Acton University 2023

**Hope for the Inner City**

Ismael Hernandez, President of the Freedom & Virtue Institute

*Most of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has been a history of replacing what worked with what sounded good.”*

 ⎯ Thomas Sowell

**Summary:** American inner cities have been plagued by a set of problems that seem intractable. As we study inner city life we are often confronted with the same questions: What is poverty? How can we attend it? Are these the right questions to ask regarding the condition of poverty? We will explore these questions with both an honest and realistic position and a hopeful outlook. We must analyze the problems that plague the inner city from a perspective built on Christian personalism, the entrepreneurial vocation, and simple solutions. What we will discuss is aimed at providing a practical approach to the integration of these vital factors.

**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 racist capitalist system, and integral to what Western society is, then we are all victims--or at least the vast majority of us are. All explanations of present situations and all interpretations of history are liable to be seen through the prism of grievances which lead to an identity of victimhood. We must replace victimization with a vision centered on the primacy of the individual, the possibility of human flourishing, and the entrepreneurial vocation.

**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, I have discerned that there exist an entrenched belief that this idea—that the state must be the provider—is self-evident and is viewed as the only possibility. The creation of a compassionate and moral society without the protagonism of the state is a task that seems far-fetched to many.

**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. Rescuing our individuality is the most pressing and daunting task in black America.

**The 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 those important institutions. The condescension of scholars always ready to give us a pass by devising ever changing external excuses for bad behavior infantilizes blacks. That blacks 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 horrible shame that must 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:

**Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert**, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009)

**David Blankenhorn**, *Fatherless America* (NY: Harper, 1995)

**Tom Nelson**, *The Economics of Brotherly Love* (Illinois: IVP Books2017)

**Peter Greer**, *The Spiritual Danger of Doing Good* (Minnesota: Bethany, 2013)

**Robert Lupton**, *Toxic Charity* (NY: Harper, 2012)

**Marvin Olasky**, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (California: Regnery Publishing, 1994)