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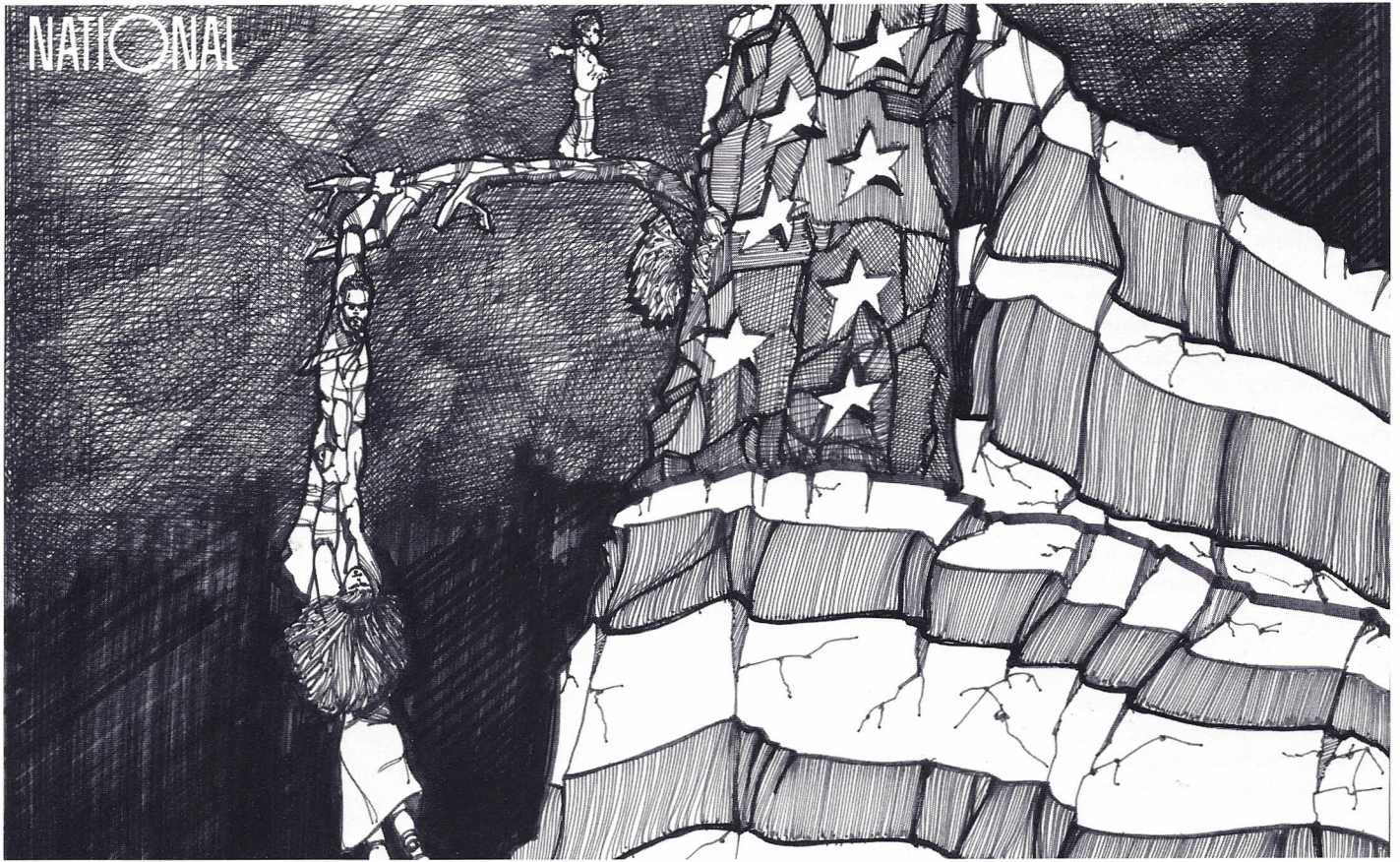


ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL LASSITER

# The State of Black America

By John E. Jacob

At the press conference releasing last year's report, I pointed out that we have been publishing this comprehensive analysis of the condition of Black Americans since 1976. And I went on to say the following:

"Never in that time has the State of Black America been more vulnerable. Never in that time have Black people so strongly felt themselves under siege. Never in that time have Black economic and civil rights gains been under such powerful attack. Never in that time have so many Black people been so alienated from their government."

That terrible situation intensified over the past 12 months. The state of Black Americans has become more desperate. The ranks of the Black poor sharply increased. About half a million more adult Blacks are jobless. Our unemployment rate is now 25 percent higher than it was at this time last year. Millions of poor people have been forced off the welfare rolls, off the food stamp rolls, off nutrition, school lunch and health programs.

Vital survival programs were slashed at the same time that the Black economy

was plunged even deeper into Depression. The result was to drive already disadvantaged people to the wall.

A year that started with savage cuts in poor people's programs ended with a riot in Miami. I do not want to imply a causal connection. But we must draw the obvious conclusion that intolerable living conditions, lack of opportunity, and perceived hostility breed an explosive anger that could erupt anywhere, anytime.

It is simply not true that we are all in the same boat — that the troubled national economy hurts everybody. Just about every measurement you care to choose — and there are a busload of statistics in this State of Black America report — show Black people suffering disproportionately.

What's more, white Americans know that when the economy recovers their conditions will improve. But Black people have no such assurances. We've always had double the white unemployment rate and triple the white poverty rate. We've never fully participated in post-recession recoveries. We are concentrated in the most vulnerable industries today, those that will never again employ as many people as in the past. Last hired, we are

the first fired and the Administration's anti-affirmative action policies ensure we will be the last rehired.

So a major question facing the nation in 1983 is whether the inevitable restructuring of the American economy will include Black people. Will we get a fair share of the jobs, the education and the training opportunities, or will we be denied them as in the past and present? Will current economic and social policies change for the better, or will we continue to be victimized by them?

Our nation's economic and social policies are like the runaway Soviet Cosmos satellite — fragmented, out of control, and dangerous.

Those policies were firmly rejected by the voters in 1982. But I see few signs that the Administration or the new Congress understand the rejection of those policies by the voters or the dangers those policies carry for this nation.

Instead, we still hear rumors of more cuts in already decimated programs that help people survive. There is still hand-wringing over the deficit without action to bring it into line by restoring tax cuts for the affluent and cancelling the Pentagon's blank check. And there is still the incredi-



ble belief that by passing a token job training program and a highway repair program that might create only 300,000 jobs we have done what is necessary to cut the unemployment rate.

Our elected representatives have to understand that the misery that stalks our land cannot be tolerated; the growing chasm between rich and poor, white and Black, employed and unemployed, suburbs and cities, is a split that drains our society of vitality and hope.

Americans can't look at those unemployment figures, and say "that's tough." We can't look at the soup lines and say, "too bad." We can't look at the kids hanging out on street corners with no education, no jobs, and no future, and say, "It's their problem."

It is *not* their problem. It is *our* problem—and all of us must come together to help solve it.

That is why I am calling on Congress to launch a bipartisan program of national economic recovery, with special attention to the needs not only of the so-called New Poor, but also of the disadvantaged who have traditionally suffered discrimination and poverty.

I call on our elected representatives to declare a State of National Economic Emergency and to implement our call for a Universal Employment and Training system.

Such a system would guarantee jobs and training for all. It would combine public works, improved public services, partnerships with the private sector, and a creative industrial policy.

These are extraordinary times. They demand extraordinary measures. □

*John Jacob is president of the National Urban League. The above remarks were made at the State of Black America Press Conference, January 19, 1983, at Howard University. Jacob is vice chairman of the university Board of Trustees.*

## Summary

The following are conclusions from summaries of eight major papers in the "The State of Black America, 1983" dealing with (1) Black students in predominantly white institutions, (2) politics and voting, (3) business development and public policy, (4) economic status of Black women, (5) changing demographics, (6) mental health, (7) Blacks in the military, and (8) economic status of the Black population. The 390-page report concludes with a set of policy recommendations and an extensive chronology of major events in Black America during 1982. For more information, write to the Communications Department, National Urban League, Inc., 500 E. 62nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10021:

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### 1

The impediments to Black educational progress everywhere are formidable. But in predominantly white institutions of higher learning (PWIs) the barriers are particularly frustrating. At every level, from elementary and secondary school through higher education, strong pressure against the discrimination that results in inferior education for many Blacks must be maintained and even accelerated.

... PWIs need to focus on the retention and graduation of Black students, providing an environment in which learning can take place for them, in addition to increased recruitment. Black students need to choose carefully where they decide to attend college. They should attend institutions that will enhance the possibility of successful graduation and career preparation. But they should recognize that some PWIs have not, cannot, or will not modify their faculty, student, and administrator's traditional behaviors in order to be more receptive to Black students. By choosing carefully, students may avoid failures. □

#### Mary F. Berry,

*professor of history and law, and senior fellow, Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, Howard University.*

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### 2

The incentive to vote against Reaganomics can be efficacious for a time, but in time there must be—*if margin of turnout is important*, and it clearly is—positive incentives as well. Democrats should not rest solely on the "push factor"—relying on the Republicans to repel Blacks; they must also focus on the "pull factor"—developing positive incentives to attract a larger margin of the vote.

... Obviously, both parties could calculate that the costs of courting the Black vote are too high. But this brings us ultimately and finally to the non-parochial nature of the Black agenda. The political party that astutely understands that the Black politico-economic agenda is, in fact, compatible with larger national interests will be the dominant party in the near future on the American political scene. There has not been a time in the struggle of Black Americans when the substantial goals of that struggle have not been linked—properly so—to the legitimate long-term goals of the American society. Most Blacks have understood this more so than whites. And therein lies the chal-

lenge to enlightened national political leadership.

... The challenge is to take the agenda so frequently and tediously articulated in the pages of this and previous *State(s) of Black America* as well as in the alternative budget set forth by the Congressional Black Caucus—for starters—and to understand those policy options as viable alternatives for the nation. It may require some ego adjustment on the part of the national decision-makers, but surely that ought to be a reasonable (albeit, inflationary!) price to pay if the potential benefits are societally enormous. □

#### Charles V. Hamilton,

*Wallace S. Sayre professor of government, Department of Political Science, Columbia University.*

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### 3

Government policies, in their zeal for economic recovery, in their desire to restore America's economic position in the global economy and in their efforts to stimulate Black business, raise as many problems for Black business as they solve. They have traditionally focused more on increasing the number of Black business owners than on improving the business performance of Black business owners.

... Bold but pragmatic, multidimensional but focused, zealous but clever, this new Black business public policy orientation should focus on the global as well as the neighborhood market; should resolve to advocate as well as advise Black business and should never sacrifice the community roots of Black businesses as they seek the most from regional, public, private and international business networks. □

#### Lenneal J. Henderson, Jr.

*professor, Howard University School of Business and Public Administration.*

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### 4

Black women are indeed the poorest of the major race-sex groups in American society. In addition, they head the poorest of poor families. They have the lowest average income both absolutely and relatively. This income, like that of all race-sex groups, comes preponderantly from wages and salaries. There is some income from property and self-employment, but it is insignificant in the aggregate.

... The relative increase in poverty among Black female-headed families was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of Black females heading families and the proportion of Black



families headed by females. The increase in female householders is a matter for concern, among other reasons, because earnings of too many Black women are too low to adequately provide for themselves and the families they head.

... The low incomes of Black women are not due to an unwillingness to work. Black women choose to work in larger numbers than white women, but due to high unemployment, the percent of all Black women who are actually employed is below the level for white women and all men.

... The oversupply of trained Black women to work results in employers being able to fill positions at lower rates than would prevail if the jobs were filled by men or white women. In that sense, private profit-makers are the chief beneficiaries of the current role of Black women in the labor force.

... Total incomes of Black women have increased relative to whites and Black men during the 1970s, but the continued inferior position of many Black women which is likely to be with us for some time suggests that public action beyond the self-help programs is needed to improve their relative standing. The high proportion of Black children living in poor families which are dependent upon the earnings of Black women lends additional urgency to the matter. □

**Barbara A. P. Jones**  
*professor of economics,*  
*Clark College.*

## 5

Central cities are becoming increasingly Black and poor. This is a serious problem that will require much skill and imagination to solve. But while these conditions represent a challenge to our ingenuity, they also represent an opportunity for Black people to regain some of the resources and benefits that have been denied them. As Blacks begin to gain political control in those areas where they are in the majority, these circumstances present an opportunity for them to gain some economic control as well. □

**James D. McGhee,**  
*director of research,*  
*National Urban League.*

## 6

Black Americans are at high risk for maladaptation, behavioral disabilities, and mental illness throughout their life cycles. There appears to be no safety nets that protects the health or psyche

of the Afro-American from institutional racism, poverty, high unemployment and a stagnant economy.

... The mental health care system should provide greater and more innovative care to the Black community based on the elimination of racial prejudice and a development of cross-cultural perspectives which should be included in all training programs. The numbers of minority health care professionals must be increased dramatically over the current meager two to three percent through affirmative action programs. □

**Alvin F. Poussaint,**  
*associate professor of psychiatry and associate dean for student affairs,*  
*Harvard University.*

## 7

The military, like other institutions, represents a microcosm of the larger society. As a consequence, it is not immune to the personal biases and prejudices of its members. It has gone farther than most other social institutions to combat and eliminate racial discrimination. President Truman's executive order to desegregate the military in 1948 antedated the landmark *Brown versus the Board of Education* decision by six years. Consequently, the last all-Black military unit was disbanded in 1955, at a time when racial integration in our society was more a dream than reality.

... Although representation may remain the dominant military manpower issue of this decade, its overall magnitude and the fervor of its critics may actually decline as the perceived quality of the armed forces continues to increase.

... The foregoing observations suggest the likelihood of slight to moderate reductions in the proportion of Blacks in the military over the next decade *assuming* higher unemployment rates and the propensity of youth to enlist. This shrinkage among Black personnel is most likely to be found among males in the enlisted ranks. It is probable, therefore, that efforts to recruit Black officers will continue to be made in all services.

... Perhaps the one area where we may continue to see increased Black participation in the military, *independent* of the representation issue, is with respect to women.

... The military will remain an attractive option for Black men and women into the foreseeable future. What is less clear is whether policies implemented by the Department of Defense under the guise of quality control will result in a

moderation of Black participation in the military. □

**Alvin J. Schexnider,**  
*associate dean, School of Community and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University.*

## 8

The experience with the current recession clearly demonstrates the futility of strict reliance on laissez-faire as a policy. This strategy has surely gotten the economy into one "hell of a mess." To explain why this is true would take us too far afield. However, at the risk of oversimplification, the reason is that most of the current economic problems are the direct result of the laissez-faire response to market forces which are arising from structural changes in the world economy. The independent pursuit of self-interest by individual economic agents in face of these changes is exactly what is creating our current mess.

... Continued reliance on laissez-faire will most likely prolong and increase the intensity of current economic difficulties. When we come out of it, after having paid a considerable price in terms of economic disruption and human suffering, we will likely be a society that is considerably poorer and considerably less equal. We would have wasted considerable resources and greatly reduced the prospects of achieving the good society both at home and worldwide. What's worse, we will still only be safe until we reach the next major crisis.

... The economic problems of Blacks can probably not be resolved without improving the functioning of the economy. We need to refocus attention away from the failings of the individual to the failing of the system. We need to find ways to improve the performance of the economy, to increase the fairness of its allocational mechanisms, and to reduce existing structural inequality. There is little question that achieving these changes will require greater government involvement in the economy. □

**David M. Swinton** *director, the Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy.*