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Source: *The Black Scholar*, September/October 1985, Vol. 16, No. 5, Black Political Economy 1985 (September/October 1985), pp. 37-49

.Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41067205>

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REAGANOMICS AND BLACK AMERICANS

by Arthur L. Tolson

In January, 1981, President Ronald Reagan entered the White House with one needed mandate from the American people: put the sluggish United States economic system in order,¹ for he felt himself committed to the nation's traditional capitalist orientation "that if only free enterprise can be liberated, the country will once again achieve a strong rate of economic growth, with rising standards of living for all."²

Such a capitalist point of view made Reagan a ready convert to the supply-side economics, for, as former California governor Pat Brown previously remarked about him, "... his ideas, his philosophy, his perception, his comprehension of human affairs and society are neatly confined to a simple framework of thought and action that permits no doubts and acknowledges no sobering complexities."³ Particularly with regard to what's needed to solve the nation's economy.

Reaganomics, with its supply-side proposals and remedies, involves furthermore an inherent belief that growth is the indispensable element or factor in the creation of new jobs for all within the economy.⁴ Essential to the essence of the American Dream is upward mobility which offers a benefit said to be greater than individual development, because of the protection that the people receive from entrenched central gov-

ernmental control.⁵

Therefore, opportunity for advancement by millions of poor and unemployed people is achieved by growth of the economy, thus reducing the need for governmental programs of those millions living in substandard circumstances.⁶ Lastly, there is the Reaganomic principle that it is growth which makes the nation wealthier, for the Reaganites state emphatically that "only a vigorously growing economy could create the new jobs and the new income that would stop inflation, lower interest rates, and . . . to spend 'what we must spend on national defense.'"⁷

A constant theme of Reaganomics were the following statements:

"Big government is the problem."⁸

"I don't believe in government funding of elections."⁹

"We must move boldly and decisively to control the runaway growth of Federal spending . . ."¹⁰

"Get rid of fraud, waste and abuse."¹¹

"Get the government off our backs."¹²

"We need to make America great again."¹³

"Faith in the marketplace."¹⁴

"Let's quit tinkering with the free enterprise system."¹⁵

"The federal government is at war with its own business community."¹⁶

"I would like to make government a friend of the American industrial community, not an enemy."¹⁷

"Free enterprise is becoming far less free in the name of something called consumerism."¹⁸

Appointed to important federal positions were the following who supported Reaganomic doctrines:

Representative David Stockman of Michigan, as Director of the Office of Management and Budget, businessman Donald Regan, President of Merrill, Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith, as Secretary of the Treasury, Norman Ture in the new post of Undersecretary of the Treasury for Tax Policy, Paul Craig Roberts as Undersecretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy, Bervil

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Sprinkel, chief economist at Chicago's Harris Trust & Savings Bank, as Undersecretary of the Treasury of Monetary Policy, and Dr. Murray Weidenbaum as Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers and Dr. Martin Anderson as the President's Chief Adviser for Domestic Policy and Casper Weinberger as Secretary of Defense.¹⁹

Reaganomics, with its emphasis on the supply-side theory, apparently was nothing new to Reagan, for fifty years, prior to his inauguration, he was taught Say's Law at Eureka College.²⁰ Once again, it was Jean Baptiste Say, 1767–1832, who “theorized that purchasing power and producing power always are equal. That means that if there is a glut of goods, it must be caused not by inadequate demand, but by some outside interference with supply.”²¹ In Reagan and his supporter's views, this was reference to the federal government.

A further understanding of Reaganomics can be achieved through examining the persons who are closest to Reagan, thereby clarifying what he “and his helpers are doing for—and to—the United States.”²² Essentially, Reaganomics involves a massive redistribution of wealth and power, wherein the Reagan administration “enthusiastically enriches further the already obscenely rich” at the expense of millions of the poor.²³

During the 1950s, Reagan had begun to augment his circle of friends with a set of no-show business ones, who were ultra-conservative millionaires in the California area.²⁴ Some thirty years later this super elite group became the basis of Reagan's “Kitchen Cabinet,” whom the president said in 1980 “would be my inner circle of advisers . . . almost like the board of directors.”²⁵ Who are these members with their Reaganomic views and ideas about the capitalist economy? What positions do they hold?

REAGAN'S COHORTS

At the top is Reagan whose net worth in 1981 was \$1,100,000, although the *New York Times* estimates it at \$4-5,000,000.²⁶ Casper Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, served as vice-president and general counsel of the Bechtel Group, that in 1980 received \$11,000,000,000 in contracts.²⁷ The

Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, was once president of United Technologies, the third largest United States defense contractor.²⁸

Donald T. Regan was Secretary of the Treasury, and had been chairman and chief of Merrill Lynch, the nation's largest brokerage company.²⁹ The Attorney General position was given to William French Smith, a member of Reagan's kitchen cabinet of millionaires and a trustee of the Ronald Reagan trust.³⁰

Malcolm Baldrige became Secretary of Commerce, and he had served as chairman of Scovill, Inc., with sales of \$1,000,000,000 a year.³¹ The Secretary of Labor position went to Raymond Donovan, formerly a vice-president of a \$150,000,000 yearly construction company.³² Samuel Pierce, Jr., a black, became Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and was formerly a director of Prudential Insurance Company and U.S. Industries.³³

James Watt, an anti-environmentalist lawyer and formerly associated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, became Secretary of the Interior.³⁴ John Black, whose farm business grosses more than \$1,000,000 a year, was chosen as Secretary of Health and Human Services.³⁵

Hence, from the moment of his assumption of the Presidency, Reagan and his advisers had put in high governmental positions a Reaganomic-molded “team of public officials who think like businessmen or who will please those who do.”³⁶ For, throughout the business world, consisting of over 17,000,000 businesses and the launching of several million new ones annually,³⁷ goes the saying, “We've finally got a man (in the White House) who thinks like a businessman.”³⁸

REAGANOMICS AND BLACKS

There are several general categories, wherein the impact of Reaganomics has been particularly devastating on black Americans over the past four years, from its onset in 1981 through August, 1984, which is the delimitation of this study. These

categories, reflecting the response and reactions primarily of blacks, shall also include to a degree the impact of Reaganomics upon other minorities as well as white Americans.

The six impact categories emphasized are: A. The Poor and Poverty, B. Joblessness and the Unemployed, C. Hunger and Homelessness, D. Prominent Blacks and Their Allies, E. Mayors: Black and White, F. The Economists, and G. Reagan Reacts. For the sake of brevity, the first two are here-in discussed at this time.

A. The Poor and Poverty

Since the 1930s, many authorities have been dealing with the problems of the poor and poverty as they continue to pursue that elusive dream that these two categories can be totally eliminated, once and for all times, in the U.S. capitalist economy.³⁹

That some progress was made toward a numerical reduction occurred "between 1950 and 1969 when the number identified as 'poor' declined from 42 million to 24.3 million—or from 28 per cent of all Americans to 12 per cent."⁴⁰ By 1971 the official figures showed that 25.5 million Americans—1 in every 8—were living in poverty, described by the government as a family of four with an annual income of \$3,968 or less.⁴¹

Much later, about two years before President Reagan entered the White House, the Census Bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce issued a report stating "that an estimated 25.2 million persons of all races were below the poverty level in 1979, of whom 7.8 million were black."⁴² Included in the preceding was that the median family income for black families was \$11,650, while that for Hispanics averaged \$11,320 and for whites \$20,520.⁴³

After assuming the presidency in January 1981, Reagan immediately began lobbying for his economic program, labeled Reaganomics by his opponents, as he proclaimed that his budget cuts in education, job training, public service employment and social services "won't hurt the poor."⁴⁴ These budget cuts totaled \$22.5 billion and accounted for more than half of the \$44 billion that he wanted to eliminate from the budget

former President Carter had sent to Congress for fiscal 1980.⁴⁵

Strong opposition from black Americans immediately expressed itself, when civil rights leader Vernon Jordan, addressing the Cleveland chapter of the Urban League during its 63rd annual luncheon, said that Reaganomics "will ensure that some poor people 'will go under.'"⁴⁶ "Furthermore," Jordan emphasized, "the Reagan program can be summed up in the words of a biblical inscription which says simply, 'To those who have, to them shall be given, to those who have not, even that which they seem to have shall be taken away.'"⁴⁷ Referring to most federal programs, Jordan added that "But for these and other programs, we would have 40 million in poverty instead of 25 million."⁴⁸

Substantiation of the preceding was given as the Congressional Budget Office's report stated that "20 million to 25 million people at or just above the poverty line would be hurt by the Reagan proposals for cuts in foodstamps, welfare, school lunches and public service jobs."⁴⁹ Several months later, the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity predicted that Reaganomics would definitely swell the ranks of America's 29.3 million poor as "those who hover just above the poverty level" will fall below it.⁵⁰

In spite of Reagan's personal reassurances that his budget cuts program "will move us toward black economic freedom because it is aimed at lifting the entire country,"⁵¹ black American leaders at the 72nd NAACP Annual Convention in Denver expressed mistrust of Reaganomics, fearing that it would "cost their movement 15 years of hard-won gains."⁵²

ANTI-POOR LEGISLATION

Despite all of the widespread opposition and dark predictions, Reagan, on August 13, 1981, signed into law two bills.⁵³ The first one, which struck hardest against millions of Americans, including blacks, provided for \$35.2 billion in cuts, with approximately \$25 billion—70 percent of the

budget savings—being made in programs affecting the poor.⁵⁴ Hence, Reaganomics emerged full-bloom as an attempt to dispel the notion that the masses of black people should look to Washington to solve their economic problems, and that the private sector can make up for cuts in government programs.”⁵⁵

In November, 1981, Jordan, the Urban League president, speaking in Rochester, New York, once again blasted Reaganomics, saying it signified ‘hostility’ toward Blacks and the poor. “Reaganomics represent, in my view, hostility toward the needs and aspirations of black Americans and poor people.”⁵⁶ A month later, Stephen Push published his article entitled “Reagan’s cuts make people sick,”⁵⁷ while Louise Cook responded with one named “Recession said turning ‘ordinarily honest people’ into shop-lifters.”⁵⁸

The negative impact of Reaganomics was clearly evident in January, 1982, as the (Toronto) *Globe and Mail* article written by Elizabeth Scheotchuk reported that “The poor are not the only ones being hurt by the budget cuts of the Reagan Administration. Government employees and contractors are being forced on the unemployment lines, and even farmers are being squeezed.”⁵⁹ By June, from thirteen cities, more than three hundred “Acorn” activists put up two tent “cities” in front of the White House to protest against Congressional approval of President Reagan’s 1983 first budget resolution, involving more future budget cuts.⁶⁰ One Acorn leader, the Reverend Grover Wright of Philadelphia, made the following declaration:

On a scale of one to five, five being the highest, I would rate President Reagan minus zero. He is quite insensitive to the fact that we are even here. His budget reflects where he—and the Congress—is at: they want a military buildup; they want to undergird the haves and ignore the have-nots.⁶¹

Two months later the destructive effects of Reaganomics upon poor and poverty-stricken blacks, Hispanics and whites were revealed by several news sources well into 1984. Using 1981 totals, one magazine reported that the number of people living

below the poverty level was in 1960, 39.9 million; in 1973, 23.0 million, and in 1981, 31.8 million.⁶² One year of Reaganomics added 2.6 million people to the nation’s poor,⁶³ including 9,173,000 Blacks, 3,713,000 Hispanics, and 21,553,000 whites, bringing the total to approximately 34,439,000 persons.⁶⁴ Percentage-wise, the awesome impact and effect upon black Americans of Reaganomics was starkly revealed in 1982:⁶⁵ Blacks—35.6; Hispanics—29.9; Total Population—15.0; Whites—12.0.

Continuing its destructive course, Reaganomics or “President Reagan’s economic policies,” according to a report by the U.S. Conference of City Human Services officials, “are creating a class of ‘new poor’ Americans—the newly unemployed who are forced to seek assistance. . . .”⁶⁶ Observed the conference president, William Donahue, “. . . the Reagan administration should halt its budget slashing . . . at the same time that 11 million people cannot find jobs, (and) over \$30 billion has been cut from the programs that can help them.”⁶⁷

Thousands of black Americans in the “new poor” class were flocking in the cities across the country seeking food and hot meals soup kitchens, wherever they could be found: New York City, Detroit, Trenton, Washington, D.C., Tucson, Tulsa, Salt Lake City, Houston, St. Louis, Evanston, Ill., Arvada, Calif., Los Angeles, Gary, Ind., and San Antonio, as 1982 ended.⁶⁸

Even as “Reagan’s War On The Poor” persevered well into 1983,⁶⁹ the “‘New poor’ numbers (are) growing in food lines” also,⁷⁰ Mrs. Coretta Scott King, the widow of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking before thousands during the 20th anniversary of the “March On Washington,” August 28, 1983, strongly criticized Reaganomics “for ignoring the poor and disadvantaged.”⁷¹ Furthermore, Mrs. King emphasized:

But even as we commemorate that great event, we commiserate in the approaching third anniversary of an administration out of touch with all but an elite group of Americans, an administration which has continually attempted and often succeeded in turning back the clock on advances of the last 20 years. . . .

Despite repeated denials from the president himself, administration cuts have been targeted to families of moderate and low income. . . . Half of American families—those with incomes of less than \$20,000 a year—have suffered 70 percent of President Reagan's budget cuts.

. . . many Americans are no better off today than they were four years ago because Reagan's 'unfair policies' have curtailed their freedom.

He has sown the seeds of a twisted notion that rich can get richer by making the poor poorer . . . and this is somehow good for America.

. . . 'As a man sows, so shall he reap.' Ronald Reagan has sown poorly and he will reap poorly.⁷²

In October it was noted that "nearly 10 million black Americans . . . continue to live just as King said in 1963, 'on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.'"⁷³ Thus confirming the fact that although twenty years ago about nine million blacks had incomes below the government's poverty level, by 1983 the number had doubled to 18 million, indicating a black poverty rate of 36 percent, while the white poverty rate of 12 percent was much lower.⁷⁴ Hence, the continuing negative effects of Reaganomics upon Americans.

Black Americans, during the fourth anniversary of Reagan's term in the White House, continued to assail Reaganomics as Urban League president John E. Jacob issued the "State of Black America" report, accusing the Reagan administration and Congress of being complacent toward the plight of millions of black Americans and economically deprived whites, with a callous and unfeeling attitude.⁷⁵ Warning that poor blacks are relegated to an out-of-sight, out-of-mind status under Reaganomics, Jacob stated explicitly:

The state of black Americans is disastrous. That is the only conclusion reasonable people can draw from the report we are issuing today.

While white Americans celebrate a long-overdue economic recovery and a falling unemployment rate, black America is buried in a depression of crushing proportions. The plain ugly fact is that there is no recovery for black Americans. . . . the administration and Congress (have failed) to recognize the 'tragic situation' blacks and the poor now face.⁷⁶

Reaganomics was further assaulted as advocates for the poor, independent budget analysts, and social scientists said that their warnings and predictions to the Reagan administration three years earlier had come

true because they had emphasized that the budget cuts would always be very harmful to all low-income people, usually numbering in the millions.⁷⁷ "Clearly," wrote William Raspberry, "blacks believe that the economic policies of the Reagan administration (Reaganomics) are harmful to poor blacks."⁷⁸ About eight days later, February 24, 1984, the Census Bureau reported a rise in poverty during the Reagan years.⁷⁹

Convincingly, the Reverend Jesse Jackson accused Reaganomics of being a failure in the following words:

But under his (Reagan) administration, the misery index is on the rise, the danger index is on the rise; five million more people in poverty, schools closing while jails are being built, jail wardens getting tenure while teachers with master's degrees lose their jobs. The No. 1 agricultural system in the history of the world, and yet there are 20 million Americans malnourished tonight . . . something has gone wrong.

In the last four years, with the Reagan cutbacks we have seen more and more people fall from poverty into destitution. We need leadership, we need leadership. Our leadership has become mean and punitive.⁸⁰

Trying for the umpteenth time to defuse what he regarded as "a riptide of criticism that claims this Administration's economic policies impoverish the poor and bestow benefits on the rich," Reagan responded disdainfully by suggesting, "This distorted view was created by special-interest demagoguery and political-year oratory dutifully reported by a goodly portion of the press."⁸¹

Furthermore, David Nyhan concluded, "It has become apparent over the last three years that Reagan is unshakable in his conviction that his policies are fair, prudent and proper. It is apparent that he refuses to face facts."⁸²

facing the clock

and that's a big our
with just enough time in it
to include all of us

the quick and not so too

—Q.R. Hand, Jr.

Black Americans continued to deny that Reaganomics was of any help to their deprived millions of the poor and impoverished people as Dutch Morial, the New Orleans mayor, proclaimed that "Spending cuts hurt the poor. . . . In short, the losses are disproportionate on minorities and poor citizens of our nation."

B. The Jobless and Unemployed

An enduring consequence of American capitalism or Reaganomics are joblessness and unemployment throughout the long history of this social system. Its origins can be traced back to Venice, Italy, of the eighth and ninth centuries.⁸⁴ About two years before Reagan assumed the presidency, "The Shameful Roots of Minority Unemployment" was published by Walter E. Williams, a noted Temple University economics professor, who emphasized that he was "convinced the source of the problem is the federal government acting in behalf of powerful interest groups—particularly organized labor."⁸⁵

To some extent, prophesizing Reaganomics, Williams further noted, "For years now, the government has been wasting money and time trying to 'solve' minority unemployment with one hand while causing it with the other. What minorities need are not additional handouts but bold legislative changes that will improve their economic opportunity. The improvement will come not through *more* laws but through *fewer*."⁸⁶ Obviously, Williams must have been associated with the supply-side school of thought from which Reaganomics eventually emerged.

Perhaps, equally predictive several days before Reagan entered the White House was William Pomeroy's "Capitalist economies to worsen into '82," wherein he wrote:

At year's end (1980), the worst forecasts have been made for the economics of the capitalist world. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the authoritative economic coordinating body for the 24 leading capitalist countries, has pointed to a severe deepening of the economic crisis for its members over the upcoming 18 months, that is, to the middle of 1982.

One of the grimmest aspects of the OECD prediction is that unemployment in the 24

member countries will rise from the present (1981) over-all figure of 23 million to 25.5 million. Young people are and will continue to be hit hardest by joblessness.

The OECD had delineated a 'cumulative deterioration' in the employment situation in the seven leading capitalist countries (the U.S., West Germany, Japan, France, Britain, Italy and Canada).⁸⁷

In its analysis, the OECD report expressed concern and grave doubts about the policies to which the incoming Reagan administration is pledged, especially tax cuts coupled with high defense spending. . . .⁸⁸

Thus, throughout the world, doubts were being expressed about the dire consequences of Reaganomics even before its chief perpetrator was officially sworn into his office.

Realizing the impending impact of Reagan's "hit list" of proposed budget cuts, which covered every human needs program affecting millions of black Americans, the 18-member Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) emphatically warned the President they would fight its economic and budget policies which victimized minorities, working people, and the poor.⁸⁹

Walter E. Fauntroy, the CBC chairperson and a Democrat from the District of Columbia, disclosed the 13 percent adult black unemployment rate, the over 40 percent black youth joblessness, and the possible unemployment of a million more white workers. Along with this, the CBC declared, was the fact that black people were disproportionately represented in the ranks of those hardest hit by inflation. And lastly, they informed Reagan "that the goal of affirmative action is to increase black participation in all areas of American economic life."⁹⁰

MINORITIES LOSE JOBS

Reaganomics had no positive response to the plight of blacks on the west coast as "Calif. suicides rise; minorities hardest hit by plant shutdowns."⁹¹ For Geraldine Johnson, chairperson of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, addressing a state senate hearing, informed them "that at least 25 percent of the Californians who lost their jobs . . . were minority workers,"⁹² and, over the past five years, about 200 plants of

all sizes had gone out of business, resulting in a loss to the state of 72,000 jobs.⁹³ Meanwhile, in Oakland, California, said Johnson, "Unemployment is 11 percent and among black youth, it is as high as 60 percent."⁹⁴

As for the high suicide rate among the unemployed, the preceding city was named America's "suicide city,"⁹⁵ according to the San Francisco *Examiner*. Noted Johnson, who concluded that "Suicides have soared because of high joblessness in California, where close to one million Californians out of a work force of eight million are unemployed."⁹⁶

Reaganomics, with its supply-side emphasis, of course, offered no consolation to the nation's unemployed millions. Later on, in Maumee, Ohio, were "9,000 applicants seeking 90 jobs" in a new battery manufacturing plant and some of the unemployed traveled from distances up to 200 miles.⁹⁷

Calling President Reagan's economic recovery plan "jelly bean economics," because it would rob the nation of programs designed to "break the cycle of poverty," Ernest Morial, New Orleans black mayor, spoke to an NAACP dinner of 1,800 persons, telling all that "Reagan's plans 'will mean disaster for American cities, especially the poor in those cities, most of whom are black.'"⁹⁸ Noted Morial, "Jelly bean economics (Reaganomics) will only make the situation worse. A balanced budget is worthless if we mortgage the lives of our children and our futures to reach it."⁹⁹

By October 1981 the civilian labor force totaled approximately 106,760,000 employed persons, while those unemployed reached 7,900,000.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, again the adverse consequence of Reaganomics upon black Americans is conclusively shown through the unemployment rates: white, 6.5; black, 14.9; and Hispanic, 9.8.¹⁰¹

However, two months later, the outlook turns to one of extreme bleakness as "More Turning to Charity as Recession, Joblessness Take Toll," when "Churches, rescue missions and charity groups across the nation are all saying the same thing: more people

than last year [1980] are knocking on their doors for a bowl of soup and shelter from the cold. And the reason, many charity workers say, is unemployment and the economy (Reaganomics). Nine million Americans are out of work—the most since 1939."¹⁰²

In its annual "The State of Black America—1982" report, the National Urban League through its president, John E. Jacob, stated "that black economic and civil rights gains were under heavy attack last year (1981) helping to create record unemployment and a pronounced sense of alienation from the national government within black America. For black Americans, 1981 was a year of economic depression, savage cuts in survival programs for the poor . . . the Administration created a feeling among many blacks that they are a forgotten people."¹⁰³

That Reaganomics was not working became clear to millions as "A few of the more than 9 million unemployed Americans are trying to send President Ronald Reagan a message: They want jobs—not tax cuts, as 1982 got underway."¹⁰⁴ Complained Kirt Flowers, a 19-year-old Philadelphia black, "I would tell the president . . . the teen-age youth in Philadelphia is very angry at him because he didn't tell them there would be no jobs."¹⁰⁵ Even Reagan himself had expressed some concern for the unemployed by this time, because he had stated, "Unemployment is a national affliction that blights every part of the nation."¹⁰⁶

DEPRESSION LEVEL

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO union reported that "over 30 million U.S. citizens are suffering under the debilitating effects of depression-level unemployment. . . . According to AFL-CIO estimates, about 11 million workers couldn't find jobs . . . the highest unemployment figure since the 1930s."¹⁰⁷

Two months later, according to federal government figures, unemployment reached 9.4 percent—breaking the post-World War II record with some 10,300,000 people out of jobs.¹⁰⁸

Charged Senator Edward M. Kennedy:

... the new figures show conclusively that Reagan's economic program has failed to do anything but 'deliver pink slip after pink slip to millions of decent men and women.'

Ronald Reagan's bread lines are longer ... the 'country is now harvesting the bitter fruits of a failed and unfair economic policy. ... Americans all over the country are losing their homes, their hopes and their pride.'¹⁰⁹

During May 1982, 10,500,000 Americans were jobless with blacks, 18.7 percent; Hispanics, 13.9 percent; and whites, 8.5 percent.¹¹⁰ According to John E. Jacob of the Urban League, "A significant number of white people are now unemployed. (There is a) significant number of white people who are hungry. They come to where they think they can get help."¹¹¹

Attacking Reaganomics, Jacob continued, "This administration has done much to exacerbate the problems of the poor in this country. There is enough meanness to go around in Washington ... when you see the poor getting poorer and the rich getting richer, you cannot help but feel the unfairness." ...¹¹²

Perhaps in an attempt to convince millions of black Americans to remain complacent and accept their unemployable status, Lawrence M. O'Rourke's article "High Unemployment Predicted Into Next Century," further confuses the impact of Reaganomics:

The United States faces a prolonged era of high unemployment, even if President Ronald Reagan's conservative economic theories work.

That is the consensus of economists, business, labor and political leaders interviewed by the *Post-Dispatch* over the last two months. They predict that for many years, a steady force of at least 10 million Americans will be constantly looking for jobs. [This is] ... a pessimistic picture of American employment in the next 18 years and beyond.

Joblessness will affect not only the blue-collar, lunchbox crowd. It will jeopardize the affluence and security of professionals, executives and managers.¹¹³

More confusion was added when President Reagan spoke before black Republicans, calling "the Great Society social programs a dismal failure that created a new kind of bondage for millions of American citizens."¹⁰⁴ At the same time, he steadfastly maintained "that he has kept his promise to

reverse 16 years of steadily growing government spending on the poor." Continuing its disastrous course Reaganomics resulted in such widespread joblessness to the extent that 16 million people—black and white—gave up their health insurance.¹¹⁵

In releasing its 1983 edition of "The State of Black America" in January of that year, the National Urban League declared that the economic and social policies of Reaganomics had worsened the plight of black Americans the previous year.¹¹⁶ So much so until John Jacob, head of the civil rights group, stated emphatically to President Reagan that a state of national economic emergency with guaranteed jobs to all be declared, for "the nation needed a 'bipartisan program of national economic recovery, with specific attention to the needs not only of the so-called 'new poor', but also to the disadvantaged who have traditionally suffered discrimination and poverty."¹¹⁷

To millions of black Americans, joblessness could mean many unpleasant things and among them receiving aid from West Germans moved by television news pictures of the misery suffered by America's unemployed.¹¹⁸ While on the other hand, it could mean hunting for your food and living in a car.¹¹⁹

Before two thousand jobless workers on the national Capitol steps, who were demanding jobs and denouncing Reaganomics, John Conyers, the black U.S. Representative from Michigan and the only congressman to appear, "delivered a stinging criticism of Reagan and Democratic congressional leaders alike for backing a program to create jobs that he considers to be too weak."¹²⁰ Exclaimed Conyers, "You're about to get sold out again. The Democrats are getting ready to get in bed with Ronald Reagan again. The Democrats are about to sell out on a chump jobs program."¹²¹

As "Thousands seek 170 cleanup jobs" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,¹²² and "12,000 seek 100 new jobs" in Hartville, Ohio,¹²³ the negative impact of Reaganomics upon black Americans was starkly revealed when Labor Statistics Commissioner Janet Norwood, ap-

pearing before a Senate committee, testified that “the startling high unemployment rate among America’s black teenagers is the result of lack of skills and lack of hope . . . and for black teenagers (it is) about 45 percent.”¹²⁴ Not only did black Americans suffer from joblessness, whites were also confronted with similar difficulties.

DISPROPORTIONATE EFFECT

That Reaganomics was of vast consequence to millions of black Americans was strikingly evident as “Layoff of Minorities Are (Proved To Be) Disproportionate,” according to Bill Sing, who noted that the pattern of minority layoffs are repeated with distressing frequency throughout the nation.¹²⁵

Meanwhile, although “Jobless rate dips in May,” and Martin S. Feldstein, chairman of the president’s Council of Economic Advisers, exclaimed that it was another month of solid recovery, Thomas P. O’Neill, Speaker of the House, disagreed.¹²⁶ For, he said with 11.2 million Americans still without a job demonstrated that “This is still a rich man’s economy. The rich are getting richer and the poor are suffering.”¹²⁷

On the other hand, the AFL-CIO union charged that “a drop of one-tenth of 1 percent is not a ‘recovery.’ A real recovery is not possible until (the) government fulfills its responsibilities to target economic policy to need.”¹²⁸ Substantiating the preceding were the following headlines: “Whites 3 times as rich as blacks: study”;¹²⁹ “Women, Minorities: ‘Disproportionate’ U.S. Firings”;¹³⁰ “Job hopes draw thousands”;¹³¹ “Black income gap hasn’t closed: report.”¹³² “Good Times still an elusive dream.”¹³³

Redirecting its strategy in a new and, perhaps, final direction was the NAACP meeting in New Orleans, where they were addressed by former Vice President and now the 1984 Democratic nominee for the presidency, Walter F. Mondale, long a favorite of the NAACP, because of his favorable civil rights record.¹³⁴ Said Mondale:

In the ‘60s, integration moved black Americans to the front of the bus. In the ‘70s, affirmative

action secured you the right to drive the bus. In the ‘80s, you must have the chance to own the bus company.¹³⁵

During the five-day convention, the civil rights officials, laying plans for an attack on Reaganomics, stressed that “they were trying to reshape the association into a youthful crusade waging a new battle for economic justice. And, although the group continues to press its traditional civil rights concerns—such as fair housing and school desegregation—economic issues now dominate. . . .”¹³⁶

Noting that the 1982 rate of unemployment was above that of 1981, the Labor Department reported that “26.5 million U.S. workers encountered some joblessness dur-

our hemisphere

afro carib latin hill billies
semitic hamitic semi dravidian natives
who might have come from india
and sho nuff be in the indies here

those carrying glyphics to the new
world whose old dwellers take to the
hills still
and teach us to worship there

black and brown and golden and
peach pink urban populists and
left winged
anarchistic
universal
qua qua versal
color coded
god headed
new world people
of every shade there is and
we’re makin more every day

a class containing classes
the x’s and y’s of manifesting humanities
be coming
the music of the world
containing all
excluding none

let the klan and
the nazis go back

we home here now

—Q.R. Hand, Jr.

ing the year and 4 million were unemployed for the entire year. Black workers experienced a higher jobless rate, with 33.4 percent out of work at some time in 1982. Among black men the rate was 36.5 percent.¹³⁷

During the March on Washington, August 28, 1983, at which 250,000 thronged the mall in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the historic march, Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, warned President Reagan:

We serve you notice, Mr. Reagan, that we are not here to live in the past and leave here singing 'We Shall Overcome.' We are here because we are committed to the elimination of Reaganism from the face of the earth. We have had enough of it.¹³⁸

Admitting the disastrous impact of Reaganomics upon black Americans was Janet L. Norwood, commissioner of labor statistics in the Labor Department, during the fall of 1983, as civilian unemployment stood at 9.5 percent:

We find there is a large disparity . . . between the whites and blacks. . . . I think there are a host of economic . . . circumstances behind it . . . I think the problem of jobs for our black teen-agers is a serious one.¹³⁹

Added Maxine Bailey, "Clearly the implications of black youth unemployment are far-reaching: greater crime rates, more welfare dependency, and greater idleness and restlessness among these youths."¹⁴⁰

In the light of the preceding, Larry Speakes, President Reagan's spokesman responded, "This pause in declining unemployment . . . point to a steadily improving jobs picture. Economic news continues to be encouraging."¹⁴¹

Declared the AFL-CIO union: "There 'is no recovery' for one of 10 Americans still out of work. Worse, of the 10.7 million jobless, only 36 percent are receiving unemployment insurance compensation benefits."¹⁴²

FOCUS ON EMPLOYED

In the election year of 1984, the supporters of Reaganomics began to shift, to a

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degree, their focus of attention from the unemployed to the number of employed as the government announced that "The total of people holding jobs reached a record 102.9 million in December up from 99 million in December 1982, prompting the administration to revise its unemployment forecast for 1984."¹⁴³

Proclaimed the Reaganites, Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan, who said the figures show that 'the Reagan program is on target,'¹⁴⁴ while Jerry Jasinowski, chief economist for the National Association of Manufacturers, claimed that "if the labor force continues to grow we are going to find unemployment falling quite rapidly this year."¹⁴⁵

Countering the preceding remarks about the success of Reaganomics were the Democratic presidential candidate, Walter Mondale, who said "unemployment is still too high, especially for blacks."¹⁴⁶ Janet L. Norwood, labor statistics commissioner, noted "Thirty-one percent of the 1.5 million people in that category (discouraged workers) were black,"¹⁴⁷ and AFL-CIO economist Rudy Oswald stated "The picture of black Americans is still very bleak with unemploy-

ment worsening . . . and indications that a large number of black Americans have just dropped out of the labor force entirely."¹⁴⁸ Thus, although there were 9.2 million people jobless, the Reagan administration continued to boast about the highest number of people employed in the history of the nation.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, "Thousands Line Up for Jobs at a Buffalo Hotel,"¹⁵⁰ "For black America, things aren't looking so good," says William Raspberry,¹⁵¹ and John E. Jacob stated "that black Americans 'faced continued economic depression and a callous disregard for their quest for equal opportunity. The state of black America is a disaster . . . black America is buried in a depression of crashing proportions.'" ¹⁵²

The year 1984 continued to remain a very bleak one for millions of black Americans as no relief was in sight from the destructive effects of Reaganomics. Said AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland in February of that year, "For more than 10 million Americans who desperately need and want jobs, recovery is not even in sight."¹⁵³

Striking hard against Reaganomics were the Democrats. Senator Lawton Chiles, a ranking Democrat on the Budget Committee, claimed "that Reagan policies have produced 'a tilt toward the wealthy and away from the poor.'" Furthermore, Chiles informed "his colleagues of a forthcoming study by Sheldon Danzinger, director of the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty, will show that 3 million of the 8 million added to the poverty rolls from 1979 to 1982 were driven there by administration budget cuts."¹⁵⁵ By March 1984, according to the Gallup Poll, unemployment was viewed as the biggest worry confronting the American people.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps, realizing the futility of any positive response from Reaganomics, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference released a nine-point People's Platform, stating among others that the Reagan administration should develop a national job training policy and thus full employment should be a national priority.¹⁵⁷

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Meanwhile, approximately "four million out of nine million working-age black men, or 46 percent, were jobless: Unemployed, not participating in the labor force, or simply unaccounted for. The comparable figure for white men is 22 percent."¹⁵⁸ Never giving up the struggle by black Americans against Reaganomics, the president of the National Urban League at its 74th annual conference issued a call "for a national program to create 1 million jobs for blacks,"¹⁵⁹ "Ex-Urban League president (Vernon Jordan) endorses Walter Mondale,"¹⁶⁰ and "Survey of cities shows job programs wanted."¹⁶¹

Since his assumption of the Presidency, Reagan has been in the forefront of an ultra-conservative economic and political reformation "that seeks to redirect the role of government in American life and perhaps to reshape the national political landscape for the rest of the century."¹⁶² For black Americans, this has created a situation which is catastrophic in its effect upon them. □

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