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Minority Report: What Has Happened To Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, And Other Minorities In The Eighties, edited by Leslie W. Dunbar

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Journal

National Black Law Journal, 10(1)

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Publication Date

1987

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Minority Report: What Has Happened To Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, And Other Minorities In The Eighties. Edited By Leslie W. Dunbar. New York: Pantheon Books. 1984. Pp. xvii, 221. \$8.95

Minority Report is a compilation of seven essays written by various authors. This book is not a historical review of the experiences of Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and other minorities, but rather an assessment of the current status of minorities. It concentrates on the realistic opportunities afforded racial minorities in today's American society. The first three essays focus on the extent of minority participation in political, economic, and educational systems. The essays which follow discuss some of the most destructive and persistent problems facing contemporary American society: urban poverty; rural poverty and the nexus between crime and the administration of criminal law. The book ends with a look toward the future and offers some possible solutions to the problems examined.

The first essay is written by Charles V. Hamilton and is entitled *Political Access, Minority Participation and the New Normalcy*. The focus of the essay is on the opportunities for, and limitations on, political participation of racial minorities beyond the act of periodically voting for candidates. The author begins by noting that there has been an American preference for minimal government that predates the current conservative mood. Although there have been some liberal reforms throughout American history, especially during times of economic crisis, the ethic of minimal government has basically remained intact. It is against this backdrop that today's racial minorities must work.

Hamilton compares present Black and Hispanic politicization with that of other ethnic groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Earlier ethnic groups arrived in America at a time of great industrial expansion and high demand for unskilled labor. These groups were mobilized into political machines, and votes were exchanged for favors. A mutually beneficial relationship was established, and ethnic groups were politicized in positive ways that led them to respect "politics." In contrast, Blacks and Hispanics have been alienated from the political system and politicized in a negative way. Much of their time and energy has been spent merely attempting to establish their claim to political citizenship. Although substantial gains have been made as far as voting and minority political representation are concerned, these gains are threatened by voting power dilution tactics such as: at-large elections, multi-member districts, and annexation.

Hamilton concludes that the needs of the newly politicized minorities are primarily economic; and vigorous governmental intervention in the economy is therefore necessary to satisfy those needs.

The second essay is entitled *Access to Economic Opportunity: Lessons Since Brown*, and written by William C. Taylor. Taylor suggests in his essay that all Supreme Court decisions and policies, since 1954, regarding race, are in essence applications of that year's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.¹

The essay begins by noting that the post-*Brown* era has brought genuine access to opportunity to large numbers of Black people. This civil rights

1. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

revolution was accentuated by affirmative action policies aimed at increasing minority participation in higher education and employment, and "Great Society" programs designed to upgrade the educational and job skills of the poor, especially minorities. These policies and programs have suffered the most under the Reagan Administration.

Although a significant segment of the Black population has made progress in the post-*Brown* era, a greater number find their situation unchanged or even worsened. Taylor believes that the reason for this is that policies focused on the amelioration of poverty are usually ineffective if they do not recognize the combined effects of racism and deprivation. Taylor offers solutions to the problem. He suggests that rather than investing in piecemeal workfare programs and short-term government efforts to help disadvantaged people acquire skills inadequate to serve present or future needs, there should be a social contract between the federal government, business, unions, and public school systems. Under this agreement, the business community would establish closer relationships with public school systems, point out their manpower needs, help to shape the educational curriculum to meet those needs, and motivate young people to fulfill those needs.

Understandably, Taylor also believes that policies and programs designed to provide access to opportunity for the poor require a larger share of the nation's wealth to be used to meet public needs. Finally, Taylor recommends an integration policy which would permit minorities to escape racial isolation before they have become affluent.

Affirmative Action, by Herman Schwartz, is the third essay. Schwartz begins by attacking the Reagan Administration and its assault on affirmative action, civil rights, and social programs. He states further, that since 1964, every administration has contributed in some way to exorcise the existence and effects of racism and sexism in our society. The Reagan Administration has broken with this tradition. In addition, it is unfathomable that any administration would actually believe that high unemployment, poverty, and infant mortality rates can actually be solved without some sort of affirmative action. However, the Reagan Administration asserts that it believes that a race- and gender-neutral society is possible against a background of segregation, racism, and sexism.

Schwartz then offers an eloquent defense of affirmative action and its undeniable successes. He acknowledges the fact that affirmative action has not always been completely effective, but he asserts that the positive aspects and the potential for even greater success outweigh any of its flaws.

The author concludes by suggesting that the sudden demand for color neutrality by the Reagan Administration is based upon a malicious agenda to prevent minorities from ever becoming truly equal.

The Urban Underclass is the title of the fourth essay, and it is written by William Julius Wilson. The author defines the urban underclass as a heterogeneous grouping of inner-city families and individuals who are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system. Included in this definition are persons who lack the training and skills to be gainfully employed, and who therefore either experience long-term unemployment or have dropped out of the labor force altogether.

The urban underclass has been plagued with the persistent problems of

joblessness and the related problems of crime, illegitimate births, single-parent homes, and welfare dependency. Thus far, these problems have been resistant to the usual policies and programs designed to combat them. Wilson argues that the usual policies cannot and will not work to alleviate the problems of the urban underclass. He reasons that these programs and policies focus on racism as the problem when the real problems are the shifting base of the American economy, from goods-manufacturing to service-producing industries, and changes in the urban minority age structure which result in population changes in the central city. As a result, the urban underclass has not benefited from race-specific policy programs such as affirmative action.

According to Wilson, the problems of the urban underclass require public policies that benefit all the poor, not just the minority poor. These policies will need to generate full employment, create effective welfare reform, and develop sustained and balanced urban economic growth.

Wilson ends the essay with the ominous assessment that unless there is a change in policy focus, there is little hope for the urban underclass.

The fifth essay is entitled, *Equal Protection, Unequal Justice*, by Diana R. Gordon. The basic theme of the essay is that minorities have been unable to receive even-handed justice in the United States.

Gordon states that there are certain contradictions in America which produce a tension between aspirations to equal protection and the reality of unequal justice. While the democratic principles of America purport that justice is an even-handed dispenser of protection and punishment, equal in process and effect; we live in a society with a tendency for official social control policies and mechanisms that reflect the underlying inequities of our society.

In great historical detail, the author traces the origins of the tension, its current patterns and possible future resolutions. Gordon suggests that there is a difference between equal protection and equal justice, and although we seem to have a dispassionate criminal justice process, the outcomes still reflect and reinforce inequalities in the larger society.

The author concludes that as long as we limit our standards of justice to the ideal of equal protection under the law, we have probably reached the limits of possible progress. She argues that a truly fair and effective system of police, courts, and correctional facilities depends on a kind of social commitment that must primarily be realized outside the administration of justice.

Land and National Resources is the title of the sixth essay, written by Vine DeLoria, Jr. This essay examines the plight of rural minorities who formerly owned and worked the land, but are now being rapidly displaced as large corporations purchase their land.

The author examines the rural roots of the nation's principal racial minorities—Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Indians, and Asians. They all share a common history which may be summarized in this way: all began their American experience as agrarian workers in the service of others; technology reduced the need for labor, and the land has become valuable for nonagricultural reasons; all were displaced by political and economic forces and were transformed from rural to urban poor.

The racial minorities in rural areas share a legacy of poverty and deprivation. This situation has resulted in a rising number of single-parent households, individuals on welfare or other subsistence programs, a rapidly

declining land base, and a lack of vocational and employment skills that would enable members to succeed in other settings. According to the author, these problems are resistant to traditional assistance programs because of institutional and cultural barriers. Traditional assistance programs assume that all people respond to the same motivations or embrace similar values, but rural groups have long been isolated from the values and institutions of mainstream America.

DeLoria suggests that changes in law and the administration of programs, in a way that is responsive to the special needs of their community, would do much to relieve the problems of rural minorities.

The final essay is entitled, *Government For All The People*, by Leslie W. Dunbar. Dunbar is successful in distilling the themes of all the essays into one theme: that the primary minority problem facing American government and society today is economic deprivation. He suggests that the problems of racial minorities can best be solved by the traditional American means of vesting in individuals the rights necessary to fulfill their needs and to provide them equality of opportunity. Dunbar correctly believes that in the future the United States will be forced to share its wealth not only with its own poor, but also with the impoverished of the world.

This book is a comprehensive, well-written report on the status of minorities in the eighties. It is an important contribution to Black studies literature. Lawyers, current event enthusiasts, students, scholars, and historians, as well as the general public, will enjoy this book. As expected there is some overlap in the essays and the reader must adjust to seven different writing styles, but these distractions are minor. This writer highly recommends *Minority Report*.

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