The Changing American Mosaic: An Introduction

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An Introduction

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This article, in addition to introducing the special journal issue on the changing American mosaic, provides a synthesis of issues associated with changing demographic trends as the number of people of color increase between 2000–2050. Welfare reform, structural inequality, and the convergence of race, class and gender issues are discussed in a civil rights context. A brief summary of the other journal articles by Glen Loury; Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn; Ruth Sidel; Mary Krist, Douglas Gurak, Likwang Chen; Doris Wilkinson and Margaret Gibelman is also provided.

> "While they're standing in the welfare lines
> Crying at the doorsteps of those armies of salvation
> Wasting time in the unemployment lines
> Sitting around waiting for a promotion.
>
> "Poor people gonna rise up
> And get their share
> Poor people gonna rise up
> And take what's theirs"
> —*Talkin' Bout A Revolution*
> Tracy Chapman

At the beginning of the decade of the nineties, the phrase "the changing American mosaic" was frequently used to characterize the anticipated demographic changes in large urban centers between the years 2000–2050. Population projections for the new millennium have shown dramatic shifts in the number of people of color such that people of color will out number the white majority in some communities. Much of this shift is associated

with immigrants who are people of color and adds new dimensions to early civil rights efforts to increase opportunities for African Americans and curtail job and other forms of institutional and individual discrimination against them. Such demographic shifts not only increase ethnic and racial diversity, but the labor force changes, concerns arise about the political economy and access to opportunities for all people of color and tensions arise over the preservation of the identity of American society. (See Reimers, *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and The Turn Against Immigration*.) More conservative attitudes about governmental responsibility and the use of public funds for low income families and the poor accompany these shifts. Large urban communities have the highest welfare population and have had the highest number of immigrants on welfare. Public assistance and essential services for immigrants add still another dimension to governmental responsibility and public assistance myths. Many of the myths about the use of public benefits have historically been negative stereotypes about poor, welfare dependent black female heads of households. (See Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last*, *1998*). However, In addition to targeting black mothers with children born out of wedlock, welfare reform actually resulted in anti-immigrant provisions as well. Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton (1999) have described the conservative narrative manifested in anti-immigrant campaigns which included, for example, negative stereotypes of Latino families as welfare dependent with dysfunctional family lives. (pp. 265–66). The same authors describe these political narratives as "racialized", and blaming "poor single and immigrant mothers for social ills like drug addiction, poverty, crime, and gang violence." (p. 264). Such political factors perpetuate social inequality in our society and changes in the American mosaic raise critical concerns about social justice and the quality of life for the growing number of people of color, many of whom are poor. These projected population changes are not accompanied by changes in structural inequality in American society.

ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL
INEQUALITY AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

The Hamiltons (1997) in *The Dual Agenda* remind us that the civil rights movement which began more than three decades ago

was not only concerned about racial justice, but the economic needs of poor families as well. Socioeconomic concerns of the civil rights movement became obscured by the necessary thrust and emphasis on racial discrimination. In their discussion on welfare reform and full employment in the 1970's, the Hamiltons note that "a full employment policy continued to represent an ideal welfare reform plan for civil rights organizations because it would be universal and provide jobs with no public assistance stigma attached to them." (p. 175). By the same token, the Hamiltons note that civil rights organizations were adamantly opposed to mandatory welfare-to-work legislative reform, the implications of such legislation being that welfare recipients did not want to work. The distinction here is made between a full employment policy and welfare reform, jobs in the "regular work force" versus mandatory workfare programs. The 1963 March on Washington was a march for both jobs and freedom—a march for federal legislation to promote economic expansion, federal programs to provide jobs for all the unemployed, federal fair employment and labor standards to curtail job discrimination and the establishment of a national minimum wage. (p. 126). Economic opportunity and civil rights were not viewed dichotomously. The civil rights movement has always been concerned about the adequate provision of social programs, access to health care, job opportunities and benefits.

The so-called New Federalism has created uneven patterns in the economic well-being of low income families needing public benefits. Under current welfare reform measures, there has been a decrease in federal responsibility for social programs, devolution to the states, and an emphasis on welfare-to-work. While southern states and states in the West, in general, tend to have greater poverty, the population shifts noted earlier have primarily created an increase in the immigrant population in large northeastern cities. Many of these immigrants are people of color, are poor, and in need of social programs, jobs, and other opportunities. It should be noted that the success of welfare-to-work programs also vary from state to state. And while reports released by state and federal governments document a reduction in the welfare rolls and a growing number of employed former welfare recipients, the employment of welfare recipients is still of grave concern.

The United Way of America, for example, has documented that lack of transportation and other pragmatic problems associated with employment have caused difficulties for welfare recipients trying to comply with mandatory work requirements. However, initiatives which encourage welfare-ro-work partnerships with the private sector have reported some success. Such private initiatives, while not universally available, do improve economic well-being of the low income individuals who participate and those programs are worthy of note.

Even prior to the 1996 welfare reform act, companies that developed business agenda around social needs, had successful welfare-to-work partnerships which included training programs for welfare recipients with employment commitments attached. The Marriot and United Airlines are examples of businesses that developed partnerships with welfare-to-work programs. Bank Boston's inner-city development initiatives and the public education initiatives of Bell Atlantic and IBM are others. In her article, *From Spare Change to Real Change: The Social Sector as Beta Site for Business Innovation,* Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1999) described various corporate social innovations such as the Pathways to Independence program developed by Marriot in 1991. "The program, which currently runs in 13 U.S. cities, hones the job skills, life skills, and work habits of welfare recipients, and Marriot guarantees participants a job offer when they complete the program." (p. 125). Kanter further notes that the Pathways program has also "created new jobs in poor communities." (p. 126).

While these pre-welfare reform business social innovations described by Kanter have produced successful outcomes for participants, as noted earlier, these programs were limited in scope. Similar attempts to transition welfare recipients into the workforce under welfare reform, have generated horror stories of welfare recipients doing monotonous, demeaning state created work assignments and still other welfare recipients who have been unable to locate decent jobs, leaving ill-equipped extended family members to pick up the pieces. Many of the work assignments available to welfare recipients under the new welfare-to-work programs are not the civil rights movement advocated "regular work force" described by the Hamiltons in the *Dual Agenda.*

Economic well-being for welfare recipients is not the only source of tension. Our society continues to struggle with un-resolved tensions associated with equality of opportunity for African Americans and other racial minorities, the redistribution of wealth and power, and the increased emphasis on maintain-ing cultural identity and a host of other interpersonal responses associated with presumed disadvantage and stereotypes. The de-mographic shifts noted earlier create even more complex issues in relation to equality of opportunity, access to resources and cross-cultural understanding. My colleague, Glen Loury (1997) made a salient point about economic inequality which is germane to this discussion and the content of this special issue. Loury states:

> People are members of nuclear and extended families; they are part of communities rooted in geographic localities. Because opportunity is conveyed along the synapses of these social networks, inherited social position is a major determinant of an individual's ultimate economic success. (Loury, p. 27)

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Racial barriers still persist in American society which impede full access to education, employment, and other opportunities for the poor, women and people of color.. For example, the removal of some federal benefits from immigrants caused, in many com-munities, a lack of access to health care, nutrition, and job training as well as other resources which promote well-being. Similarly, African Americans still face employment barriers and other forms of institutional discrimination. While the 'colored' and 'white' signs of *de jure* segregation have been dismantled in the south for over 30 years, *de facto* segregation continues to persist in both the south and the north. The racial and social division which was once legislated is now more insidious, unwritten and informal, or exists in the form of public policy which has a negative impact on minorities. The need for reparation strategies for the historically racially disadvantaged African American population and special policies to provide access to opportunities for other people of color, the poor, and women persists.

Those of us who grew up in the south in the late forties and early fifties have the historic and anecdotal memory of segre-gation customs. In addition to the "colored" and "white" water

fountains and other posted apartheid signs, certain jobs such as those in janitorial services were considered black people's jobs and other jobs such as white collar jobs were those for white people. Shopping in more expensive clothing stores was off limits, black Americans were seated and served last in public accommodations, if at all. In some instances, black customers were served at the back door of eating establishments. Just as I was about to graduate from college in North Carolina, civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations was passed. A restaurant, now closed, across the street from the university I attended, began to seat black customers. Under *de jure* segregation customs, black customers ordering a hamburger from this restaurant, for example, were given a hamburger wrapped in waxed paper in a paper bag at the back door. Initially, the white community was still adjusting to the new civil rights legislation and while black customers no longer ordered from the back door, white waitresses would still serve the seated black customers a hamburger on a piece of waxed paper instead of a plate. This example is but one of the many ways black Americans were publicly humiliated. Black Americans have often been expected to "do more for less" or to work harder and be more overloaded than others to achieve similar outcomes. Often watched and overly criticized, the aspirations of many black Americans were stifled. The current conservative political narrative described by Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton is reminiscent of the stereotypes and negative projections from the old days when stereotypes that Black people were unclean, smelled bad and had over-active sex drives were used to thwart desegregation attempts.

Socially defined rules as well as negative and debilitating stereotypes not only dominate the conservative political narrative about welfare recipients, but persist at many other levels in our society and negatively impact employment, educational opportunities and other means of improving the quality of one's life. Feagin (1998) in describing the "codefinition" of racism and class subordination indicates that "characteristics of the racial sphere are also determined by the economic sphere." That is, racism, and sexism as well, are influenced by economically defined roles in the larger society. In keeping with black historical memory, Feagin states that "higher paying jobs have for more than three centuries

been assumed to be the prerogative of white people and lower paying jobs the position of blacks." (p. 327). Job competition and stereotypes, working in tandem, influence employment outcomes and success on the job.

People of color, women, and welfare recipients are not infrequently the object of negative projections in the general society and in the workforce. For example, an article by Kilborn (1995) related to glass ceiling phenomenon in labor force participation described the stereotypes white business men held about minorities and women which created presumptive attitudes causing these groups to be excluded from higher paying corporate positions. Perceptions about women involved "not being tough enough" and tied down to one location. Black men were viewed as "undisciplined and always late"; and Hispanic men seen as "heavy drinkers and drug users who don't want to work". As might be expected, Asians were perceived as "more equipped for technical than people-oriented work". Describing the negative influence of stereotypes on creating a diverse work force, Kilborn states: "Some white men are frightened and angry that people unlike them are vying for their jobs. But for many other men, higher level executives, simple inertia sustains the stereotypes and keeps top management white and male". (p. 329). As our society becomes more diverse grappling with others "seeing the wrong thing" becomes tantamount. Similar stereotypes and presumptions can cause hypercritical attitudes and behaviors as well as cultural and gender insensitive remarks and interactions which may impede the success of minorities and women in the work force at all job levels.

Addressing lack of cultural awareness and understanding in the workforce, a recent article in the *Health Care Review (Southern New England)*. "Over the Rainbow: The Many Hues of Today's Corporate Culture" notes that:

> Stereotypical perceptions of culturally different individuals often push minority employees into less visible and secondary positions within organizations, ultimately limiting the inclusionary process and the potential of those employees. . . . People will not contribute if they are not recognized and respected for who they are. (Louis and Maloof, 1999, p. 10).

Negative perceptions and projections can potentially have serious consequences for families who are trying to comply with welfare reform regulations and become integrated into the regular workforce. For example, very similar to Louis and Maloof's (1999) comments about integrating culturally different employees into the corporate culture workforce, working styles, attitudes and values among the TANF job trainees who are high school drop-outs are very different from the traditional job trainee in programs such as those of the Urban League designed for high school graduates.

Presumptions about others based on stereotypes also influence outcomes for the poor, women and people of color who try to advance themselves through the educational system. This is particularly true for African Americans and exists within the middle class.. In a recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Claude Steele (1999) described the impact of stereotypes on the success of black students and calls our attention to the fact that the disadvantages of race are not overcome by higher socioeconomic status. Steele and his colleagues used the term "stereotyped threatened" or stereotyped vulnerability" to describe the threat of being perceived based on a negative stereotype or the fear of behaving in such a way as to confirm that stereotype. Those who are stereotyped threatened also have a low degree of racial trust associated with social attitudes and stereotypes about race. Subtle cues can cause performance difficulties in test situations, taxing the mental abilities of black students who have the ability to perform better. Steele also suggests that this situation requires special policy and practices by educational institutions. As we are reminded in the article, similar analogies apply to women in advanced math and the poor in certain academic situations. These issues are intrinsically woven with the current affirmative action debate and educational admissions policies. The need for social remedies for the historically disadvantaged groups persists.

While the major thrust in this issue of the journal is on social justice for lower socioeconomic groups, we need to acknowledge that other social injustices which involve racial disadvantage are quite prevalent in our society. For example, Feagin (1998) describes in his research on antiblack discrimination in public places, both contested and uncontested forms of discrimination

against black college professors, black physicians and other mid-
dle class black adults and their children. These transgressions
were documented in public facilities as well as in educational
and work place sites. (pp. 267–294). Often, such transgressions,
in addition to involving racial prejudice and intolerance, are
based on societal stereotypes about all black people. Presumed
disadvantage because of race or about affirmative action benefits
feed into these stereotypes. Cultural insensitivity and lack of
understanding in the changing American mosaic is exacerbated
by this persistent and continued discrimination against African
Americans so long after the civil rights movement of the sixties.
Stereotypes and myths persist at all levels of our society, but to
paraphrase Sidel (1999), "the convergence of American stereo-
types about race, class, and gender" causes the poor, especially
the welfare recipient, to be denied access to American wealth.
(p. 15).

CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE/ETHNICITY INTERSECTING.

Tracy Chapman's *Talkin' Bout A Revolution* characterizes the
welfare recipient's lack of "regular work force " opportunities and
lack of access to the American wealth. A disproportionate per-
centage of welfare recipients are people of color, both native born
and immigrant. Most people of color would like to be gainfully
employed. However, with limited education and discrimination,
access to decent employment has been limited. Danziger, et. al. in
their research on welfare reform and mental health call attention
to the many barriers which influence the employability of welfare
recipients. They state:

> Many single mothers have problems with physical health, depres-
> sion, substance dependence, domestic violence , and child care re-
> sponsibilities that make steady work difficult. When these problems
> are combined with lack of education, work experience, and job skills,
> the cumulative effect can be overwhelming. Women, especially mi-
> nority women, also often face discrimination and harassment in the
> workplace. (Danziger, et. al., p. 4).

Jobs available to welfare recipients are often menial forms of
employment and menial employment tends to pay less than
public assistance. These low wages are further complicated by

inadequate child care and lack of access to health care. (It is helpful here to acknowledge that a large number of working poor are also without insurance coverage and adequate child care.).

Current mandatory welfare-to-work programs are political strategies designed to reduce the welfare roles and not address full employment policies for the underclass. Devolution of the welfare state with the passage of the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996 focuses on employment for welfare recipients, but not necessarily employment in the regular work force. While the civil rights movement endorsed greater job opportunities for the poor or underclass, many scholars and public policy analyst view current welfare-to-work programs as punitive, a form of racial politics and primarily designed to attack black female headed households. Based on stereotyped assumptions about welfare recipients not wanting to work, welfare reform limits the time a recipient can remain on welfare and removes the safety net for those who are unable to comply with new regulations. Persistent poverty remains a concern and while some welfare recipients have obtained employment, researchers have stated that the poorest families have been driven deeper into poverty and the others are only slightly better off. (See Boston Globe article reporting on reactions from the Liberal-Leaning Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, August 22, 1999).

As expected, 1997 poverty statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the percentage of poverty is still greatest among those families of Hispanic origin and among black families. Among female headed households with no husband present, black women and women of Hispanic origin have the highest percentage of poverty. The poverty rate among Asian and Pacific Islander families, while lower than other minority groups, is still higher that the rate for white families. While these numbers were down in 1997 compared to 1996 and 1989, the percentage of families in poverty remains high, 39.8% for black female householder families and 47.6% for female householder families of Hispanic origin. It should also be noted that poverty rates among foreign born and non-citizens is disproportionately higher than the native population living in poverty. While there has been improvement relative to persistent poverty among black Americans, in 1993 black individuals remained in poverty significantly longer than

other racial groups. In 1998, the number of African Americans living in poverty declined, and the Census Bureau reported an overall increase in income. However, both the African American and Latino poverty rates are still disproportionately high. (Census Bureau, 1999)

The safety net for immigrants varies from state to state and differential state policies create concerns about immigrant economic well-being since immigrants tend to be concentrated in certain geographic locations. Under welfare reform immigrants initially lost entitlement to case assistance, food stamps, health benefits and other public programs. While some of these benefits have been restored, food stamps are only available to children, the elderly and the disabled and new immigrants have to wait five years to qualify for federal assistance.. (Zimmerman and Tumlin, 1999). Advocacy groups continue to work for policy changes which have negatively impacted immigrants. Zimmerman and Tumlin note that the response to immigrants under the new federalism raises a number of policy questions. They state:

> . . . since the federal government determines how many and which immigrants are admitted to the United States, does the federal government have a special obligation to provide for them? What are the implications of this new devolution given that most of the immigrant population is concentrated in only a handful of states? Is the federal goal of promoting self-sufficiency achieved by devolving eligibility decisions to the states (Zimmerman and Tumlin, 1999, p. 3)?

The new federalism has created a decline in the welfare rolls among immigrants as well as citizens. Much of this decline in large urban centers is associated with the immigrant population and it is difficult to fully understand the significance of this decline on family economic and emotional well-being for immigrants as well as citizens. For example, Fix and Passel (1999) of the Urban Research Institute document dramatic declines in approved applications in some California counties when eligibility has remained unchanged. In this regard, Fix states, "It appears that these chilling effects originate in confusion and fear among immigrants and lack of understanding on the part of providers over who is eligible for benefits." (p. 1). This study further noted

that low-income immigrant households were less likely to receive welfare benefits than low-income citizen or native households. These research findings have serious implications for low-income as well as other immigrant households where individuals are being cared for in extended family arrangements. (See Krist, Gurak, Chen, This Journal). In such arrangements, family networks may be stretched and overburdened.

In May, 1999, the Boston Globe reported on data released by the federal General Accounting Office. This media data paints a very healthy public picture of the social outcomes of welfare reform with 67 to 87 percent of former recipients having been employed at some point after leaving welfare. However, again, issues are raised not only about whether these former welfare recipients are or were in the "regular work force", but issues are raised about the safety net and social consequences for families. The periodic reports in the New York Times on family household well-being are good cases in point. In February, 1999 the New York Times described the burdened placed on families as the welfare rolls shrink. (p. 20). Examples of life for those who left welfare included grandmothers with meager resources in "skip-generation" households raising their grandchildren in unsupported kinship care arrangements, young welfare recipients unable to retain or locate private jobs and unable to qualify for welfare, others caring for substance abusing relatives and exposure to highly conflictual household arrangements. These were just a few examples of troubled households as families, most of them female headed households, struggle for economic and social well-being. These struggles for economic and social well-being exist while the media gives reports of many unspent welfare dollars. (New York Times, 1999, p. 1)

This special issue of the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* is intended to help us understand the current nature of structural inequality, and the relationship between socioeconomic conditions citizenship, class, gender and race. The social construction of minority status and its relationship to public policy formulation is also addressed. We have emphasized economic well-being and social justice for people of color.

The first article by noted economist, *Glen Loury*, a comparative analysis of census and other statistical data, provides insight into

the social and economic well-being of the black and white popula-
tions. Trends in the changing nature of the historic disadvantage
of African Americans are presented over time. While the number
of single parent households is disheartening, Loury's analysis
points out the increase in income and educational attainment
among African Americans during the past 25 years.

Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn give an overview of the
current welfare reform legislation and its consequences. Their
essay includes a historical synthesis of welfare provisions from
1935–1996 and describes the gradual dismantling of the welfare
system since the Reagan administration. Conservative assump-
tions undergirding welfare reform, consequences of the legisla-
tive provisions for individuals and families, inadequacies of
welfare reform and a more progressive solution to welfare are
discussed.

Ruth Sidel, author of *Keeping Women and Children Last* (1998),
has developed a polemic on the impact of welfare reform on
women and children. She calls our attention to the role of political
conservatism on poor, single mothers and describes how race,
class and gender stereotypes converge to exclude poor women
from access to American resources..

The article by *Mary Kritz, Douglas Gurak, and Likwang Chen* is a
quantitative analysis of the household composition of elderly im-
migrants using two samples of the 1990 U.S. Census. Comparative
data is provided on living arrangements as well as demographic
and socioeconomic characteristics. The cross cultural implications
of their findings show that living arrangements of elderly immi-
grants from developing countries are significantly influenced by
economic resources and family social support is prevalent. Policy
implications for elderly immigrants living in extended family
households are discussed as well as English language fluency,
and other implications associated with labor force participation
and immigrant status.

People of color have increasingly become concerned with
preservation of group identity and differentiation from other
groups. *Doris Wilkerson's* evaluation of the social construction of
the word minority is quite timely for the changing American
mosaic. Professor Wilkerson notes that our use of the term mi-
nority does not promote understanding of the cultural and racial

diversity in American society. She challenges social scientists and practitioners to rethink the conceptualization, use and relevance of the term minority which is "nonscientific and devoid of conceptual clarity and empirical validity." (p. 115, *This Journal*).

In his social ethics essay, "Who Cares About Racial Inequality", *Professor Glen Loury* develops a moral argument in support of using race as one of a number of other criteria of excellence to take into account in admissions and hiring procedures. He suggests a form of "developmental" affirmative action to maintain diversity in educational settings and the workplace.

Margaret Gibelman's article is a synthesis of longstanding issues associated with affirmative action. A social justice perspective is presented and emphasizes is placed on the mission and values of the social welfare community. She proposes reframed affirmative action strategies which focus more on the economically disadvantaged.

These authors provide thought provoking perspectives on social inequality, and insight into the social construction of gender, race, and poverty in America as well. Social scientists and practioners alike are challenged to rethink the social construction of minority status.

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