

Welfare turns people into government dependents

By Sylvia Perry
JACKSONVILLE FREE PRESS

When President Franklin Roosevelt created the welfare program as part of his New Deal, it was meant to be a temporary measure to allow American citizens the opportunity to still look for employment while keeping their family from starving to death.

Instead, for many it has turned into an irreversible hereditary crutch that trains dependence and ignorance at an early age. Welfare was not meant to be a vehicle for black people to get ahead or even survive. Despite the overwhelming

stereotype that the majority of the welfare system is composed of African Americans, only a small percentage is received by blacks, instead the majority of welfare goes to whites. The problem is that considering the minute percentage of blacks that make up the U.S. population, 13 percent, a disproportionate percentage are dependent on welfare (around 5 percent).

"Affordable" housing was once a sound way for working families to have a safe, up-to standard, neighborhood in which to raise their children. As times changed and requirements for living in these areas became more stringent, working class

people had to find somewhere else to live to provide for those with a smaller or no income base. The result eventually grouped thousands of poorly educated, non-working, idle people in a congested, confined area. These areas in the past few decades have become a breeding ground for crime, teenage pregnancy and drug trafficking. Some people have used their childhood experience in these 'government projects' to plant a seed of desire for a better future and have gone on to prosper.

Others have chosen to join their environment as yet another negative statistic.

Unfortunately, neither usually does anything to improve the 'hood'.

What are we to do with these places? Suggestions have included tearing down old tenements, replacing them with more modern facilities, relocating into various locations (scattered-site housing). All of these options are met with debate and criticism. Conservatives feel welfare recipients are undeserving of new housing with the rationale that if they really wanted it, they would get out and work for it. Scattered-site housing is an idea everyone approves of, as long as it is not in their neighborhood.

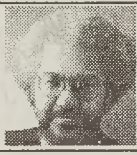
The residents of our nation's projects are a lost tribe of people. No one wants them and they have nowhere to go. We look upon their residences as eyesores and make extra efforts to avoid them.

Next time you drive by one of these places, don't turn your head. Live in the reality that we have created for our environment. Look at the residents and wonder about what they do all day. Then go home and look in the mirror, be thankful for what you have, and realize it could have been you.

SYLVIA PERRY is editor of *The Jacksonville Free Press* in Florida.

Lower the top, raise bottom of wage scale

Manning Marable



We live in an increasingly polarized society, where some Americans live in wealth and comfort, while millions more are trapped in low wage jobs. Last year's stock market increased in total value by over twenty-two percent. Billions of dollars in profits were generated. Meanwhile, the highest number of bankruptcies was recorded in the U.S. since the Great Depression. Millions of working poor people were laid off, forced into part-time employment, or were pressured to accept wage reductions.

A major indicator of this national problem of increasing inequality is the ratio between the salaries of the highest paid individuals in executive, professional and managerial positions vs. the average wages of most workers. In countries like Japan and in Western Europe, the chief executives of huge corporations usually earn no more than 25 times the average salary and compensation of their company's lowest paid, full-time worker. In the United States, in 1995, by contrast, the chief executive officers at the largest 500 companies each received \$4.06 million on average. That is 197 times the salary of a worker paid at the minimum wage!

What's the solution? More than a half century ago during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed that the country adopt a maximum wage: no one could earn more than \$25,000 in 1942, and the government would tax any income above that amount at 100 percent. FDR's basic concept here was correct. There is indeed an important relationship between the "top" and the "bottom" of a productive economy.

Let us suppose that there was a legal ceiling of how much any American could earn. For the sake of argument, let's say that the maximum wage would be set at 50 times the minimum wage. That would mean that as of 1996, the maximum income would be \$425,000. Anything above that amount would be taxed at 100 percent. The advantage to this approach would be that the wealthiest Americans would have a direct interest in raising the incomes of fast food employees and other low-wage workers. As wages are lifted from the bottom, they could also rise at the top.

There's another approach that could foster greater income equality. Suppose trade unions fought for and won contracts that linked the salaries and overall compensation of top executives to the wage levels of the lowest, full-time employees. An executive who wanted a financial package of salary, stock options, interest and other compensation of \$2 million, for example, could only obtain that figure if the corporation's lowest paid, full-time employee earned at least \$40,000 annually. Many progressive politicians and civil rights advocates have already endorsed these types of income fairness propos-

als. Minnesota Democratic congressman Martin Sabo, for instance, has proposed a bill that would forbid corporations from deducting any part of an executive's total compensation that exceeded 25 times that of the lowest paid worker in the company. Last year, 30 members of Congress endorsed Sabo's proposal.

Undoubtedly, there will be a few black apologists for multinational capitalism, such as conservative economist Thomas Sowell or journalist Tony Brown, who would take the side of those in the corporate suites. But the overwhelming majority of African American households would directly benefit from these proposals. Most black families earn less than \$50,000 a year, and fewer than 1 percent earn above \$150,000 annually. For every Michael Jordan earning \$30 million a year, there are millions who are barely making it from paycheck to paycheck. With federal government reductions in social programs, job training and investment in our urban centers, we must explore innovative proposals that create greater fairness and income equality. The only way to direct investment into our cities, to improve the quality of public schools, and to guarantee quality public health care, we must restrict those at the top, to increase social justice and opportunity for the rest of us.

MANNING MARABLE is Professor of History and the Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University, New York City. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 300 publications throughout the U.S. and internationally.

Meeting the state's redistricting deadline

D.G. Martin



They did it.

The General Assembly beat a deadline. That is big news in itself. We are not used to the legislature getting its work done on time.

With respect to a court-imposed April 1 deadline to pass a new congressional redistricting plan, few thought our legislature would come close.

You remember that the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the state's congressional districts could not pass muster constitutionally. Following the Supreme Court's directions, a lower federal court ordered the state to redraw the lines. The lower court said that if the lines were not redrawn properly by April 1, it would do the job itself.

The General Assembly's on-time completion of this assignment stirs up a hundred good

political topics — each good enough for a column. But since my editors will not let me spend the rest of the year writing about congressional redistricting, I am going to try to crowd several of those possible columns into just one — this one. Here goes.

1. Why the surprise? Why did so many people think that getting agreement on the new boundaries would be so difficult?

It is always hard to change political boundaries. If a proposed change hurts the current office holder's chances for reelection, he is going to be angry — and encourage all his friends in the legislature to get stop the plan. With so much politics involved, any completion deadline would be hard to beat.

2. What about "political cleansing"?

This year there was a special complication. One house of the legislature is controlled by the Republicans and one by the Democrats. In the past, for as far back as anyone can remember, one party has been in

charge of both houses.

When the same party is in charge of both houses, its legislators do everything they can to give their party the advantage in as many districts as possible. The basic technique is to shift all the other party's loyal voters into a few districts. Skillfully done, these shifts can reduce the number of seats the opposite party has a chance to win.

(It is not unlike the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. You round up all the people who "are not like you" and you move them out of your district and concentrate them with their "like kind" in another district. We don't actually make people pack up their belongings and move; we just draw a line around them. You could it "political cleansing" if you wanted, but we just call it "gerrymandering.")

This year, with each party looking over the other's shoulders, the gerrymandering plotting was much less a factor. So the "complication" of having two different political parties may have speeded the project along.

3. Who should get credit for

the timely completion? Democratic Senator Roy Cooper and Republican Representative Ed McMahan deserve much praise. But neither will insist on getting a lot of credit. Both of them are hard workers who don't need to get all the glory. They worked with each other well. Their low-key approach helped them gain the trust of each other and their colleagues. All that set the stage for agreement before the deadline.

It also helped that the top leaders of the senate and the house get along with each other pretty well — even though they belong to different political parties.

(They get along with each other better than they do with opposition members in their own branch of the legislature. In fact, these leaders get along better than they do with members of their own party who serve in the other branch of the legislature.)

Back to the point. It helped that the leaders of the house and senate were in basic agreement to finish up the project—

and get any differences worked out quietly.

4. Who did better — Democrats or the Republicans? It is probably a draw — at least for now. Each party has a good chance to win the six districts it now controls. As for the future, the Republicans probably have the edge. The redistricting plan shows that the Democrats are still in retreat — fighting a "rear guard" action against forces of political realignment.

The new plan confirms that the Democrats have given up hope of winning any congressional district in the west — including three districts that have had Democratic representation fairly recently (and one more where they came very close to winning).

Just remember though, the game is not over. If the courts don't accept the legislature's plan, they could draw a completely new one.

D. G. MARTIN is vice president of public affairs for the University of North Carolina system. He can be reached via e-mail at dgmartin@ga.unc.edu

Parents need a TV rating system that makes sense

Marian Wright Edelman



What kind of TV shows do your children look at? Do you worry if their favorite shows contain violence, sex, or inappropriate language? If your children are like most children, they spend an average of four hours a day in front of the tube.

One recent study found that children are bombarded with more than 2,000 television messages a day. And black children watch more TV than other children. Two-thirds of black fourth-graders watch four or

more hours of TV a day, compared with one-third of white fourth-graders and a half of Hispanic fourth-graders. On average, a black household watches 72 hours of TV per week, 49 percent more than other households. With hundreds of channels to choose from, I think parents need help to make good choices about what their children should and shouldn't watch. And parents need to stop using TV as a babysitter.

Earlier this year, the Implementation Group for TV Ratings, headed by Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti, introduced a rating system based on age, just like the movie system, that consists of six broad rat-

ings. The ratings provide no information for parents about the content of television programs — no hints whether a show has a lot of violence, or sexual content, or both. Under the industry's rating system, Y represents programs suitable for children two to six year old, Y7 programs are for children seven and older, G programs are suitable for all ages, PG suggests parental guidance, 14 means unsuitable for children under 14, and M programs are for mature audiences only. I agree with the dozens of academic experts, child advocates, members of

Congress, and parent, health, religious, and education groups across the country that parents would be better off with a rating

system that describes content by using symbols such as "V" for violence, "L" for language, and "S" for sex. A similar system has been used by Home Box Office and other premium cable television channels for the past decade, and we ought to have it on every channel.

"It is important to know what exactly is in the shows children are planning to watch," says psychologist Dale Kunkel, a leading researcher on the media's effect on children. "Research has shown that children learn behaviors by watching others, and TV presents a huge range of behaviors to learn from, including violence." Violence in our communities and in our nation is caused by a combination of factors, includ-

ing easy availability of guns, poverty, and violence in the home. But TV violence increases children's risk of becoming violent, overly fearful, or numb to victims.

Parents say they want all the help they can get. A recent poll sponsored by the PTA found that four out of five parents polled preferred a rating system based on content and using letters to warn parents when violence, coarse language, and sexual content appear in programs, rather than a rating system based only on age.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund, which coordinates the Black Community Crusade for Children.

Letters to The Post Snubbing author of 'An Original Man' is an affront

The book "An Original Man: The life and Times of Elijah Muhammad," is authored by my son, Claude "Andy" Clegg III, and was released to bookstores a few weeks ago.

Andy, a former resident of Charlotte, attended Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and has family and friends residing in this area.

In November, it was brought to my attention that articles regarding the book and the author were published in quite a few newspapers around the state and in some newspapers in other states. Also, several television and radio stations in the Triad area (where Andy resides), as well as National Public Radio, have interviewed him or invited him to do talk shows. As a subscriber to The Charlotte Observer for years, I contacted The Observer early in December to determine if there was any interest in doing an article. I mentioned in my letter that Andy has ties to Charlotte, and I enclosed several articles which had appeared in other newspapers. I did not receive a response from The Observer, and no information appeared in their newspaper until a poorly-written review of the book appeared in their March 9 issue.

The Observer's review was a negative, vague critique of the book. Frankly, their article did not do justice to the book nor to the author. The New York Times carried an excellent review of "An Original Man" in its, Jan. 23 issue. Admittedly, The Times article focuses more on the positive aspects of Elijah Muhammad's life and leadership, and it is fluently written and easy to understand.

Andy is neither pro nor anti-Muslim. His book is a fact-based, unbiased account of a man who is little known in history yet influenced and inspired many people, including such notable figures as Malcolm X. The inspiration for the book came while Andy was studying Afro-American history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The research on Muhammad and the Nation of Islam was submitted for his dissertation, a requirement for receiving his doctoral degree in history at the University of Michigan.

Andy is an unassuming, low-key individual and he is esteemed in academia. An historian who happens to be black, he is as knowledgeable of American history and world civilizations as he is of black history. His articles and book have been reviewed in The Chronicle of Higher Education, as well as in a number of major newspapers. He has been invited by a number of organizations and colleges to give lectures, book reading, and interviews. His next television appearances will be on C-Span's Booknotes program and America's Black Forum on March 30.

With the exception of The Charlotte Post, the media in Charlotte has been non-responsive in bringing "An Original Man" to the public. Notwithstanding the controversial ideals to which the leader (Muhammad) espoused, the intent of the author was not to offend.

Elizabeth Burton
Charlotte

What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160. You can also use E-mail — charpost@clt.mindspring.com. All correspondence must include a daytime telephone number for verification.