

Black Generational Poverty:

Reconnecting the Black Church and Black Community to Create Behavioral Transformations

A Theological Analysis by Darryl Elow and Nikita McCalister

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Section I. Case study: Newspaper Article - *Children Having Children*

Copyright 1989 Globe Newspaper Company
The Boston Globe
May 14, 1989, Sunday, City Edition

SECTION: Special Section; pg. 18

LENGTH: 1000 words

HEADLINE: *Children of Poverty / Living in the Shadows: Thirteen million American children live in poverty today. Three times as many as a decade ago. Who are they? How do they live? If this is our present, what is our future?*

ARTICLE TITLE: *Children Having Children.*

BYLINE: By Irene Sege, Globe Staff

DATELINE: Newark, New Jersey

BODY:

Victoria Franklin and her sister Tihinna are pushing their newborn sons in brand new strollers. They leave the dim, graffiti-stained lobby of their apartment building and walk across a concrete plaza where half dozen cherry trees are in bloom. They pass men in sweatsuits who linger in the next doorway between drug deals. They cross vacant lots so big they look like fields of litter and weeds and broken glass.

A minister peers into the strollers. "Are those real babies," he asks, "or are those baby dolls?"

Vickie, 14, is a freshman at Science High School, which requires students to pass an entrance examination. She used to say she would never get pregnant before she finished college, that she wouldn't be like her sister Mary who had a baby at 15.

She is third of Patricia Franklin's five daughters. Tihinna - everyone calls her Kisha is 18, Mary 17, Chastity 12, and Sah-Frann 5. Mary's daughter Janelly is 2 ½. Vickie's son, Pierre, and Kisha's son, Brian, were both born in March.

"Well," Vickie says, "when I first found out I was kind of sad and happy at the same time. Sad because I wouldn't be able to play with friends. Happy because I was having a baby."

That was January, when she was eight months pregnant. A few days earlier she began to suspect she was expecting, so when a school nurse asked if she was pregnant she said she thought so. "My mother was mad," Vickie says, "because I was always her pride and joy. When I brung A's and B's home she would show it off. When she found out I was pregnant, she cried."

Like one of every 10 residents of Newark, Vickie lives in public housing. She lives in Stella Wright Homes, in a 12-story brick high-rise where, like the Franklins, half the families collect welfare and 70 percent are headed by women.

Last year, Stella Wright had more drugs activity, more aggravated assaults and more robberies than any other public housing development in the city. There is cocaine here and crack, and now police are seeing heroin, too. Vickie's sister, Chastity, once witnessed a shooting from their apartment window.

"The only time I like to go out," Vickie says, "is if my mother takes us to the store or the library or downtown. I just like to stay in the house and stuff and look out the window."

"I don't feel too comfortable outside. I don't know why. Maybe it's the people that be out there and stuff. People who fight. Sell drugs. Boys that try and come up and talk with you and you don't even know who they are."

One moment, Vickie has the grace of a woman, the next the gawkiness of a girl. She'll hold Pierre on her shoulder, her cheek next to his, saying nothing. She'll change his diapers in moves so quick and expert it's easy to forget she's new at this.

She also chatters her words almost too fast to understand. The kids at her old middle school, she says, just care about new clothes. She and Chastity threw hamburgers at each other last night. They always goof around. She used to fight with her sisters all the time, but now her sisters are her best friends.

Vickie likes books. She has read "Little Women" so many times she keeps it, torn and coverless, in a plastic baggie.

She also likes to watch television. The family has three TVs.

Vickie's favorite shows are "The Crosby Show," "A Different World," "Dynasty," and "Dallas." Everybody on those shows has more money than the Franklins. They don't live four generations and 10 people in a three-bedroom project apartment. They don't pull out the living couch at night and sleep with their sister, the way Vickie does with Kisha.

"Sometimes," Vickie says, "I be dreaming that's me on TV, and my mother will win the lottery and we can get out of here."

Vickie's mother, Patty, is 36, and she never married. She had her first child when she was 17. Now she works as an aide in a daycare center and collects welfare. She studies word processing at night. She leads a Girl Scout troop.

Her own mother had her at 12, and Patty's cousin, Maggie Franklin, adopted her. Maggie, 82 and arthritic, lives with Patty. She helped Patty with her children just as Patty helps her own daughters now.

Every time something important needs to be discussed, Patty, a round, ebullient woman, calls a family meeting. They all sit at the round table or plop on Patty's bed and talk about chores and school and the facts of life. Patty asks if anyone's having sex. Mary lied and said no when she was pregnant. So did Vickie.

"Well, I was mad at all three of them," Patty says. "But I was really mad at Vickie. That was my genius right there. She was going to go to college and stuff."

Vickie knew all about birth control from her mother, but when she had sex with the boy upstairs, they didn't always use a condom. He got kicked out of Stella Wright when he was caught stealing, and now he's in the South. Patty used to warn Vickie that he was no good, but Vickie didn't listen.

Vickie still talks about college. She'll attend Rutgers in Newark, she says, instead of going out-of-town. She's going back to high school right after spring break.

She loves school. She enjoys taking tests, even though her grades have fallen since she started at Science High. Her social studies teacher couldn't believe she was pregnant.

She really likes French. That's how she picked the name Pierre. She and her mother were thumbing through her French book and they found that name. When she grows up, Vickie says, she'd like to live in Paris. Chastity is in the kitchen, making a bologna sandwich after school. She and Vickie used to talk all the time about the future. She'd say she wants to work at Prudential Insurance just like Aunt Cynthia. Vickie would say she wanted to be a teacher. They'd each say they weren't having any babies for a long time.

Then Vickie got pregnant.

"I felt like sad and mad." Chastity says. "Because she said she wasn't going to get pregnant until she was old enough. Everybody said I was next. I said no, it's going to be you."

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Section II: Introduction and Description of Project

After reading the article: *Children having Children*, it became apparent that these children would be raised under inadequate economic circumstances, thereby increasing the number of children living in poverty. The number of children living in poverty continues to escalate. As in the case of Victoria Franklin (child from article), the majority of the children are born into generational poverty. These children are recipients of welfare or some other form of public policy assistance. This project aims to explore the religious implications of chronic poverty (also called generational poverty) among black people.

When considering the plight of the poor, one must ask like Howard Thurman, "What does our religion say to them? ... "the search for an answer to this question is perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life."¹ This project topic acknowledges the complexities raised in the previous question as well as the difficulty inherent to the topic itself, because poverty is the result of many complicated and interdependent disciplines. Further, we do not pretend to know how to solve the issue of poverty. Rather we hope to propose that a behavioral transformation can occur when social isolation is overcome. Therefore, the goal is to show how economic, social, and psychological aspects of poverty lead to social isolation and identify how the Black Church might address the needs of those in extreme poverty.

It is important to note that poverty stretches beyond any particular color line; however, the focus for this project is how poverty affects the black population, and this for the following reasons.

- 1.) Blacks in poverty are more "isolated from jobs and from employed neighborhoods" than other racial groups such as Mexicans or Caucasian.²
- 2.) Racism and discrimination in America have contributed to highly concentrated areas of black poverty. Thus, it is important for blacks to understand how American culture has shaped their current positions in society as evident by Naim Akbar's statement:

"The information about how Black people came to be in a state that we find ourselves is an important story to be told so that future generations will understand that it was not genetic deficiency and/or Divine decree which created the privilege of a few and the poverty of many."³

- 3.) The social and economic structure of communities affect and shape, culture and ethos of the people living in the environment.
- 4.) Based on the success of the Black Church, we feel this entity would be the best institution to lessen social isolation and implement a plan of behavioral transformation.

Section III: Historical Background and Description of Welfare System

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the 1920's, America was in the midst of a booming economy where businesses flourished and the stock market soared. However, on October 29, 1929, the stock market collapsed and so did the U.S. economy. This resulted in the Great Depression, in which millions of people became unemployed, hence, proving to be America's most difficult economic period. In response to this economic devastation, in 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Social Security Act that established a national welfare system for the first time in American history.⁴ (Attached picture of Roosevelt taken from <http://www.theinternetparty.org/commentary>, 11/12/04).



The number of families who were receiving assistance had more than doubled between the years 1940 to 1960. President John F. Kennedy responded to the growing poverty issue "by expanding the range of social services, such as day care and job training. He intended to move people from welfare to work and prevent them from needing to go on welfare in the first place."⁵ Unfortunately, President Kennedy and many other legislators, economists, and sociologists have proposed public policy changes, but have not been able to eliminate poverty. (Attached picture of Kennedy taken from http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/modern/jb_modern_kennedy_1_e.html, 11/12/04).

Likewise, former President William Clinton's 1996 Welfare Reform law intended to move welfare recipients from welfare to work failed to eradicate the issue of poverty too. Although, Welfare Reform was designed to prevent generations of families from depending on government assistance, it still has major weaknesses. For example, those welfare recipients who move off welfare and secure employment have merely shifted to a new classification called the working poor (making minimum wages). Consequently, these individuals remain in a state of poverty due to the high cost of living, poor education attainment, etc. This is especially true because many of these recipients do not have the necessary skills to maintain work, which forces them back on welfare. So, how do we break the cycle of poverty? (Attached picture of Clinton taken from <http://www.tfhrc.gov/pubrds/winter96/p96w29.htm>, 11/12/04).



DESCRIPTION OF WELFARE SYSTEM

We have selected the book, *And the Poor Get Welfare*, by Warren R. Copeland to describe the welfare system. This book analyzes the debated ethical issues surrounding welfare policy over the last quarter century. When reviewing welfare policy one must ask fundamental questions like who is responsible for the poor? What causes poverty and can it be eliminated?

As indicated in the introduction, it is apparent that there is no clear-cut answer to any of these questions. However, Copeland identifies four factors that lead to poverty: 1.) the economy, 2.) the types of jobs the economy needs performed, 3.) the division of society both physically and economically, and 4.) public policy. The book also presents perspectives by Charles Murray, Lisbeth Schorr, Lawrence Mead, and Frances Fox Piven that address poverty. These perspectives are briefly highlighted below to illustrate the variety of ways to approach this topic. First, Charles Murray states that individuals are the result of their choices. He strongly believes in a market economy, which provides people with incentives and disincentives. He believes in equality of opportunity not of outcomes. He views the government as an obstacle to the free market approach. For example, he believes that people should make their own way in life without the government's help and depends on their own self-interest as a motivation. He believes that these programs help to "explain the increasing rate of joblessness, crime, out-of wedlock births, female-headed families, and welfare dependency, especially among the ghetto class."⁶ Hence, Murray sees "poverty as personal failure."⁷

Similar to Murray, Lawrence Mead considered an authoritarian, believes that the welfare policy should force people to accept the value of work and family if they wish to receive public assistance. According to Mead's view he "does not trust individuals to make the right choices and wants government to guide or to force at least some citizen to do what is right."⁸ Mead offers five social obligations for adults: 1.) working if one is able, 2.) supporting one's family as much as possible, 3.) speaking and writing English, 4.) learning enough to get a job, 5.) and following the law.⁹ He criticizes those recipients of welfare because it allows for dependency instead of self-sufficiency. In sum, he feels that there is little hope for change.

Conversely, Lisbeth Schorr takes an American liberalism approach to welfare reform. She maintains the individuals are shaped decisively by their place in society. Thus, she feels the "government has a responsibility to develop people into their potential and help people make better choices."¹⁰ She suggests outreach support programs that aid individuals whom have fallen on hard times to be able body citizens. Therefore, the community should have a personal stake in making sure everyone gets the help they need. Schorr's hope lies in social service programs that provide the poor with the tools they need to succeed and build their self-esteem.

Lastly, Frances Fox Piven feels that America must change its capitalist system for the betterment of the society. She believes that a community whether good or bad shapes an individual's life. She states, "the poor are just as valuable as anyone else but are victims of an unjust society."¹¹ Thus, she is convinced that poverty is the "failure of the economic, political, and social system, not the fault of the poor."¹² Consequently, society "is what it is", so the poor should strive to get as much as they can from the system.

It is interesting that the male scholars' (Mead and Murray) attitudes about poverty represents the traditional white patriarchal perspective. Their views convey that the poor are their own enemy because they chose not to work hard and be self-sufficient. These two have neglected to see that the racial discrimination of their privileged class has hindered the opportunity for the people of color. This disposition criticizes people such as the Franklins for being poor, yet it does not provide them with the proper tools to be successful.

In contrast, the two female scholars (Schorr and Piven) appear to be more sensitive to the inherent human dignity of the poor. They acknowledge that the cultural climate of bigotry shapes the behavior pattern of poor people. Schorr believes that it takes an entire community to meet the needs of the less fortunate. In addition, she believes social programs help to build self-esteem and to provide the tools needed to succeed. Thereby, encouraging young people like Vickie and her sister to continue to discuss their future goals and equipping them with tools to pursue their dreams. However, Piven suggestion that the poor should milk the welfare system sends the wrong message, because this would only perpetuate chronic poverty. Vickie needs skills that could release her from the welfare system and allow her to be a productive citizen. But, if she continues to be educationally handicapped, institutionally victimized, and socially disconnected, she would never reach her fully potential.

Thus, poverty and welfare challenge the meaning of our own lives because it is a "moral and religious issue."¹³ There is no doubt that a person's view of the world shapes his/her moral, ethical, theological beliefs. Therefore, the way one understands and responds to poverty has spiritual implications for the church. As stated in the introduction of this project, we attempt to interpret why generational poverty exists from a theological perspective. In order to accomplish this task, we will examine some economic, social, and psychological aspects of poverty.

Section IV: The Economical, Social, and Psychological Aspects of Black Poverty

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES:

William Julius Wilson's research suggests that over 60 percent of the people in poverty are ensnared in poverty cycles that will last eight or more years.¹⁴ Even worse, for those families headed by women the duration of the poverty spell increased to twelve years. Expectedly, the article mentioned the

same type of stager statistics for female-headed households living in the Stella Wright. The result is that more than one generation is dependent on welfare and living in poverty (see article). Moreover, Wilson states, "once the culture comes into existence it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on the children."¹⁵ Obviously, the socially isolated tend to develop a different set of values based on their life experiences and living conditions.

Perhaps the pathology exhibited by Vickie and other is related to class structure and racial inequity. It is clear that persons who come from impoverished areas have different social skills and behaviors. However, most of those "behaviors are largely due to segregation, limited opportunities, and external obstacles against advancement - which were determined by different historical circumstances."¹⁶ In other words, one must attempt to account for the effects of racial discrimination and prejudice. But, how do you calculate the long-term negative effects of racial injustice in the United States? What are other social problems created by impoverished areas in the one of the riches countries in the world?

One problem with areas of extreme poverty is that they are areas populated with neither middle-class nor stable working class families. Essentially these areas are socially isolated communities. This trend is different from the ghetto populations of the 1940-1950's. Today the heavy concentrated areas of disadvantaged blacks are alienated from other heterogeneous population of American occupational employed.¹⁷ Wilson states, "neighborhoods that offer few legitimate employment opportunities, inadequate job information networks, and poor schools lead to the disappearance of work."¹⁸ Therefore, the isolation of poor individuals diminishes their exposure to acceptable mainstream standards.¹⁹

Another major problem is the educational system for those who live in poverty. Education is a determining factor in the distribution of wealth and employment. Yet, the public school system has inadequately educated those in impoverished circumstances. Inner city schools do not have the adequate resources such as books, technology, teachers, and other tools that allow its students to effectively compete in a capitalistic society. For example, large portions of students who graduate from public high schools cannot even read or write. Formal education is a key to economic success, yet poor people are disadvantaged by educational structure that is intended to help them. Therefore, the education affects a person's ability to obtain and sustain work.

Deficiencies in the education of public schools have led to Black flight from the inner cities. Minorities, who are able, move to the suburbs to acquire better education in hopes of increasing their employment opportunities. The disinherited are deprived of middle- and lower-class blacks that provide essential social and cultural resources to the community.²⁰ This state of isolation includes separation from religious practices and life. Therefore, we argue that social and economic factors contribute to the psychological framework that creates a socially isolated

class of Black people. The following is an examination of some psychological barriers for Blacks.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

America's culture of racism plays a critical role in the psyche of Blacks. On one hand, America is supposed to be the land of the "free" with "liberty and justice for all". On the other hand, America does not provide justice to all citizens, only a selected few. Historically, American culture has promoted models such as the Inferiority and Deprivation/Deficiency models. These models have weakened the self-esteem of the black community and strengthened the esteem of whites.

The Inferiority Models date back to 1799 when a professor Charles White insinuated that blacks were deformed animals with a small brain and a tad more intelligent than an ape. This model focused on the theory of genetics and heredity. It suggests that blacks have inherited this inferiority through DNA. Whereas, the Deprivation/Deficiency Model emerged around the late 1950's or early 60's.

[It] "suggested blacks are somehow deficient with respect to intelligence, perception skills, cognitive styles, family structures, and etc. Unlike the inferiority model, the set of hypotheses suggested that environment rather heredity factors were responsible for presumed deficiencies in Blacks."²¹

The result of these models leads to the age-old dilemma that plague numerous societies regarding the concept on imitation and/or assimilation. The purpose of assimilation is to pattern one's social and culture behaviors after those of the dominant culture. Thurman argues that the imitation process have negative effects.

"A strategic loss of self-respect. [Because] the aim is to reduce all outer or external signs of difference to zero, so that there shall be no ostensible cause for active violence or opposition. Under some circumstance it may involve a repudiation of one's heritage, ones customs, one's faith."²²

The idea of assimilation is likened to imitation, which is a heavily debated subject. Some would argue, that blacks are so busy trying to assimilate and gain acceptance into the white culture that they have rejected their own unique identity.



To illustrate, we read that Vickie Franklin dreamed of living as Cosby lived. Yet, the "Cosby Show" received negative press by many black communities because they accused the show of being "too white". Rather, it was hard for these lower class blacks to see themselves outside of the urban ghetto because they could not believe that a black family could be middle class with two professional parents. What is the root cause of this type of outlook? (Attached of the "Cosby Show" picture taken from <http://valdefierro.com/cosby.html>, 11/12/04).

According to Dr. Na'im Akbar, slavery has shaped the mentality of African-Americans more than any other historical event.²³ He lists the following as attitudinal consequences of slavery: motivation to work, view of property, leadership, clown like behaviors, personal inferiority, community division, and the destruction of the family unit. Likewise, Donna Franklin includes slavery as the number one factor of five that have affected the African-American families. The other factors are: 2.) the northern migration that resulted in loss of communal institutions, 3.) AFDC policies, 4.) decreasing job opportunities for lower class black males, 5.) and social isolation in neighborhoods of high poverty concentration²⁴ However, Wilson does not mention slavery rather he emphasizes socialization. For example, he states that inner city youth:

"Lack the idea of work as a central experience of adult life, they have little or no labor-force attachment. [In which] these circumstances also increase the likelihood that the residents will rely on illegitimate sources of income, thereby further weakening their attachment to the legitimate labor market."²⁵

Moreover, inner city neighborhoods have deteriorated because of the amount of drugs trafficking in these neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the illegal drug industry has provided poor people with a source of steady income and employment, thereby, elevating drug dealers to status of the role model. In addition, escalating the crime rate due to the drugs and firearms has reduced safety level, thereby causing residents not to leave the safety of their homes. The article refers to the safety concerns as expressed by Vickie's statement that she did not feel comfortable outside because of the crime. Such fears decrease their involvement in voluntary associations and informal social control networks essential to maintain the social organization of the neighborhood.²⁶ Sadly, poor neighborhoods do not have strong community connections to institutional resources like churches, political organization or businesses that would prevent the intense alienation its resident's experience. The lack of institutional resources reinforces the social isolation experienced in ghetto neighborhoods, especially for female head of households. Thus, social isolation deprives residents of not only adequate role models but vital social resources as well.

In addition, to the previous mentioned factors, the use of religious imagery has been detrimental to African Americans. Because "the experiences of seeing God in an image of somebody other than yourself is that it creates an idea that the image represented is superior and you are inferior."²⁷ Thus, one could easily argue that blacks have been psychologically controlled by an unconscious Caucasian image of Divinity and have felt inferior because of religious imagery.

Theological Analysis

For the purposes of this paper, we will concentrate on aspects of theological analysis that includes academic scholars like Gutierrez and Cone and the framing of the Black Church as a separate theological entity.

Section V. Church Doctrine and Community

The doctrine of the church attempts to address the function and role of the church. Early ecclesiology focused on the unity and universality of the Christians grouping that they called the church. For example, Tertullian recorded that "we are the body, knit together by the bond of piety, unity in discipline and by the contact of hope."²⁸ In contrast, Origen emphasized the organized community or assembly of believers.²⁹ Hence, church doctrine can include detailed topics such as the church membership, unity, salvation, etc. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this project, the church is defined as a body of believers who seek to be in communion with Jesus Christ and fellowship with one another.

COMMUNITY

People are formed and shaped based on their shared interactions with other human beings. These interactions dramatically shape the choices people make at any given time. Therefore, establishing and maintaining a sense of community is very important. In fact, one could argue that the highest purpose for an individual is to contribute as much value to the community as possible. The concept of community celebrates the contributions of all its members and seeks to develop the gifts of all its members. Therefore, this project seeks to promote the concept of "lived community" defined as seeking the interest of the other. This type of community seeks to embrace and live as practice the message and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Conversely, the discrimination, racism and prejudice are in opposition to *lived community*, because there is no sincere concern for the other. To illustrate:

"Where discrimination is pervasive, the freedom of minority groups is severely restricted, as are their opportunities for achievements. Such limitations harm not only these discriminated against, but also the larger community. Talents go underdeveloped, potential output is irrevocably lost, and markets are unnecessarily restricted"³⁰

Consequently, the *lived community* expressed by the Black Church reduces the forces of social isolation as will be reflected in the next section.

Section VI Black Church and Black Faith

BLACK CHURCH

The historian Nathan Hatch in his book, "*The Democratization of American Christianity*" demonstrated how religion crossed the social and economic boundaries of America's nineteenth century culture. Various denominations were born of these democratic religious movements, which reconstructed the thought of theology, church and state, economic and social justice. Since the Episcopalians and Presbyterians refused to Christianize slaves many blacks (whether free or slave), flocked to Methodist and Baptist congregations who early on welcomed them warmly. Thus, the Methodist and Baptist churches experienced tremendous growth in membership during the nineteenth century.

These congregations were able to give dignity back to those of lower means. In addition, the church employed its laity that allowed ordinary congregates to express their faith openly. Blacks began to form their own congregations. Thus, the Black Church "served as the major rallying point for human dignity, freedom, and equality among those who bore slavery's cruel yoke"³¹). The Black Church was the first public establishment under African-American control. Theodore Walker Jr. a theologian says, "the story of the Black Church is best defined by three abolitionist movements: to end slavery, to end segregation and to end poverty."³²



For example, in the 1960's, the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged the socio-political culture in American to fight for justice for all. The civil rights movement demonstrated the churches ability to preach the social gospel. The Black Church was able to interpret the gospel of Luke to mean to seek liberty and justice now! (Attached picture of King, taken from <http://www.africanamericans.com>, 11/12/04).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." (Luke 4:18-20)

Thus, the Black Church has been a pioneer of using religion to transform culture. Rather the Black Church has understood that '*Christ Transforms Culture*' as stated in the words of Richard Niebuhr.

BLACK FAITH

The ability to transform culture means that there is a vital force of hope and faith. Thus, African American faith is crystallized in theological concepts like (1) God's goodness, (2) freedom, and (3) justice. In fact, one can say the cultural motto found in Black Churches is: "God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good." It is because of the steadfast faith of Black Churches that the black community believes that even in difficult times that "*all things work together for good for those who love God*" (Roman 8:2). Lastly, discrimination and racism has restricted black people experience of freedom, nevertheless, blacks have felt liberated by the message of Jesus Christ. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ communicated to blacks that God remains on the side of justice. Therefore, black faith is embedded in anticipated hopes of a better tomorrow. However, this hope is grounded in seeking justice now!

ESCHATOLOGY

However, in order to have the religious thrust needed for Black Churches to make a difference in black community, they must relinquish "the general

impression that Christianity is essentially an otherworldly religion, having as its motto: take all the world, but give me Jesus.³³

One way to counter the prevalent eschatological teaching is to adopt Black theological principles. Black theology instills self-determination in black people and it refuses to accept pain, suffering, and injustice as the will of God.³⁴ Cone argues that:

"Eschatology does not mean merely salvation of the soul, individual rescue from evil world, comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of man, the socializing of humanity, peace for all creation."³⁵

In summary, black theology forces us to seek justice now!

Section VII. Theological Perspectives Of Liberation Theologians

GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ

Gustavo Gutierrez identifies liberation to be at the forefront of human history. When human beings are limited in their expression of freedom, self-fulfillment is never materialized. He argues:

"Human relationship with nature changed substantially with the emergence of experimental science and the techniques of manipulation derived from it. Relying on these achievements, humankind abandoned its former image of the world and itself"³⁶

The advancement of technological and scientific knowledge has caused human beings to view the world and each other differently. Critical thinking is now the platform that disengages humanity's relationship with the world. Thus, a capitalistic society finds it easy to disregard people of lower social status. Gutierrez understands that liberation is to fight the forces that oppress such people in the conquest of "new way of being a human person to achieve a complete fulfillment of the individual in solidarity with all humankind."³⁷ (Attached picture of Gutierrez is taken from http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/misc/newsid_2989000/2989979.stm, 11/12/04).



Salvation through Jesus Christ is a gift of liberation to humanity. Gutierrez approaches liberation as a salvific process. He describes sin as "the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings"³⁸. However, one can be liberated from sin by the grace of God in which one receives by faith and through fellowship with each other. His "theological analysis leads to the position that only liberation from sin gets to the very source of social injustice and other forms of human oppression and reconciles us with God and our fellow human beings"³⁹. Thus, Gutierrez recognizes that his liberation theology is indeed a salvific theology.

The church itself neglects its mission if it does not preach that poor are also welcomed to the Wedding Banquet. He states “poverty is an evil, a scandalous condition, which in our times has taken on enormous proportion. To eliminate it is to bring closer the moment of seeing God face to face, in union with other persons”⁴⁰. Therefore, emancipation of human history is for individuals to dictate their own destiny.

JAMES CONE

James Cone, a black theologian suggests that the church’s central task is to live out the gospel. Living out the gospel implies that the practice of theology and religion must be directly related to life. Thus, Cone says liberation theology



is strictly derived from the black perspective of oppression experienced in America’s. He believes that people can only speak of God in terms of human history. In order to be free, blacks have to sever themselves from the chains of their white oppressors. Cone feels that white have failed to recognize that Jesus “did not become a universal human being but an oppressed Jew, thereby disclosing to us that both human nature and divine nature are inseparable from oppression and liberation. (Attached picture of Cone taken from <http://www.cta-usa.org/reprint%2001-03/1-03reprint.html>, 11/12/04).

To know who the human person is, is to “focus on the oppressed one and what he does for an oppressed community as it liberates itself from slavery.”⁴¹ Thus, humanity is bound toward freedom and when this freedom is limited or eliminated then humanity loses its identity. Cone theology of anthropology wrestles with the dualism of humanity; “on one hand, to be (fully) human is to be separated from everything that is evil. But on the other hand, being human means being against evil by joining sides with those who are the victims of evil.”⁴² However, in order for blacks to be free, they must seize their freedom regardless of the cost.

Cone describes sin not only as a separation from God but also as a separation from community. Therefore, the individual as well as the community cannot be what it ought to be if sin is present. “Sin, then, is a condition of human existence in which we deny the essence of God’s liberating activity as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a way of life in which we cease to be human and we make choices according to our private interests, identifying the ultimate with an alien power”⁴³. Cone poses the question, “what can salvation possibly mean for oppressed blacks in America?”⁴⁴ For him, salvation takes on an earthly reality whereby those who are defenseless rise up against their oppressors so to live in freedom from bondage.

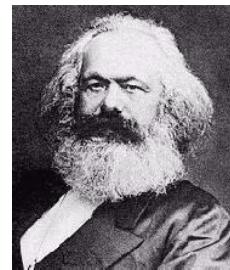
Theology then expresses the meaning of Christ’s existence in relation to the black experience. For Cone and the Black church, nothing can be accomplished without recognizing the power of the message of Christ. Hence, Christ is normative for Black theology.

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS

SYSTEMATIC EVIL

In America, community is a byproduct of self-interest. Individualism takes precedent over community. Those in power “*must not distort justice; (they) must not show partiality and (they) must not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right*” (Deut. 16:19). James Poling's book, *Deliver Us from Evil* describes systemic abuse of power. The dominant society has established superior and inferior institutions that divide the lower social class into objects. An object can be sold, traded, or even violated. Thus, this creates tension between the haves and have-nots.

Karl Marx indicates that those in power are ingrained in their own economic well-being. They will shape language, custom and ideologies that may dehumanize other social classes that could infringe on their benefits. When the privilege deny their responsibility of systemic evil, it is easy for privilege to lack empathy. Systemic evil has caused those of lower social class to suffer tremendously under the pressure of constant alienation. It pushes those in poverty to the margins of hopelessness and despair. Although, the external forces of systemic evil are real, we suggest that the internal spiritual force is stronger and capable of leading to behavioral transformation. (Attached picture of Marx taken from <http://www.newgenevacenter.org/west/19th-cen2.htm>, 11/12/04).



Section VIII. BEHAVIORAL TRANSFORMATION

By adopting the models of liberation theology, one person can use their experience as a starting point to acquire behavioral transformation. Behavioral transformation occurs in three stages.

1. Connection to the Black Church to experience a sense of community that eliminates social isolation.
2. Encounter with Jesus Christ initiated by the experience of lived community.
3. The cultural transformation of the world through the Churches and programs of empowerment.

The first stage requires that the Black Church build lasting relationships with the estranged, isolated, and alienated poor class. The established connection with the poor builds a sense of solidarity with the poor. Although, the Black Church has been successful in advocating for the needs of the lower class and middle-classes, the church must re-commit and take responsibility for the poor. The Black Church has traditionally been the focal point of the black communities because they addressed the economical, political, and social concerns of the community.

For example, during the civil rights era, the Black Church understood its responsibility to families like the Franklins because all the members lived together in community. It seemed that the social gospel preached was easier to identify. Now, the Black Church is composed of different economic classes (i.e. upper, middle and lower). Hence, because of the stratification of class, it is harder for the Black Church to recognize and establish its relationship to the community and vice versa. Therefore, the new challenge of the church is to share the message of Jesus Christ beyond the walls of the church building, thereby, establishing contact and fellowship with the underclass. This connection eliminates the isolation experienced in the desolated areas and lays the groundwork for the true community to exist.

The next step is building "lived community". One of the greatest commandments in the Bible is to love your neighbor like yourself. The problem of poverty summons the Black Church to implement the classic theological virtue of love. Thus, the highest expression of love is to live in community with others. This type of community is not divided by the "haves and the haves nots". But, as demonstrated by the community of believers in the book of Acts, true community implies that those of greater means help those of lesser means.

By living among and with those in poverty, the church is able to more effectively spread the message of Jesus Christ. Thurman shares that Jesus was concerned about the "redemption [of] all the cast-down people in every generation and in every age."⁴⁵ Jesus lived among the marginal and rejected, a church ability to connect with the residents of its community enacts the embodied presence of Emmanuel - God with us! Therefore, the church like Gutierrez must live among the poor and form solidarity. Life lived in community allows an encounter with Jesus Christ to occur. Living in community ensures that the needs of the poor are not overlooked. The community supports the human dignity of each individual. This type of community would be able to restore humane dignity and self-worth to Vickie Franklin. The stage is imperative to the church ability to accomplish the third stage.

Finally, it is in the third stage that possessions are distributed among the entire community. Once, solidarity and fellowship have been established the needs of people can be assessed in such a way that empowers them to be liberated from their current predicaments. This is the stage where the Black Church administers effective programming and forums that liberate "those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18-20) Essentially, the Black Church must connect with other institutions that can collectively serve as communal and societal anchors.

These institutions not only help to address class stratification, education, career/workforce development, injustice and inequity, but they will provide the cultural and social resources missing in social isolated areas. Example, programs that can help poor people include: the establishment of a financial institution like credit unions, training programs on fatherhood, mentoring

programs that model acceptable adult working behaviors, mortgagee and housing programs, financial literacy programs, and entrepreneurship programs, etc.

The key is to establish a rapport and build community with the poor in order to provide the church with effective ways to advocate for the needs of the poor. Because the church would have established solidarity with the poor it eliminates the idea of proving "charity". Because the poor have experienced transformation through lived in community, one with the other. Thereby, the culture is transformed by the enacted love of Jesus expressed through the concept of community.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that behavioral transformation is the key to eliminating social isolation. More importantly, poor people are not the sole objects of transformation, but the whole of community. True behavioral transformation occurs in lived community (one with the other). However, just as the factors, that have led to social isolation and poverty did not occur overnight. The behavioral transformation is a process that occurs over time. Akbar suggests that the only remedy is transformation. He states:

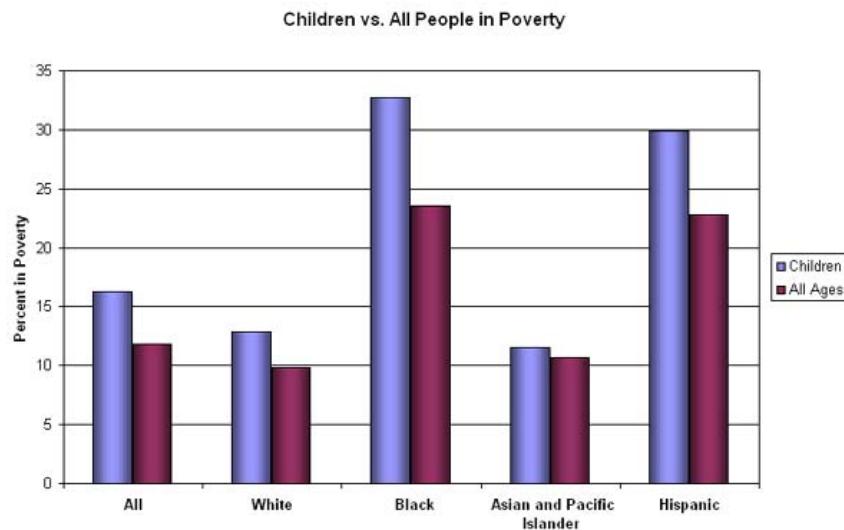
"Ultimate liberation does not involve substituting an African racial image for the Caucasian one. Ultimate liberation recognizes that the form of the Creator is as affirming superior to human flesh totally and the perfected being invites us to a transformed state of perfection larger than material identity."⁴⁶

In sum, we believe that when the church establishes a connection with those isolated from society, then an encounter with Jesus Christ is possible because of the experience of "lived community" which leads to the church's ability to meet the needs of all its members. Because a behavioral transformation or change has occurred in the life of the community (both those in poverty and those working to eliminate poverty), an oneness of purpose to live in the equity of shared community supports self-determination and self-esteem.

In closing, we have proved that the "Vickie Franklin's" of the world are not destined to social alienation. Rather through implementing the three stages of the behavioral transformation model, the Black church can eradicate the negative effects of generational poverty. Because of its desire to live in solidarity with its community and those disinherited by society a transformed people is now empowered to live prosperously economically, intellectually, and spiritually.

Section X. Appendixes

Appendix A: Children of the United States in Poverty Based on Race

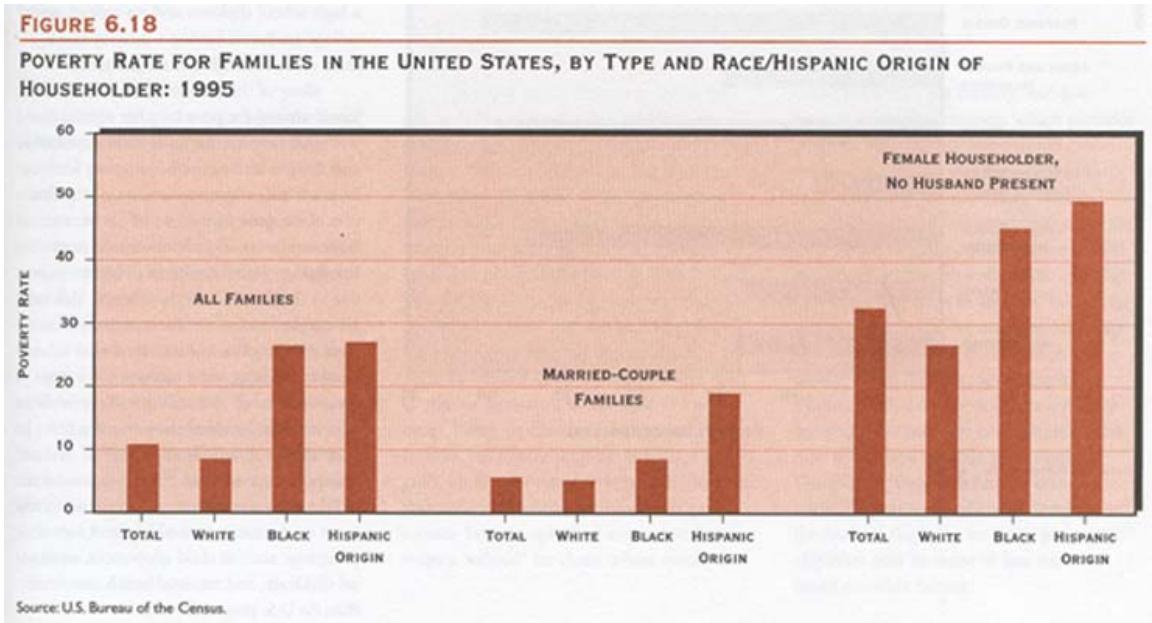


U.S. Bureau of the Census. [Statistical Abstract of the United States: 121st Edition](#). Washington DC: 2001. (p.442)

Children of every race have higher poverty rates than the rest of their race. Children are vulnerable to poverty because they are almost completely dependent on a parent or guardian to provide for them. A child can not choose to be impoverished or not. As a result, children may find themselves in situations of poverty due to their parent's choices, disability, or irresponsibility. Of course, a parent may be working long and hard, but at an underpaying job, causing their children to be in poverty. Unlike adults, young children may not apply for a job, receive a raise, or go about seeking aid. They are relatively at the mercy of those taking care, or lack of care, of them.

Appendix B: Family Composition

The physical makeup of families often plays a large role in the likeliness of the members living in poverty. This chart shows the percent of each type of family that is in poverty in the United States.

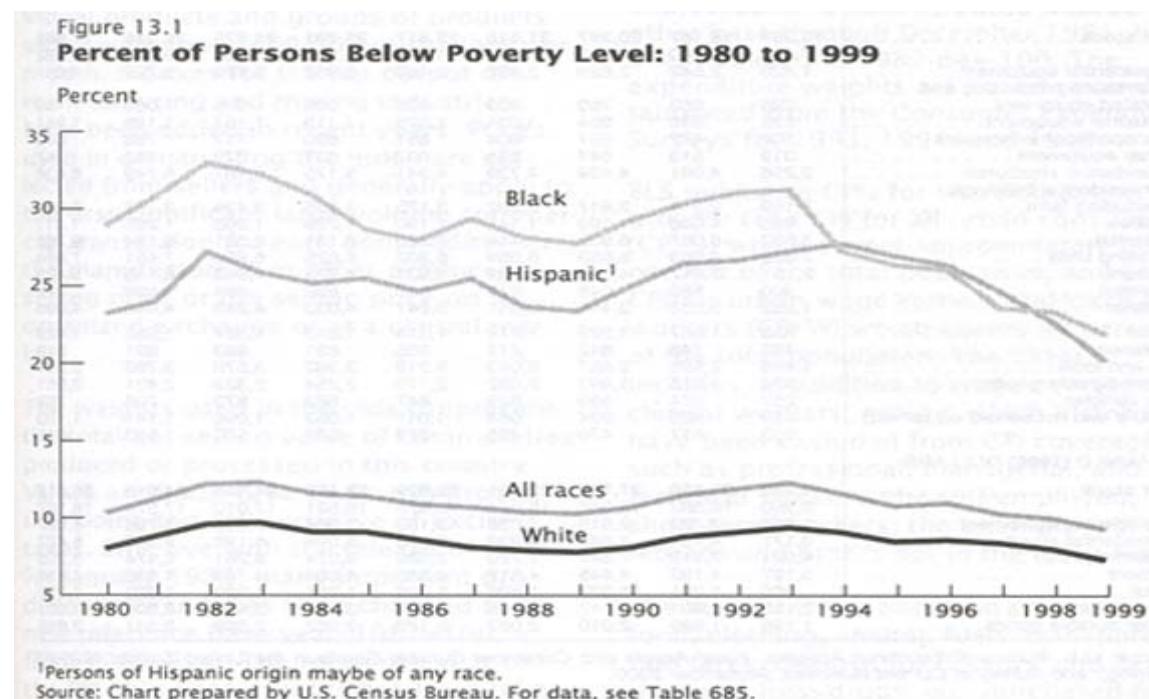


Litman, Mark S. A Statistical Portrait of the United States: Social Conditions and Trends: 1st ed. 1998. (p.86)

The graph shows that married couples are less likely to live in poverty than families with a single female householder, and this is true for all races. The Hispanic families have higher poverty rates in all the categories; however, in the All Families category the Black and Hispanic Origin are basically the same at about 27 percent. This is due to a very different family composition between the two groups. You can also see clearly in this graph that Whites have a much lower poverty rate than the other groups.

Appendix C: Racial Statistics

Some of the most significant trends in poverty are those relating to race. White people experience the lowest poverty levels of any race in our country. While percentages change from year to year, the position of white people as the least impoverished race remains the same. Black people have a history of high poverty percentages in our nation, along with Hispanics. Many assert that the alarming differences in economic situations between races are rooted in a history of inequality and prejudice. Whatever the reasons, it is indisputable that one's economic situation is influenced by one's race.

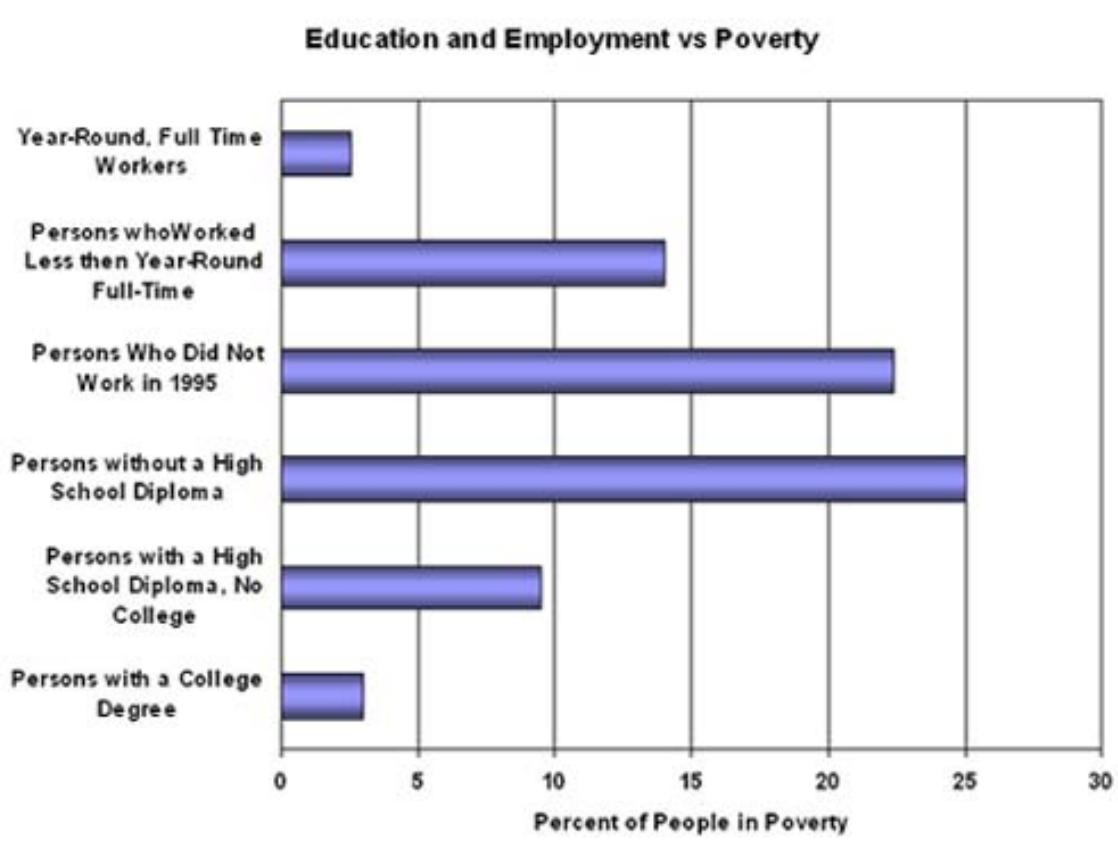


U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 121st Edition*. Washington DC: 2001. (p.447)

One can see from the graph above that race is a significant issue in discussing poverty. Poverty levels among Black and Hispanic people have generally gone down since 1980, yet it is clear that these races are still incredibly impoverished in comparison to others.³ In 10 Hispanics live below the poverty level, compared to 1 in 10 non-Hispanics. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans have the highest poverty levels of Hispanic people, while Cubans have among the lowest.

Appendix D: Education and Employment:

Employment, being a means to avoid poverty, and education, a means to get a more successful job, are shown in this comparison chart of different degrees of education and time worked in a year.



Litman, Mark S. *A Statistical Portrait of the United States: Social Conditions and Trends*: 1st ed. 1998. (p.88)

People with a college degree have a much lower occurrence of poverty than those with only a high school diploma. Those with a high school diploma have a much lower poverty rate than those without one. People who work full time have the lowest poverty rate, which makes sense because they have a steady income year-round, while those working less than year-round have a significantly higher poverty rate. It is interesting that people who did not even work in 1995 still have a lower poverty rate than people without a high school diploma.

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