

[BACKGROUND: In June of 1965, President Johnson gave a commencement address, titled "To Fulfill These Rights," at Howard University in Washington. In this speech, he announced a White House Conference on Civil Rights which would also have the theme and title of "To Fulfill These Rights." A planning meeting for the White House conference was held in November of 1965 where Bayard Rustin presented this strategy paper on the necessity of moving beyond issues of segregation to those of poverty and economic injustice.]

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Civil Rights  
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BACKGROUND PAPER  
WHITE HOUSE PLANNING  
CONFERENCE

-- Bayard Rustin

We are at "the end of the beginning."

So President Lyndon B. Johnson has defined the state of the civil rights struggle for the fulfillment of the moral principles of equality and brotherhood which are so basic to the American ideal.

And so we here can define our task in the same terms. Our agenda is to complete the beginning that has been made -- and then to chart the bold, new departures which are required if every American is to be a full, first class citizen of his own land.

*I. To Complete the Beginning*

Ten years ago, and some ninety years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the Supreme Court of the United States outlawed segregation in public education and laid the juridical basis for eliminating discrimination from every area of the national life.

In the ensuing decade, there has been a vast awakening of conscience among millions of Americans, Negro and white. There have been heroic struggles in the streets and in the jails and there have been those who paid with their lives to make freedom truly indivisible. In the courts, the battle to challenge every segregationist statute and practice has become more intense than ever before. And out of all these activities, out of this most dynamic movement of our time, there has come a new national commitment to full civil rights in the form of a series of laws, and, above all, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965.

The main impact of these victories has been felt in the South, for it was blatant and self-proclaimed discrimination which was the first target of the movement. Yet even here, if one can now see an end to that mockery whereby democratic institutions were used to enforce an anti-democratic policy of segregation, these beginnings are still incomplete.

For despite the law of the land as articulated by the Congress and proclaimed by the Supreme Court, American racism still has powerful weapons for the subversion of our national policy and principles.

Terror and physical and economic sanctions are effectively used to nullify the solemn will of the society as a whole.

Civil rights workers have been beaten and murdered and those accused of these vile crimes against them have been exonerated in trials which make a disgrace of the judicial process. We therefore propose:

*that the Congress make it a federal crime to interfere in any way with any citizen engaged in implementing the national policy for full and complete racial equality;*

*that the Department of Justice vigorously pursue the enforcement of existing laws against the discriminatory selection of juries at all levels of American life; and that the Congress make more precise and specific rules toward the same end.*

We cannot say that we have yet come to the end of the beginning when racist terrorists can strike down American citizens who are acting in accordance with the highest traditions and the express public policy of the nation. The physical safety of the participant in the political process is a fundamental concern, and precondition, of democratic life. We demand that it be guaranteed for every citizen.

In addition to outright terrorism, the civil rights movement confronts more subtle forms of intimidation. First and foremost are the economic reprisals taken against Negroes in the South who actively participate in the freedom struggle -- or who simply assert their democratic right to the ballot. A strengthened Fair Employment Practices Statute should contain provisions aimed directly at this evil, for there are the most obvious and outright patterns of economic coercion which can be brought under the rule of law.

In addition, we believe that there are many situations when direct federal aid should be provided to those who suffer economic hardship and deprivation because of their fidelity to the democratic ideals of this nation. It has recently, and rightly, been suggested that the victims of violent crime (and in the case of those who die, their families) should be reimbursed by the public, that the individual should not be required to shoulder the burden which society's failure to give adequate protection imposes upon him. We believe that this principle should be applied to those who suffer from both physical and economic terror in the civil rights movement. We do not suggest that they should be given a hand-out. We ask that America give them their just due for performing a courageous and vital function in the democratic process.

In the South, then, there is often a brutal, open and utterly anti-democratic double standard of justice where the Negro is involved and almost always when the issue is civil rights. But in both the North and the South, the social and economic position of the Negro often results in his being victimized by a more sophisticated double standard. Condemned to miserable ghettos, high rates of unemployment

and an unjust share of society's misery, the Negro is often unable to view the policeman or the judge as a friend or protector of law and order. They appear in the guise of the enemy, as one more source of the torment which white America imposes upon the Negro.

We therefore support every effort to eliminate social class factors from the administration of justice, i.e. programs to give financial support so that the right of indigent defendants to a full legal defense can become a reality; rigorous observation of recent Supreme Court decisions regarding the rights of citizens who are arrested; and, in local areas, independent civilian review boards for hearing complaints against the police.

In addition, there are existing laws -- and again, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 are most crucial in this regard -- which must be fully and totally implemented. In this context, we believe that the government of the United States should play a most active role in initiating action against discrimination. From the earliest days of this Republic to the present moment, Negroes have been segregated and abused in flagrant violation of principles which the entire nation claimed to hold sacred. Now that this scandal is coming to an end, shall the victims of injustice be told to shoulder the main burden in redeeming the honor of the whole society? The answer is clear. Precisely in the name of equal rights before the law, the government has the responsibility to volunteer its resources in this great struggle and to say clearly and unambiguously that it is the duty of the United States of America as a nation to work positively for its own basic principles.

In all of these proposals to complete the beginning that America has made in the fight for equality, it should be clear that we envision that the civil rights movement will increase its activity in the coming period. We have come as far as we have by employing a wide range of complementary tactics: challenging segregation in the courts; legislatures, and in the streets. On all these fronts, our efforts must be redoubled if we are truly to arrive at the end of the beginning and if the movement is to be prepared for the even more profound struggles that lie ahead.

## *II. The New Departures*

In the course of the great struggles against segregationist statutes, America has become conscious that the problem of discrimination is deeply rooted in the national life, that it is more profound than laws and court decisions.

Most specifically, we now understand that every formal and open support of segregation could be abolished and that the American economy and social structure could still perpetuate, and even intensify, the second class status of the Negro. What Congress and the courts give, the market place could take away.

This grim reality was the central theme of President Johnson's

historic address at Howard University. Thus, it is now only necessary to cite but a few of the facts which show how potentially tragic the situation is.

Between 1949 and 1959 -- years of the "Negro Revolution" -- the percentage of the white wage received by the Negro worker declined from 57% to 53%.

In 1948, Negro and white unemployment were roughly equal. In the fifties and early sixties, Negro unemployment was consistently double that of white, and Negro teen-age unemployment has often been at rates as disastrous as those which prevailed for the entire nation during the depression of the 1930s.

*At this point, it is very much worth while to pause and take a more careful look at the problem of Negro unemployment. It is happily true that Negro unemployment has, as a result of the nation's improved economic performance in the sixties, declined from the level of 12.6% which it reached in 1958 (and 12.5% in 1961). Today, non-white joblessness in the United States stands at roughly 8.3%. But, and this is of great significance, the proportion of Negro unemployment compared to white has remained constant despite this progress -- it is twice as serious. So if in 1958, 12.6% of the Negroes were unemployed and 6.1% of the whites, in 1965, the corresponding figures are 8.3% and 4.2% -- or still a ratio of 2 to 1 against the Negro. In other words, there is continuing discrimination even when gains are made.*

But these statistics conceal an even more dangerous trend: the persistence of Negro youth unemployment. In 1961, 24.7% of those Negroes between 14 and 19 years of age were out of work. And it is estimated that in 1965, this incredible rate will only decline to 23.2%. This is an expression of the fact that Negro job progress has been largely a result of calling men with previous experience back to work. The official figures give us no reason to be optimistic about the huge number of young, and often unskilled, uneducated, Negroes who will be entering the labor market in the next period. For in the next year, Negroes, who are 11% of the population, will be 18% of the new entrants to the labor force. Approximately half of this disproportionate number of young Negroes will be without the equivalent of a high school education and they will be competing in an economy in which the demand for skill and training is increasing dramatically.

It is thus possible that there be a deterioration of the Negro's social and economic position at the very moment when the civil rights movement achieves great political victories. As a result the new "freedom" would be a bitter thing indeed, and economic servitude would be as effective an instrument of discrimination as any racist law.

During the past year, the public has become somewhat more conscious of the way in which these statistics about the economics of Negro life describe more than a series of random and unconnected facts

and indeed form the basis for important social patterns. In particular, the problems of family life among poor Negroes have been emphasized as an example of the kind of problems one encounters in this regard. We think that it is extremely important that this point should be made and understood -- and just as important that it should not be misunderstood.

In 1940, Edward Wight Bakke described the effect of unemployment on family structure. Bakke demonstrated a model tragedy: *the jobless father is no longer a provider, credit runs out, the woman is forced into the labor force. Then, if relief becomes a necessity, the woman is even more of the focal point -- and the welfare investigator is often a woman, too. The father is dependent, the children bewildered, the stability of the family is threatened and often shattered.*

Bakke's research was a description of the plight of the white unemployed. Thus, the fact that Negro scholars, like the late Franklin Frazier and Dr. Kenneth Clark, and other investigators, have described this pattern as a typical one among the Negro poor does not mean that it has anything to do with some "inherent" Negro trait. *It is a relationship between family life and joblessness which holds, and has held, for both blacks and whites. If Negroes suffer more from this problem today, it is not because they are Negro but because they are so disproportionately a part of the unemployed, the underemployed and the ill-paid.*

What has happened in America is that the post-Emancipation labor market denied many Negroes the opportunity to become "economic" fathers -- the breadwinning heads of stable families -- just as the laws of slavery had denied the Negro the juridical right to marriage and children.

So it is that today:

35% of all Negro children live in broken homes;

25% of Negro women who have been married are divorced.

14% of all Negro children are receiving Aid for Families of Dependent Children.

*The answer to this problem is not to give the impoverished masses of the black ghetto sermons about middle class virtues. It is to give them jobs and decent, integrated housing and schools. For the official government statistics already show that, in the 1950s, the Negro family became much more stable in good times, less stable in bad. And this issue, let it be emphasized, is not one of special pleading on the part of the Negro male, but a vital question of Negro life as a whole. As Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women put it, "If the Negro woman has a major underlying concern, it is the status of the Negro man and his position in the community and his need for feeling himself an important person, free and able to make his contribution in the whole of society in order that it may strengthen his home."*

### *III. Negro Poverty*

Thus, Negro poverty is a special, and particularly destructive, form of American poverty.

The white immigrant waves of the 19th and early 20th centuries faced ethnic and religious prejudice. But they were never confronted by an organized system of race hatred with its own laws and myths and stereotypes, its own economy. Those of the older generations of white poor who fought their way out of poverty could thus assimilate into American life as soon as they acquired money, education, mastery of the language. But the Negro lawyer, doctor or teacher is often as victimized as the Negro laborer and every Negro, whatever his work, faces the evil of prejudice.

Secondly, Negro poverty is special because masses of Negroes migrated from the rural South to the urban South and North and entered the mainstream of the American economy only a few years before the once insatiable demand for unskilled muscle power went into decline. The older white immigrants came to an economy which could put grade school drop-outs to work; the Negro of today must compete with machines which have high school educations.

But Negro poverty is also a part of American poverty and this is a crucial fact in developing new policies and departures.

Indeed, I think it can be fairly said that the Negro movement is one of the main reasons why we now have a War on Poverty to help the white and the black poor. For it was the struggle for civil rights that first tore away the veil and revealed the tenements and the rats and all the rest of the black misery, and once this was seen then the plight of the white slums and the white rural poor of Appalachia could be seen too.

The non-white poor are more than doubly poor because of their race -- but they are still roughly a 25% minority of the total impoverished American population. The three quarters of the American poor who are white do not share the terrible problem of race prejudice with Negroes but they do have a similar deficiency in education and skill and thus the same kind of disadvantage in the labor market.

Given this analysis, a most important fact emerges: Negro poverty cannot be abolished without the simultaneous abolition of white poverty, and vice versa.

Because of this, the range of programs which are required to provide Negroes with genuine economic opportunity will not, by far and large (the exception is primarily in the area of Fair Employment Legislation), the "civil rights" laws. Instead, they will be measures aimed at transforming the living conditions of all the poor, black and white. To the extent that Negroes suffer economic misery disproportionately compared to whites, an anti-poverty program will in that sense "disproportionately" help Negroes -- but not by singling them out for special treatment.

In the areas of new departures, then, the civil rights concern merges with the anti-poverty commitment. But then, there is an even larger convergence which must be noted. Poverty, both Negro and white, effects the entire nation. The despair of the poor is often a source of crime; the neighborhoods of the poor produce little public revenue and demand huge public expenditures; the very existence of the poor in a society as productive as America's is a corruption of morality. Therefore, in righting the grievous economic wrongs which have been done to the Negro, it is not only necessary to bring justice to the poor whites, but the entire level of the country will be raised as well. In this context, one of the major economic tasks of the Great Society is the abolition of poverty and the consequent granting of economic and social content to the political freedoms being won by the civil rights movement.

To accomplish all this is a considerable undertaking. It will require the active participation of every sector of American society: of the voluntary institutions, like the churches and charitable organizations; of both business and labor; and of government at every level.

#### IV. Voluntary Organizations

America is a land in which the individual charitable impulse plays a major role. The power of this practical idealism must be oriented toward the next stage of the Negro Revolution. For example:

*The religious leadership in America has become conscious of its responsibility to the cause of equality and anti-poverty, but their rank and file often lag well behind in this regard. The voluntary sector must thus attack every vestige of racial prejudice to be found in its own organizations; it must convert its own constituents.*

*In the voluntary sector -- and particularly in charitable institutions like hospitals -- one often encounters poverty jobs for Negroes and other poor people. Philanthropy cannot build on other people's misery, and the voluntary sector must recognize its responsibility to pay decent wages and to allow for collective bargaining.*

*Many voluntary organizations have massive building programs. They must pledge that not one cent shall be spent upon Jim Crow construction.*

*The voluntary sector often holds extensive investments. Churches and universities and hospitals should never hold shares in poverty enterprises, like slums.*

*Above all, the voluntary sector can begin to establish lines of human communication between black and white America. Churches can exchange visits and so can individual parishoners; universities can exchange both students and faculty.*

## V. Business and Labor:

In the economy, both business and labor can help in the crucial task of annulling the unwritten Jim Crow laws which exist in the labor market.

### Business:

*should not take refuge in the excuse that qualified Negro workers cannot be found, but should aggressively pursue on-the-job-training programs consciously designed to train Negroes;*

*the Plans for Progress Program can be intensified so that every enterprise in the land will be playing an active role in promoting the national commitment to full equality;*

*where mechanization or automation is going to have its usual, particularly cruel impact upon displaced Negro workers, business must assume a social responsibility superior to any technical consideration and engage in government-labor-community planning to see to it that new jobs are found;*

*business and particularly small and new businesses, should be given tax and other incentives (as in the Economic Opportunity Act) when their policies will promote the hiring and upgrading of Negroes and others who are poor.*

The American labor movement is the most successful voluntary organization for the abolition of poverty in American history. The economic challenge of the civil rights struggle now gives it the opportunity to face up to a new and profound challenge which is in keeping with this tradition.

Almost half of the heads of poor families work hard and long -- and they are still poor. Some of them are denied coverage under the nation's collective bargaining policies (farm workers), others lack Social Security, some work at the sub-poverty official minimum wage of \$1.25 an hour, many are in unorganized shops.

*We believe that the labor movement's program for increasing minimum wage and extending its coverage constitutes a major step forward for the working poor.*

*We urge the labor movement to fight vigorously so that all farm and domestic labor will be brought under the social benefits of the welfare state, for in the doing there will be an important contribution to Negro well being.*

*Finally, we believe that the labor movement must bring its unique skills -- organization and collective bargaining -- to the unorganized poor. Some trade unionists have already suggested that strong, stable internationals and locals "adopt"*

*organizing campaigns among workers who are so poor that they cannot pay the cost of organizing themselves, at least at the outset. Others have indicated that union organizing experience can make a major contribution to help organize the poor for "maximum feasible participation" in the War against Poverty.*

## *VI. The Responsibility of Government*

But, frankly, neither the voluntary sector, nor business and labor, can do much to abolish Negro and white poverty unless government recognizes its responsibility.

For, as the Employment Act of 1946 stated, and as every Administration since, Democratic or Republican, has realized, a complex, inter-dependent and enormously productive economy like ours does not automatically and effortlessly achieve full employment, a proper rate of growth, a just distribution of benefits. In this regard, our analysis of the problem of Negro poverty -- and of white poverty as well -- points in certain important directions for federal action.

There are unemployable Negro and white poor, among them the children, the aging and the permanently handicapped. No measure of full employment or of economic growth can put an end to their misery. They must be provided with a decent level of life as defined by American society.

*We believe it is wrong for America to have Social Security benefits which are often tragically under the poverty line. We believe that it is cruel for various welfare payments to be figured as a partial percentage of what is needed. We consider it outrageous that there are still dependent children programs which promote separation and divorce because of rules against an able-bodied male being part of the recipient family.*

*We believe that this nation is productive enough to adopt the principle that all unemployable people have a right to a decent annual income.*

*In addition, we believe that all pension and other social insurance programs should have an escalator clause. In West Germany, for instance, such payments are readjusted upwards in proportion to the increase in the GNP every two years.*

However, we do not mean to suggest that we propose to "buy off" the unemployable poor by a simple cash payment. That could often concern them to lonely, bitter existences lived out in racial ghettos. In addition to recognizing their right to a decent personal consumption income, we must also grant their right to proper levels of social income and amenities -- like decent housing, social programs, leisure time activity, and the like.

Then there are the unemployed poor and the working poor, Negro and

white.

Along with the majority of the Senate Sub-Committee on Employment and Manpower in 1964, we believe that if the nation's projected GNP is going to produce levels of unemployment and underemployment which are in contradiction to our commitments to civil rights and the abolition of poverty, then the government must create a larger GNP which will suffice to promote our national goals.

*We believe that one area of tremendous need which could provide a basis for an enormous expansion of the economy and a resultant elimination of unemployment, underemployment, and working poverty, is investment in the nation's social capital: in schools, parks, mass transportation systems, hospitals, theatres, and above all, decent, integrated and desirable housing for every American.*

In the age of automation, we believe that there is another area of need, one that is well nigh inexhaustible: investment in human beings. In the course of the most modest War on Poverty, we have already discovered that poor people can do "non-professional" social and educational work.

*We believe that the human care of human beings should be a major area of growth for this nation and that we should begin to train, on every level of skill and education, people whose work will be helping people.*

To some, the proposals made here may seem so sweeping as to be incredible. To us, the truly incredible fact is that America allowed Watts to happen in 1965 and that it did so because the problems we have been describing -- depression rates of unemployment, increasing widespread rates of high school drop outs, the consequent frustration and corruption of much of family life -- were ignored. After the Harlem riots of 1964 something was done; anti-poverty money was pumped into Harlem. After the events in Watts, something will be done.

But are we thus to teach impoverished Negroes that the only way they can get the ear of white America is to rise up in violence: That is a really outlandish proposal in a democracy. And the ideas which we here advocate are a first step toward genuine sanity.

Finally, we do not propose an isolationist paradise in order to fulfill our civil rights and anti-poverty commitments. The nation has long honored military service -- with ROTC subsidies, with the GI Bill of Rights -- and we believe that we should now make social service -- of every kind at least as honored a calling as that of the warrior.

For we believe that, in an integrated nation, black Americans can contribute, not simply to the well being of their own countrymen, but to that of the world as a whole.

In short, after "the end of the beginning" in the struggle for civil rights, we propose that the energies and skills and talents of Negroes be put to work in the service of the nation and of mankind.