

Hope for the Inner City, "The Inner City and the Inner Man"
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Most of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has been a history of replacing what works with what sounded good."

— Thomas Sowell

Summary: American inner cities have been plagued with a set of problems that seem intractable. As we study black reality, a study integrally connected to inner city life, we can see how utopian and structuralist explanations have been preferred and how they consistently fail to connect with a correct vision of man. There is a need to analyze these problems from a perspective built on Christian personalism, the entrepreneurial vocation, and limited government.

Victimization. The evil of victimization is nefariously connected to the structural explanation of oppression in the black community. If poverty and discrimination are the structural evils of a capitalist system, and integral to what Western society is, then we are all victims; or at least most of us are. All explanations of present situations and all interpretations of history are viewed through the prism of grievances leading us to a victim mentality.

Interventionism and Black Reality. One of the most fundamental assumptions underpinning the treatment of social justice in America since the late 1920s is that the state is preeminent in assuring the common good. In effect, the boundless field of collective action moves in the direction of collapsing the whole of social welfare into the affairs of the state. In my many conversations with black leaders in local communities such assumption seems self-evident; a must that ought to be accepted as the only possible alternative. The creation of a compassionate and moral society without the protagonism of the state is a task that seems farfetched to many.

Determinism vs. Freedom. The modern black liberal outlook is based on resentment, hopelessness, and the negation of reality. The reality of the opening and expansion of real possibilities for blacks is constantly denied or, at least, minimized. America is portrayed as unrepentant and racism as ever-transforming and never-receding. Portrayed as in eternal Diaspora, blacks have lost their memory of a mythical 'Mother Africa'¹ and are still wondering in the desert as strangers in America. Their true self, their 'black soul', is said to have been forgotten, as it lies concealed on an African past erased by white lies. The present self, as Randall Robinson tells us, is conceived only as an 'embattled, beleaguered, damaged self.'² This notion has a negative impact on young blacks trying to advance in life. Confronted with the perception of impotence, hopelessness, and alienation in a land perceived as foreign they surrender their freedom as moral agents.

¹ Dr. McWhorter tells us: "Let's face it: calls to find our identities upon Mother Africa are asking us to pretend to feel living kinship with people who speak languages we do not know, who neither move, dance, cook, sing, nor view the world the way we do. We are asked to adopt a "culture" that never existed: the mono-cultural conception of "Africa" is a post-colonial construction, essentializing the peoples of enormous continent home to over 1,000 languages, with even Swahili spoken in only eight of the more than 50 African nations. Afrocentrists here fall prey to the American tendency to see Africa as a continent of indistinguishable "black people," but the Africans who sold one another into slavery were certainly under no illusion that "black" overrode cultural differences." In John H. McWhorter, "Toward a Usable Black History," *City Journal* (New York) (Summer 2001; vol. 11, No. 3).

² Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Plume Books, 2001) p. 13.

Individuality vs. Collective Identity. In ideological victimization, there is a complete surrender to deterministic explanations of black reality. Social structures are blamed for the individual's situation in life, viewed from the collective. Collectivist racialism views a radical separation of mind and body, a separation between the physical body and consciousness. The determinism of race aligns well with such mind or consciousness/body dualism. It is possible, and indeed believed by the black liberal elites, for a person of African descent to have the physical traits and family history of an African American but lack 'black consciousness.' As true self is consciousness, one indeed becomes a non-person by lacking a true "black" one. Rescuing our individuality is the most pressing and daunting task in black America.

The Black Family. Faced with the daunting reality of bondage, an African experience of marginality, and a brutal society, blacks held the best they could to institutions such as the family and the church as their tools for survival. We have seen however great changes in that important institution. The condescension of scholars always ready to give us a pass by devising ever changing externalist excuses for bad behavior infantilizes blacks. That we have close to seventy percent of children being born to single mothers is not an example of the adaptive capacity of blacks in view of marginalization. It is instead a shame that needs to be challenged.

What to do. We will explore alternatives toward a positive racial universe and advancement away from the clutches of race consciousness.

Recommended Reading:

Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character; A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990); *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990)

Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001)

Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005); *Race & Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); *A Conflict of Visions* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001)

Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration* (New York: Basic Books, 1997)

Stephan & Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black & White* (New York: Touchstone, 1997)

John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Perennial, 2000)

Opposing Views:

Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basics, 1992)

Joe Feagin & Hernán Vera, *White Racism: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993)

Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black & White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (N Y: Scribner's, 1992)