S. of community organizations which are organizing along the lines of the Gandhian collectives in India. One inspiring example is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Roxbury, Mass., which is documented in the film *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street* produced by Leah Mahan and Mark Lipman (distributed by New Day Films) and in the book *Streets of Hope: The Rise and Fall of an Urban Neighborhood* by Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar (South End Press, 1994). But organizing efforts in this country often fail to ground themselves in the practice of inner transformation in their concern for developing political strategies to bring about social change. We invest vast resources on political processes in this country and while occasionally some of this political energy has an impact on people living at or below the poverty line, these efforts too often fail to bring sustainable change. The result is the

deepening of despair. Religiously affiliated peace and justice movements, unfortunately, are not immune to this.

If religious communities emphasized more the teaching of spiritual practices that enable people to cultivate the peace within—and if grassroots organizations were more able to integrate these spiritual practices into their political organizing process—I think people would be better equipped for engaging politically in a fertile way.

The simple—and powerful—truth of Gandhi's message is that we must be the change you wish to see. When we connect external political process to inner spiritual practice, we can lean forward toward the horizon of dawn.

TV

Extinction or renaissance

"Many people are beginning to shift their attention from the quantity of material resources and goods they could possess or consume to the quality of their connections and relationships: relationships with their own inner and spiritual values, with each other, with their communities, with other cultures, and with the larger living system. Duane Elgin calls this a time of the "awakening Earth"; John Cobb, Jr., calls it "Earthism"; Paul Hawken refers to it as "the restorative Era"; and Paul Ray describes an emerging "integral culture." In this new worldview, wealth is measured by the quality of these fundamental relationships, and the world is viewed as more than a marketplace.

"We currently have two cultures in operation simultaneously. The modernist, materialist culture of economism is a powerful engine that dominates our Western societies. However, we are already seeing the emergence of a new, fledgling start-up of an integral culture.

"What a moment! As we approach the millennium, we seem poised between catastrophe and possibility; between empty and unsustainable consumerism and reconnection with our deepest values, with the natural world, and with each other. We are poised between extinction and renaissance."

— Lisa Friedman,
Timeline, 1-2/98

Media and resistance

"If the only means of communication in a society were interactive, network systems — face-to-face discussions, telephone, short-wave and CB radio, and computer networks — then an aggressor or

oppressor would have the greatest difficulty in controlling the population. Network communication technologies do not by themselves eliminate hierarchy and exploitation, but they do aid resistance. The telephone can be used to issue orders, but it is far too labour-intensive for controlling large populations. Also, the subordinate can always talk back.

"The mass media under dictatorships omit the perspective of the oppressed, who therefore must use other media — covert discussions, graffiti, leaflets and clandestine radio, as well as symbolic communication at funerals, concerts and other "legitimate" events — to share experiences. This also applies to some aspects of life in liberal democracies: for example, police treatment of stigmatized minorities, or oppression and alienation in working life, are seldom portrayed in the mass media. Thus, mass media are useful tools for dominators, whereas network media are useful for developing the voice of the weak."

— Brian Martin,
Media Development, 2/96

Immigrants boost economy

Eighteen percent of all new small businesses in the U.S. are started by immigrants, according to the Archdiocesan Immigration Legal Services in Detroit. Small businesses account for up to 80 percent of the new jobs available in the U.S. each year, the agency reports. They also cite research showing that 80 percent of U.S. economists believe that immigrants have a very favorable impact on economic growth, and that legal immigrants' Social Security deductions help keep the system afloat, since a large percentage are young and have years of work ahead of them.

If the price is right

Dollars and Sense reports that, according to a survey of some of the wealthiest one percent of U.S. households published in *USA Today*,

respondents would pay an average of \$640,000 for "a place in heaven." The survey of households of at least \$2.5 million net worth reported lower bids for eternal youth (\$259,000), great intellect (\$407,000) and true love (\$487,000).

Military bases for homeless

"Addressing Homelessness through Military Base Conversion" is a guide to converting military bases into housing for the homeless. Military bases already contain low-income housing and various other appropriate facilities that are free of cost for homeless assistance programs. Examples of successful homeless assistance programs that use military bases, legal regulations, and procedures for military base conversion are included. Available for \$20 from HomeBase, 870 Market St., #1228, San Francisco, CA 94102; (415)788-7961, Ext. 21.

The poetry of exploitation

The Progressive recently reported that the well-known political poet Martin Espada (a member of its Editorial Advisory Board) was approached by Nike's ad agency with an invitation to appear in the Nike Poetry Slam — a competition offering a prize of \$2,500 and the chance for winning poetry to be featured in Nike commercials celebrating "the poetry of competition and athletics." In rejecting the offer, Espada suggested that the agency "take the \$2,500 you now dangle before me and distribute that money equally among the laborers in an Asian sweatshop doing business with Nike."

Travelers' guide

A new edition of a guide to inexpensive accommodations at religious houses offers worldwide listings of religious communities of various denominations which welcome guests. *Overnight or Short Stay at Religious Houses Around the World* is available from Hugen Press, POB 2286, Bloomfield, NJ 07003 at \$19.95 postage paid.

short takes

Roundtable launches poverty fight

Religious leaders representing 37 denominations, church-based service organizations, advocacy groups, international relief and development groups and national coalitions have formed a "roundtable" designed to galvanize joint action in the fight against poverty. The group has been convened by Call To Renewal, an organization of "Christians for a new political vision."

At a meeting held last fall in Arlington, Va., the roundtable laid out an action agenda that includes plans for a national internet database focusing on successful church-based efforts around the country and aiming to assist churches who might want to get involved in offering similar programs. The national bodies and church organizations participating in the Roundtable are requesting to meet with the govern-

nors of all 50 states to facilitate the creation of new church-government-business partnerships, including implementation of the charitable choice provision of federal public assistance legislation, which allows states to finance programs run by religious-based groups. The roundtable will encourage new civic partnerships; community-based organizing; a living family wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit; and mobilizing youth.

The roundtable's widely diverse makeup ranges from the National Council of Churches to the Family Research Council, the National Association of Evangelicals to the U.S. Catholic Conference. Also participating are The Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, World Vision, Campaign for Human Development, the Center for Public Justice, March for Jesus, the

TenPoint Foundation, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Leadership Foundation and America's Promise. Plans are already underway for regional roundtables of equally diverse groups to focus on the needs of poor people in local communities and to begin strategizing and mobilizing resources at the local level.

"The cold war among religious groups over the poor is over," Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals told a press conference. The NAE supported the controversial welfare bill that passed Congress last year, and was signed by the President. Cizik added, "To support welfare reform and not be here is to be a hypocrite."

John Carr of the U.S. Catholic Conference said church workers should not stand with Democratic or Republican policy, but with moral principle. Referring to the budget debate, he said, "It's not a question of whether you call it a cut or a reduction in growth, it's that people are not living in dignity."

The roundtable first gathered a year ago, on the eve of the President's Summit for America's Future. From the outset, the struggle was to build common ground across a wide spectrum of outlooks and positions.

"I am very proud of our collective voice in this process," said Call to Renewal Convener Jim Wallis.

"We have worked hard to find the common ground. The ground rules for this group are that we stay committed to focusing on the issue of overcoming poverty, that we actively listen to one another and that we do not question each other's motivations — that has brought us a long distance in this discussion."

— from Call to Renewal;
<Call_to_Renewal@convene.com>.

BACK ISSUES WITH CONNECTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

The following back issues of The Witness contain articles which may relate directly to Welfare or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- Caesar, widows and orphans (4/93)
- Economic justice (5/94)
- Hospitals: quality, access and spirit (6/96)
- Immigration: the flight into America (12/97)
- In need of a labor movement (9/96)
- Raising kids with conscience (3/97)
- Unmasking the death penalty (9/97)

Other available back issues:

- Africa: Come, spirit, come (6/95)
- Allies in Judaism (10/97)
- Alternative ways of doing church (9/94)
- American Faces of Islam (5/96)
- Birthing in the face of the dragon (12/91)
- Body wisdom (5/95)
- The Christian Right (10/96)
- Church structures and leadership (5/97)
- Christians and animal rights (10/93)
- The communion of saints (11/93)

- Defying presumptions: gay and lesbian Christians (6/97)
- Dialogue (4/94)
- Disabilities (6/94)
- Economies of sin (3/95)
- Family reunions/family history (7/96)
- Fasting in Babylon (12/96)
- Glamour (11/94)
- Godly sex (5/93)
- Grieving rituals (3/97)
- Holy matrimony (12/95)
- In defense of creation (6/93)
- Is it ever okay to lie? (4/96)
- International youth in crisis (7-8/93)
- The Left (3/94)
- The New Party (11/95)
- Northern Ireland: winds of peace (11/97)
- Ordination: multi-cultural priesthood (5/92)
- Perspectives on Aging (1-2/93)
- Resisting sprawl (10-95)
- Witness in the world (gen'l conv. issue, 7-8/97)
- Women's spirituality (7/94)

To order a back issue, send a check for \$3 per issue ordered to The Witness, 7000 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210-2872. To charge your back issue to Visa or Mastercard, call (313) 841-1967,

Welfare reform and refugees

by Thomas Robb

Early in 1997 welfare reform was a hot topic among social service advocates in the U.S. The hard work of writing regulations and causing the new welfare machinery to begin to function had just begun. Now, the machines are operating, but many of the problems of the past welfare system continue and the new machinery is so new that many problems exist in simply defining who will receive benefits and what benefits will be provided.

Welfare reform has been especially ambiguous because it is to be administered by individual states with only very broad federal guidelines. As a result, programs are widely varied from state to state regarding requirements for eligibility and the nature and size of benefits.

Refugees, affected both by the legislation to reform welfare and by the new immigration reform law [see TW 12/97], are facing special problems. This discussion relates specifically to the dynamics facing Bosnian refugees who are in Illinois.

Refugees are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as those people who must leave their homeland to avoid death, torture, or imprisonment. In the case of the refugees who came from Bosnia, most had experienced expulsion from homes and towns, been in concentration camps or severely wounded. Under the current conditions in Bosnia, most have no option to return

to their homes as they are currently occupied by enemies.

A unique refugee community

The refugee community from Bosnia is unique, as it represents the largest number of people who came to the U.S. with significant disabilities and includes a large number of elderly refugees who are here without supporting families. In addition to the public assistance provided during the first few months of their stay, many have qualified for Supplemental Security Income due to their disabilities and their age.

Refugees grieving the loss of their families and their country are losing the social system which welcomed them when they arrived.

The Bosnian community began to arrive in the U.S. in 1993 and a very large group came during 1995 and 1996. As a result of political changes in Germany and other European countries and as a result of the reduction of hostilities in Bosnia, refugees who were housed in Germany are being sent back to Bosnia. Many of these people cannot return to their homes. The U.S. has agreed to receive them here. Currently, in Illinois alone, hundreds are arriving each month.

All refugees are offered access to public assistance for the first eight months of their residency. The assistance is intended to allow them to learn English and to find work. For many this plan works well. For single mothers and the severely traumatized, it is not sufficient. A family I know

who arrived in 1994, for example, comprised a brother and sister. His wounds were so severe that he continues to be under aggressive medical care. She came to care for him. Because they are brother and sister, and because of her age (under 63), she was dropped from assistance after the first eight months. He receives \$494.00 a month from SSI and about \$14 in food stamps. She cannot work as she must care for him. This total amount is their only income. One must wonder whether they have found refuge in this country.

Switch from AFDC to TANF not beneficial for the traumatized

Illinois is one of the more affirmative states for refugees and has designed one of the most humane systems for administering the new welfare program. Even in light of these positive statements, refugees are in great fear of the future. Families who have been on Aid to Families with Dependent Children are now on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. What had been an open program for families with dependent children is now limited to a few years for the lifetime of the parent. Recipients must make 20 job applications a month to remain eligible for benefits. If they are unsuccessful in finding work after two months, they will be placed in workfare or non-paying jobs which qualify them for their benefits.

Refugees who have come here grieving the loss of their families and their country are experiencing the loss of the social system which welcomed them when they arrived. For some this is an effective incentive to learn English faster and better and to seek employment faster. For others, it offers the spectre of leaving traumatized children or severely disabled spouses or siblings to fend for themselves while they work.

Another, more significant impact of the reforms is on the aged and disabled.

Thomas Robb is a member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Evanston, Ill., and is currently working with the Bosnian Refugee Center in Chicago. He has worked with welfare and health care delivery systems for the poor for over 25 years.

Prior to 1994, the U.S. did not permit aged or disabled people to enter as refugees without a sponsoring family member. Specifically due to the shelling of the market in Sarajevo, the U.S. relaxed its rules for Bosnians. A few thousand elderly and severely disabled people came after being driven from their family homes and spending months in refugee camps. When they arrived in 1994 and 1995, many qualified for SSI with food stamps. The new welfare reform law reduced their food stamps to about \$14 a month. (The immigration law had also established a time limit for benefits unless they became citizens. Initially, the limit was five years. Since no one can apply for citizenship until they are here for five years and since the application period takes between eight months and two years, this presented a major problem. However, the time limit has now been extended to seven years.)

Language obstacle

Then there is the question of citizenship. The Bosnian refugees are true refugees. They came here for safety and healing. These refugees did not select to come to America for the good and easy life so

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Demonstrators outside White House on day President Clinton signed 1996 welfare reform bill into law.

Jerome Friar/Impact Visuals

often described by anti-immigrant political groups. They came without legs, after being in concentration camps as horrible as those of World War II; they came from rape camps; and they came here when they would have preferred staying in Europe, but there was not place for them there.

This traumatized community has displayed considerable difficulty, as a rule, learning English. Their learning ability is further complicated by age and severity of disability. In Chicago, a large proportion of the population is receiving treatment for or living with significant post traumatic stress disorder. The aged and severely traumatized are not exempted from taking the citizenship test in English.

Without citizenship, elderly and severely disabled people, many of whom have seen their children and grandchildren killed, face certain destitution. The meager \$494 a month for an individual and \$650 a month for a couple they now receive will disappear. The \$14 a month in food stamps they now receive plays no

role as it is so small.

A new category of street people?

It is very significant that the U.S. opened its shores to the people from Bosnia. The politicians enjoyed showing their openness to the people of this horrible war. Now we face the prospect that, should these laws continue as written, we have developed a new category of street people — elderly and disabled Bosnians who could not learn English soon enough or well enough to become citizens in a country they never wanted to visit.

There is a need to reflect on this potential tragedy as members of faith communities. Most of the public agencies providing services to the needy are modeled on ones that had been established by religious institutions to help the destitute in the absence of public assistance. Perhaps in this time of waning public commitment to help those in need, it is once again time for the religious community to establish some new models for serving them, including those seeking refuge from war and oppression.

TW

The feminization of the clergy in America

by Alison Cheek

***Feminization of the Clergy in America*, Paula D. Nesbitt, Oxford University Press, 1997**

Like many of us, I have been privy to a considerable number of poignant and painful stories from women struggling to enter the ordination process in Christian churches and from ordained women striving to realize their full potential within the structures of their church organizations. Sometimes it is difficult to assess these stories, as well as my own, in order to discern how much of the difficulty is idiosyncratic and how much is the impact of a gender-biased system. Reading Paula Nesbitt's book, *Feminization of the Clergy in America*, enabled me to move out of the purely anecdotal to a structural analysis of employment opportunities and trends associated with the increased number of women joining the ranks of the clergy.

Feminization of the Clergy in America is a longitudinal study over six decades of male and female clergy employment opportunities. Using interviews and statistical data drawn from two disparate denominations — the Episcopal Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association — she traces career trajectories for men

and women in the two religious organizations. Her interest is in the impact of the influx of women into the ranks of the clergy in the 1970s and 1980s, asking the question of whether gender balance among those clergy with substantive power and influence is likely to be realized and whether this might lead to widespread change in both the ideology and social behavior of organized religion.

For women there is a dilemma. Many have no interest in working their way up the corporate church ladder. Others wish to follow the traditional career path and are blocked by lack of opportunity.

I have sat with this study for quite a while now, pondering the significance of its results and wondering why I find it such an important book. I think it is because of the breadth and depth and clarity of its analysis combined with the penetrating and visionary discussion of the issues underlying resistance to inclusion on an equal basis which is set forth in the final chapter. If this study were required reading for all aspirants to the ministry, women with liberationist theologies and a transformative agenda would enter the process with a very clear sense of what they are up against.

Predictable results

In terms of achieving gender balance in positions of power and influence, Nesbitt's results are all too predictable. "Women tend to hold disproportionately assistant, associate or interim appointments, to work

in smaller congregations with more limited budgets, to hold specialized positions less likely to lead to promotions, and for Episcopal priests, to work part-time regardless of marital or parental status. There is a greater tendency for women clergy to experience downward mobility compared to men." The Unitarian Universalist Association has been ordaining women for more than 100 years, yet there is a dearth of women ministers in senior level positions. Men have not been disadvantaged by the increasing numbers of women entering the clergy, but rather advantaged. Nesbitt examines in detail the processes which create this situation and hold it in place.

For women there is a dilemma. Many have no interest in working their way up the corporate church ladder. They have different values and may choose specialized positions, part-time work or a saner lifestyle, or may feel a calling to work with small and struggling congregations. Others wish to realize their full potential in following the traditional career path and are blocked by lack of opportunity. The net result is that the current power structure stays intact. "When the structure of gender inequality remains embedded and perpetuated within religious imagery, practices and discourse, men remain disproportionately empowered," Nesbitt writes.

Critical first five years

How is it that increasing numbers of women are being ordained, modeling more relational styles of leadership, and nothing changes apart from their labor being coopted into the prevailing patriarchal system? Nesbitt's statistics clearly show that the first five years of ministry are critical for the subsequent career trajectory. Sometimes diocesan affirmative action efforts help a woman to secure a first position, although she may be hired with a job title of lower status than that of a man in his first appointment. After the initial appointment there is seldom any further affirmative help into the critical second appointment. For



Alison Cheek was one of the first 11 women ordained as priests in the Episcopal church in Philadelphia in 1974, and was the first Director of Studies in Feminist Liberation Theologies at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. She is now associated with the Greenfire community in Maine.

young white males there is a certain "crown prince" mentoring which doesn't exist for females or for older second career males or men who do not belong to the dominant sector of society. Only a token number of women and minority men jump this hurdle. The rest are kept in place by a consciously inflated job market.

Nesbitt deals extensively with the development of multiple ordination tracks, gender-based job segregation and the growth of non-stipendiary ordained ministries, all leading to a two-tiered ordained ministry. This is examined in a chapter on backlash. While the ordination of Canon 9 priests in the Episcopal church, and permanent deacons trained in diocesan programs, has a socio-economic basis, it is also a means of social control. A deacon is under the direct control of her bishop. A permanent deacon remains in this relationship. The increase in the number of permanent deacons directly responsible to the bishop of the diocese can have a political impact.

Political impact of deacons

"By inflating the overall number of clergy who hold traditionalist perspectives, or who are not likely to challenge the authority, ideology or practices of their clergy leaders, pro-feminist clergy can be effectively outnumbered, outvoted and marginalized without a direct confrontation over affirmative action, inclusive language, or other gender-related concerns," Nesbitt points out. "Furthermore, the occupational conflation of women in the primary ordination track with those in the alternative tracks minimizes women's potential impact on the occupation and religious organization, and serves to set apart male ministers and priests from all others — preserving as much

as possible a male professional image at the core of the clergy occupation." Eighty-three percent of permanent deacons do not receive pay for their church work. Many have parish appointments while

seminary-trained women cannot find a first job.

There are women who are cardinal rectors, seminary deans and bishops. Such appointments have an ideological effect but are too few in number to represent a significant gender-related challenge to the male dominant authority structure. Nesbitt has a very interesting section on the pros and cons of tokenism.

Why is change so hard to bring about and what can be done to alter the current situation? These questions are examined in the final chapter. Included in it is a very significant examination of the construction of gender and its implications. As to what can bring about change, Nesbitt would say that women must confront head on men's sense of owning the organization. Women clergy need collectively to press issues as to why their labor and status is worth less than men's. She also looks clear-sightedly at the difficulties women face in finding time and energy to overcome differences and form coalitions. An interesting section considers post-feminist strategies which are situational and non-combative.

Nesbitt's analysis substantiates many of the findings of prior studies and is clear and sobering. Without transformation in the church, women remain either exploited or expendable. But she does not rule out radical change from within over a long period of history. Her visionary concluding chapter explores possible scenarios for the future of the church and her deconstructive analysis is matched by a listing of seven reconstructive possibilities.

The book is not a quick read, but it is rewarding in terms of conscientization and scholarship, and provocative in its analysis of

future possible trends in the church. It is worth sticking with the detailed sociological analysis to have realistic ground on which to stand for envisioning a transformed church.

TV

Women must confront head on men's sense of owning the organization.

Woman celebrates eucharist at Eau Claire cathedral

Over the protests of William Wantland, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eau Claire (Wis.) and one of the church's most vigorous opponents of women's ordination, Mary Caucutt celebrated the eucharist at Eau Claire's Christ Church Cathedral on Dec. 28. She is the first woman priest ever to celebrate the eucharist at the cathedral.

Caucutt, now vicar of an Episcopal congregation in Wyoming, was baptized at the cathedral and her grandparents are still members there. The cathedral's vestry and dean, H. Scott Kirby, say they invited Caucutt to preach and celebrate because of her family's connection with the congregation, not to make a political point.

Wantland asked that they reconsider the invitation, but acknowledged that there was no legal barrier to prevent Caucutt from celebrating. Following last summer's General Convention decision mandating implementation of the canons permitting women's ordination, the diocese's executive council had repealed diocesan prohibitions against women priests.

Caucutt received a warm welcome from the cathedral congregation, who applauded after Kirby introduced her as "Mother Mary Caucutt."

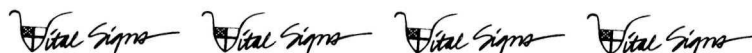
— ENS

A new PECUSA?

Perhaps in anticipation of just such events as the eucharistic celebration reported above, Eau Claire bishop William Wantland and several other bishops have incorporated as "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" (PECUSA), a name frequently used to refer to the Episcopal Church (which is officially incorporated under the name, "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society").

Wantland says he wanted to create a new institutional "umbrella for orthodox individuals, organizations and parishes" because the Episcopal Church has been progressively abandoning "the old Faith." He has refused to change the name of the organization.

— ENS



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It takes a nation

by Dale Susan Edmonds

***It Takes A Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty* by Rebecca M. Blank (New York and Princeton, N.J.: Russell Sage Foundation and Princeton University Press, 1997).**

Dense with facts and illustrative material, Rebecca Blank's *It Takes A Nation* is not the kind of book that one can "speed read." However, it is essential reading for anyone who is serious about poverty and its attendant issues.

This book was conceived and written during the time when the proposals for welfare reform were being debated on Capital Hill. Blank, a Northwestern University social scientist, targets it toward the audience of policy-makers, state and local, who are designing the programs which will directly affect the lives of real people. I would also commend this work to lobbying or neighborhood groups that are in a position to influence law-makers, and religious or community-based organizations that are in the business of attempting to bring about neighborhood change.

Blank's first concern is to identify and address the hosts of "myths" that surround the issue of poverty. Our public policy must be shaped by factual arguments which are supported by careful and well documented research; this book attempts to pull together and interpret that body of work.

Dale Susan Edmonds is a UCC pastor who recently served as co-minister of her denomination's Chicago Metropolitan Association. She is teaching a course on public issues at Chicago's Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education.

The context of the fight against poverty has changed radically. The author demonstrates that, while we could previously count on economic growth to bring about inherent benefit to those who are on the bottom of the ladder, this will no longer be the case. While employment has been bandied about as a certain cure, the author makes evident why "getting a job" provides no assurance of being able to make significant strides toward the doorway out of poverty.

On the other side, the federal government has been advanced as the central player in the war on poverty. While Blank asserts an essential role for the federal government, she recommends that this role be balanced and coordinated with state, local, private and non-profit initiatives.

The answer to the question of "how to solve the problem of poverty" has everything to do with what one first advances as the causes of poverty. Blank devotes major time and attention to this debate. One by one she lays out the major categories of "belief" and demonstrates with clarity of thought and well-researched analysis the limits of our assumptions.

Laid out in a largely "question and answer" format, the book examines the phenomenon of poverty from all angles: "Who is poor in America today?" "Why don't they just get jobs?" "The death of trickle-down economics" "What do antipoverty programs do?" "Who should help the poor?" "Where do we go from here?"

Some of the answers to these questions are surprising because program analyses and documented evaluations offer conclusions which differ consider-

ably from public perceptions. Among the findings discussed are:

- Poor people don't fit the stereotyped images that we are flooded with in the media;
- many poor people already work;
- antipoverty programs over the years have largely accomplished the goals that they set out to (contrary to popular belief, most were never intended to get people out of poverty, rather to reduce poverty's devastating effects);
- job programs are inherently more expensive to run (not less) than direct cash assistance programs;
- the dollars spent by the federal government on antipoverty efforts cannot be replaced by the combination of private charities and state spending.

The solutions to poverty are not impossible, but neither are they subject to quick fixes. They also cannot be solved cheaply. Blank enthusiastically shares with her readers examples of programs which have been very successful with varying target audiences in different parts of the country. Offered not as "cookie cutter" solutions, they are presented so that we can both be encouraged that real progress can be made, as well as admonished not to disregard the complexity and sophistication that will be required.

Creativity and long-term commitment will be demanded of religious, civic and business organizations in cooperation with all levels of government if we are to make serious inroads toward a new future for this nation's poor.

The first step might be studying this book.

TV

review

“Homelessness is relatively new,” says Will O’Brien, the Director of Education and Advocacy for Project H.O.M.E., a nine-year-old program serving chronically homeless people in Philadelphia. “We’ve always had some form of poverty, but there simply wasn’t anything like this 25 years ago. To the degree we forget that, we tend to accept it as just part of life in urban America.”

O’Brien is currently working with a committee to develop a “Blueprint to End Homelessness in Philadelphia.” Spurred by welfare reform and the growing tendency to blame poor people for their poverty, the committee has been looking at what it would take to get people off the city’s streets and into decent housing.

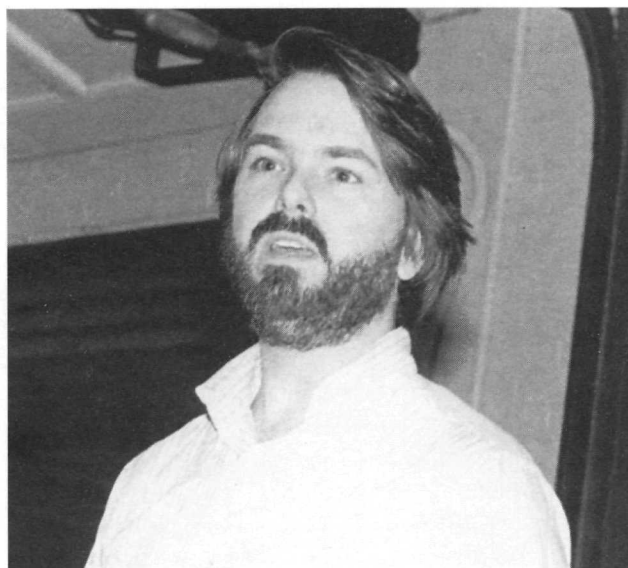
“We felt it was a critical time to not give up,” O’Brien says. “The idea was to engage people in the possibility that with the right commitment, we really can solve a great deal of homelessness.”

The work is frustrating, O’Brien says, not for lack of creative proposals, but for lack of resources to implement them. “Homelessness is an expensive problem. As a society, we have let this problem fester to the point where it would take enormous resources to solve it. And the political will isn’t there.”

But even more disturbing to O’Brien is his growing perception of homelessness as the tip of an unacknowledged iceberg.

“In our current social and economic landscape, market forces are rendering more and more people completely disposable.

*It’s not so much
the rich versus
the poor, but
what is God’s
will for human
community?*



Will O’Brien

Harvey Finkle

Restoring holy rhythms

by Marianne Arbogast

With globalization and technology and a much more vicious global capitalism, you see, at one level, the downsizing of middle management, but at the other level, people on the street. It’s the same phenomenon. The economy no longer needs all these people, and it doesn’t care what happens to them. It’s deeply sobering because I don’t think we are willing to name that reality, and until we can, we’re not even going to begin to get a handle on how to solve the level of poverty we have.”

O’Brien is well acquainted with both the complexity of the problems and with practical ways of addressing them. After joining the Project H.O.M.E. staff eight years ago, he helped it grow from an emergency shelter to a multi-faceted agency offering services ranging from street outreach to job opportunities in one of three micro-enterprises — the Back Home Cafe, Our Daily Threads Thrift Store and the Cornerstone Community

Book and Art Center. Two hundred and fifty housing units offer support for special needs like mental illness or addiction, and job readiness courses are available to residents and neighbors.

At the core of Project H.O.M.E. is “a spiritual conviction of the dignity of each person,” O’Brien says. “At the heart of the crisis of poverty is a value system in which some people are valuable because of their possessions, their money, their power; and people who are on the streets, who are broken or wounded, have no value.”

Faithfulness to this conviction is Project H.O.M.E.’s yardstick of success.

“We have had amazing stories of people you never thought would make any progress, who are now working full-time jobs and living on their own and doing great,” O’Brien says. “Residents often tell us that what works about Project H.O.M.E. is that we really treat people with dignity and we affirm people’s gifts.

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness* (<marianne@thewitness.org>).

"But others are so deeply wounded that what they are going to be able to achieve will always be somewhat limited, so we make room for that, and try to have a safe and good place for them to be. Potential funders always want to hear your success stories — and we have a lot of successes, but there are also many cases where we can't give them the statistics they need of people being mainstreamed. People who are poor and homeless often have deep, deep wounds. It may be profound personal trauma and alienation and abuse that comes out of a desperately poor family and community. And we're continuing to learn how deep and serious addiction is, as a medical problem, as a psychological problem and almost as a spiritual mystery."

O'Brien traces his own commitment to the needs of the homeless to his childhood in a family bruised by alcoholism. "It wreaked a lot of emotional havoc on the family, which is one of my connections to a lot of the people we work with, that I'm still in my own recovery. The experiences of an alcoholic family in some subtle way sensitized me to suffering, so that as I would step out of my normal world — say, volunteering at a soup kitchen in college — something about those encounters with suffering really pulled on me. I went from these personal encounters to the questions that inevitably lead you to social analysis and a broader concern about justice. And I think the work with Project H.O.M.E. has been very healing for me, personally."

After studying literature in college and graduate school (O'Brien lists Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoyevsky among his favorite theologians), he moved to Philadelphia to work for *The Other Side* magazine. Now married to Dee Dee Risher of *The Other Side*, O'Brien divides his time between Project H.O.M.E. and the Alternative Seminary, a project which gathers people in justice ministries

for theological and biblical reflection. Under its auspices, O'Brien has led interfaith study groups on the Jubilee tradition in scripture with Philadelphia rabbi and author Arthur Waskow.

"A traditional understanding of justice from a faith perspective has been that we must care for the poor and stop oppressing the poor — which is true," he says. "But as we've gone deeper into the Jubilee tradition, it's a much more wholistic and awesome vision. It's not so

The community cannot begin to achieve the genuine justice and shalom God desires until it roots itself in quiet and rest. Poor people are among the victims of this hyper-productive culture, so one of the things we can do to try to restore sanity is to slow down.

much the rich versus the poor, but what is God's will for human community? How do we live in harmony with the world? How do we balance work and rest? How do we ensure that resources are available for all of us in the community?"

Jubilee values challenge the roots of our social crisis, O'Brien believes. "The roots of our market culture are hyper-productivity and radical individualism. Everything is commodity. Nothing ever rests. You're always using up resources, you're always working hard, you're always getting ahead. It's destructive on our psyches, it's destructive on the people in the economy who are left behind, and it's enormously destructive on creation.

"There's a deep sense in which the Jubilee vision answers all of that. It says

work, rest, share, live in holy rhythms, worship, play, enjoy the world that God gave you. Let the land rest periodically, redistribute resources periodically, cancel debt periodically. All of those would be profoundly healing if we figured out ways to practice them."

O'Brien points out that a favorite biblical text of social activists — the exhortation to fast by doing works of justice in Isaiah 58 — is immediately followed by a text on observing the sabbath.

"It's part of the same prophetic oracle, and it's integral to that prophetic vision," O'Brien says. "Yes, you pour yourself out to feed those who are hungry, but you also practice sabbath. And, in fact, the community cannot begin to achieve the genuine justice and *shalom* that God desires until it roots itself in contemplation and quiet and rest. Poor people are among the victims of this hyper-productive culture, so one of the things we can do to try to restore sanity is to slow down."

Though he admits to struggling with "a lot of guilt and drivenness," O'Brien is working to integrate sabbath practices into his life.

"I'm trying to learn to revere sabbath — to say that at least one day a week I'm really not going to do any work. It's amazing how hard that is, but it's also amazing how important that is. I try to build into my weekly life good quality time with my wife and with my friends. To get together to play music, to cook good meals. I try to take time in nature, to make sure that I'm praying enough and just having quiet time during the day.

"A lot of it is releasing myself from a sense that solving homelessness and poverty is up to me. Whether I work an 8-hour day or a 23-hour day is not going to make a heck of a lot of difference. But if I can practice a healthy lifestyle in a community, that might draw more people into the values I care about; then maybe they'll pick up some of the slack." **TW**

Witness praise

HOPE YOU CAN HELP ME REGAIN some modicum of my Christianity — feel like a Buddhist.

Ara Nelle Robinson
Wester Springs, IL

I HAVE RECEIVED *The Witness* since my subscription to *Christianity & Crisis* was converted. You have a much needed publication, not only for Episcopalians, but for us Presbyterians (and others) as well.

Gordon H. Ringenberg
Clayton, CA

I'VE BEEN A SUBSCRIBER since I was in seminary, and always appreciate your insight. Love the artwork too!

Eliza Linley
Berkeley, CA

THE WITNESS IS MY FAVORITE magazine. There is always something special to me — and many issues more than one thing that speaks to me. Keep up the good work and I'll keep reading. Fair enough?

Marie J. Lennan
Springfield, PA

I GREATLY VALUE your magazine. I learn something valuable and inspiring

from every issue. I'd especially like to see future issues on cooperative living and intentional community, and on public education.

Cindy Maxey
Cleveland, OH

I WAS SO ENCOURAGED by your issue on homosexuality. I'm a nurse (RN) and Health Educator.

Louise Smith
Holt, MI

YOUR RANGE OF ISSUES and depth of coverage is outstanding among religious periodicals.

Alban Richey
Plainfield VT

Fundraising appeal

WISH I COULD SEND MORE, but trust that this will help. I've been a *Witness* subscriber since the 1960s and have always found the articles stimulating and right on target!

Douglas M. Spence
Ashland OR

Abusive shepherds

A CERTAIN GROUP OF EPISCOPAL bishops want to bar certain people from activity in the Episcopal Church. As one who believes in

inclusion, I'm reminded of what Sam Goldwyn was given credit for saying, "I'm including you out." Don't let anyone include you out.

*Certain shepherds seem quite abusive
The way they wish to be exclusive.
Truly, who gave them the nod
To change the loving plans of God?*

Robert C. Grieve
Canon City, CO

Sex and debt

THE STATEMENT BY THE DALLAS conference of Anglican bishops and archbishops linking debt to sex is right [TW 12/97]. The continued lack of acceptance of homosexuals in the life of the church alienates many Christians and seekers who would otherwise support the church. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the depths of human sexuality by the hierarchy of the church drive many more people from the ranks of the Christian community.

We need more discussion, information and understanding of human sexuality, especially homosexuality, not more efforts to create outcasts in the body of Christ.

Robert Warren Cromeey
San Francisco, CA

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