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Race Policy in Three American Cities

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LINO A. GRAGLIA

In the 1960s, America underwent a revolution in race relations, removing all legal obstacles to black advancement. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision prohibited racial segregation in schools and, it soon became clear, all official race discrimination. In the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Congress ratified and made effective the *Brown* nondiscrimination principle and extended it even to private discrimination, as in employment, public accommodations, and by recipients of federal funds. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was drastic but effective, finally guaranteeing to blacks the right to vote. The 1968 Civil Rights Act, prohibiting race discrimination in housing, pretty much completed the task of banning discrimination, a magnificent achievement hardly thought possible a short time before.

Great as the achievement was, it soon became apparent that the ending of legal racial discrimination would have little immediate impact on the lives of many blacks, particularly the worst off. In a sense they were even worse off, in that it began to appear that their condition was less the result of societal disadvantage than of personal characteristics. As Edward Banfield pointed out in *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (1970), the condition of the worst-off blacks would be little affected if by some miracle they became white overnight. In any event, the immediate effect of the civil rights revolution seemed to be, surprisingly enough, not to end or lessen but to increase black discontent. The first response of many urban blacks to their new guarantee of equal treatment was, it seemed, not gratitude but

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anger, leading them to riot, loot, and burn down their cities, thereby increasing both their own misery and the disaffection of whites for years to come.

We have no more pressing need than to understand how our nation's successful efforts to remove legal obstacles to the advancement of blacks had the effect of increasing racial strife and hostility and worsening the condition of many blacks. It is clear that the worsening trend in race relations must be halted if the country is not to be torn apart.

Someone Else's House, America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration: The Effects of the New Racism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), by Tamar Jacoby, a writer on social issues and former editor of the *New York Times*, is a detailed history of race relations in three American cities—New York, Detroit, and Atlanta—from the late 1960s to the present. In essence, she provides three case studies of how our race relations reached their present dangerous state, showing us not so much what to do as what not to do to keep the situation from deteriorating further. In each case, liberal public officials and community leaders sought to increase racial harmony and integration and thereby to improve the condition of blacks by adopting race-based policies that proved to have the opposite effect. The single most important step toward improved race relations, Jacoby's book shows, would be simply to terminate the failed race-based policies of the past, policies that necessarily have the consequence of increasing racial consciousness, separatism, resentment, and strife.

New York City

Jacoby begins with the story of the devastation wreaked on New York City by the policies of John Lindsey during his eight years as mayor, aided and abetted by McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation. The year before the 1965 mayoral election (and two weeks after the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act), Harlem erupted in four consecutive nights of rioting and looting following the shooting of a black youth by a policeman in the course of law enforcement. The depth of the problem was indicated by the fact that “virtually all black leaders with a base in Harlem found ways to justify and applaud the rioters” (p. 73). There also seemed to be a surprising degree of approval of the riots from ordinary Harlem residents. As one put it, “White folks respect us more when they find out we mean business”; smashing the plate glass windows of stores convinces whites that “Those Negroes are mad! . . . And for a little while, they will try to give you a little of what you want” (p. 73). In fact, however, Jacoby points out, whites in New York City had already been giving blacks a good deal of what they wanted. Although blacks accounted for one-seventh of the city's eight million people, one-half of the city's budget was being spent on them “for welfare, schooling, public housing and the like” (p. 83).

Lindsey campaigned on his goodwill, his “general, well-meaning determination to do the right thing by the black man” (p. 79). The focus of his campaign became the need

for a civilian police review board. His opponent on the Conservative Party ticket, William F. Buckley, Jr., put forward “the serious idea . . . that government could not solve all the problems blocking black entry into the mainstream—could not eradicate illegitimacy or make rebellious teenagers into scholars” (p. 80). Jacoby recognizes that Buckley spoke the truth “that many blacks were not prepared to compete in the mainstream, that the black crime rate was soaring, hurting no one so much as other blacks” (p. 81). Perhaps nothing better illustrates the strong disincentives to a frank discussion of race issues than that Jacoby nonetheless goes on to accuse Buckley of “mischievous race baiting” (p. 81), “mean-spiritedness” (p. 81), and running a “pandering campaign” (p. 80).

Realism and candor are the central values of Jacoby’s book, yet perhaps in the interest of maintaining an appearance of moderation and balance, she often writes as if she thinks realism can be overdone. Thus, she accuses Buckley of failing to “try to talk to liberals and convince them with reasonable arguments” (p. 81). But she had just quoted Buckley’s statement, apparently with approval, that any attempt to discuss the problem of, say, black illegitimacy with liberals would cause them to “either simply vanish from the room in a cloud of integrated dust; or else they will turn and call *you* a racist” (p. 81). The core of our race problem, as her book amply demonstrates, is the absolute commitment of liberals to white racism as the only acceptable explanation of black difficulties and the impossibility of shaking this view by reasonable arguments.

The “race relations” problem the Lindsey administration faced and the country still faces is essentially the problem of how to bring more blacks fully into the mainstream of American life. More specifically, it is how to deal with the social pathologies—illegitimacy, crime, academic failure—characteristic of the so-called black underclass. The defining characteristic of the 1960s was the belief that there are no social problems, including racial problems, that cannot be solved by more law and government. The need was simply to wage a “War on Poverty”; poverty could be defeated by government action and its effects would thus be removed. The fundamental need, according to liberals, was for whites to convince blacks of their goodwill by accepting responsibility for black problems—attributed to past and continuing oppression—and demonstrating their determination to solve them.

The need, in a word, was for appeasement. It became obvious that equality of opportunity would not quickly produce equality of outcome for blacks; the latter would have to be produced, therefore, by other means. Inequality of outcome caused the black anger that led to threats of violence and the necessity of appeasement. Blacks could be appeased, it was hoped, by preferential treatment in schooling, employment, and contracting, and such symbolic gestures as Black History Month and making the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., a national holiday and putting his name on a major street in every city. Nowhere was a policy of appeasement adopted and implemented more fully than in New York City under Mayor Lindsey. The results, Jacoby makes clear, should be sufficient to establish conclusively that it is the precise opposite of the policy that is needed.

“If the youth of Watts and Harlem had not felt so powerless,” Lindsey believed, “they would have felt no need to rampage through their cities” (p. 89). The need, therefore, was for “ghetto empowerment” (p. 88), the turning over of the new War on Poverty social service programs to local black organizations and leaders. In search of such leaders, Lindsey’s aide Barry Gottehrer frequented such places as the Glamour Inn, a “seedy one-room lounge on 127th Street, frequented mostly by gamblers and pimps” (p. 107). He “immediately fell in love with the place” and spent “as many as four nights of his week there, trying earnestly to convince regulars that rioting ‘would hurt the poor far more than the rich’ ” (p. 107).

What led Gottehrer to believe that the rioters were concerned with helping the poor is not indicated. As a result of his efforts, the Lindsey administration soon had “every street-corner speaker in Harlem on its payroll” (p. 106). A “fairly typical recruit” (p. 19), who went on to become the head of the Brooklyn chapter of CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) and to play a continuing role in New York City racial disputes was Sonny Carson. Now in his mid-twenties and “brimming with unfocused anger at the world around him, . . . he was already stealing pennies from newsstands” in elementary school and “by junior high, he had become an accomplished mugger” (p. 19). After spending time in a state reformatory, selling drugs, and running an illegal gambling joint, he found his true calling in racial politics.

Carson favored blacks’ burning their communities as “a good way to get the kind of attention we needed” (p. 122). This attitude made him “popular in the ghetto” and “exactly the kind of local leader Gottehrer was looking for” (pp. 122–23). Robert Kennedy appointed him to the board of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Redevelopment Corporation, explaining that “these are the people we have to reach” (p. 122). Carson might seem an unlikely ally in the cause of preventing riots. Gottehrer doubted “he ever stopped anything” but considered it enough that “he didn’t always inflame it” (p. 124). Claiming that some crisis was about to break out, Carson would call Gottehrer to meetings only to show that he could.

On one occasion Gottehrer, accompanied by three black policemen, attended a meeting Carson had called to demonstrate his power before a group of reporters. “Unwilling to argue publicly with a black spokesman,” Gottehrer “felt obliged to agree with Carson’s indictment of the system and promise to try to make some of the changes he was demanding” (p. 130). He “watched passively as Carson tongue-lashed the three black cops and accused them of betraying their race” (p. 130). One of Carson’s “tougher-looking lieutenants decided to make the newspapermen squirm a little, too.” He picked up a photographer’s “camera from the chair next to him and smashed it violently to the floor. The journalist, terrified of a confrontation, looked away as if nothing had happened—and neither Gottehrer nor the humiliated cops moved to lift a finger” (pp. 130–31). “Plainly enough,” Jacoby concludes, “the more menacingly [Carson] threatened Lindsey and Gottehrer, the more eager they were to mollify and appease him” (p. 125).

Appeasement, it turned out, hindered rather than advanced the cause of improved race relations. “[Lindsey] and his well-meaning aides had not just appeased the city’s nihilistic militants; they had encouraged and legitimized and amplified these men, giving them a reach and power they could never have hoped to achieve on their own. . . . Thanks to Carson and others like him, many blacks were only angrier than when the riots started,” whereas whites became “less sympathetic to blacks’ problems and less inclined to help” (p. 130). Worst of all, Carson’s example encouraged other black spokesmen to join in “an unending ritual of protest that would do nothing to close the gap between black and white” (p. 130).

Riots that took place across the country in the summer of 1967 led President Johnson to appoint a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the cause and recommend solutions. Although officially headed by the “staid and centrist Illinois governor Otto Kerner,” it was dominated by “the galvanizing presence of the crusading mayor of New York” (p. 132). In what Jacoby calls “the last gasp of sixties liberalism” (p. 134), the commission issued a five-hundred-page report that amounted to a “*mea culpa* to the effect that white racism is the cause of the problems of the ghetto: ‘White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it’” (p. 141). The report recommended more welfare programs, including a guaranteed annual income, that would require, as it stated, “unprecedented levels of funding” (p. 142). “Rather than clearing the air,” however, “the *mea culpa* only inflamed black anger, boosting the sense of grievance and separatism already poisoning the atmosphere in black America” (p. 144). It “signaled to young blacks that they were right to blame their frustrations on white society . . . [and] lay every setback, no matter how personal, at the door of the white world” (p. 144). It “effectively fixed the terms of future debate about race. From now on . . . black anger and black threats . . . would be the engine that would drive relations between blacks and whites” (p. 145).

Perhaps the climactic event of Lindsey’s mayoralty was his decision, supported by McGeorge Bundy and Ford Foundation funds, to decentralize and provide for “community control” of the public schools, as a manifestation of his belief in “empowerment.” The movement for community control of schools, hospitals, police, and welfare services was apparently begun by black separatist Malcolm X and endorsed by Stokely Carmichael in his book *Black Power*. “For ghetto activists,” Jacoby notes, “community control held out a promise of black teachers and a ‘black curriculum’ ” (p. 159). As one group of activists, seeking to oust whites from teaching at a Harlem school, put it, “We got too many teachers and principals named Ginzberg and Rosenberg in Harlem” (p. 170). Lindsey and Bundy, however, managed to believe or hope that by increasing a “sense of belonging” (p. 159), community control would further racial harmony and integration. “In the name of empowerment, Ford was funding separatists and street gangs, including a Cleveland CORE chapter that championed armed revolution and ‘race hatred’ ” (p. 174). “At the time it seemed an effective means of getting black people involved in solving their own problems,” Bundy explained, and “you can’t

expect effort-free social revolution” (p. 174). Making an end run around the state legislature and the city Board of Education, Bundy freed three of the poorest school districts from public control by funding them as “demonstration school districts” to experiment with community control.

In practice, community control meant control by militant activists, including in particular the ubiquitous Sonny Carson. On the basis of no authority, he announced that he was going to “evaluate” thirty-two teachers in Bedford-Stuyvesant schools, and then declared all but four of them “fired” (p. 173). The superintendent of schools would “see what happens,” he threatened, if “those teachers . . . try to come back to our community” (p. 173). Carson and his gang were “regularly entering school buildings and accosting teachers in the halls, telling them among other things, ‘the Germans did not do a good enough job with you Jews’ ” (p. 173–74).

The Ford Foundation could not have found a less promising area for its experiment in community control of schools than one of those it selected, the Ocean Hill–Brownsville section of Brooklyn, adjacent to Bedford-Stuyvesant, where “residents wrestled daily with every imaginable social problem” (p. 176). A “People’s Board of Education” (p. 177) was formed by a small ad hoc group of activists, and a devotee of Malcolm X was put in charge. In Bundy’s view, the race hatred of the radicals he was funding was the result of white racism and would dissolve with ghetto empowerment. Freeing the schools from the central bureaucracy would, he believed, lead to innovations, rising test scores, and the return of whites to the schools. Ford’s aim, enthusiastically supported by the liberal establishment, was to increase minority parents’ involvement in their children’s schools; the result, however, was to unleash separatist hatred.

The “number one priority” of the Ocean Hill People’s Board turned out to be “raising racial consciousness,” which to the district’s white teachers “seemed more like schooling in race hatred” (p. 186). The “first order of business was to develop a black curriculum: lessons, laced with hostility for ‘the power structure,’ that only black teachers could teach” (p. 186). Student discipline soon became nonexistent. At a school assembly following the shooting of Martin Luther King, a popular teacher advised the students: “Get your minds together. You know who to steal from. If you steal, steal from those who have it . . . if whitey taps you on the shoulder, send him to the graveyard” (p. 188). Students then roamed the corridors looking for teachers to assault. “People were harassed and beaten,” one teacher reported. “From then on, we knew the threats were real” (p. 188).

Matters came to a head in Ocean Hill when the board, “ignoring tenure, seniority and merit ranking” (p. 190), announced the dismissal of nineteen teachers and administrators, all but one of whom were Jewish. The dismissals were enforced by Sonny Carson and his followers, who blocked the teachers’ entry to their schools. The board finally found a determined opponent, however, in Albert Shanker, head of the United Federation of Teachers, and a series of strikes followed, one lasting more than a month. The Ocean Hill board was eventually replaced by a state-appointed trustee,

but the experiment in community control continued, with the city divided into thirty-two districts, each with its locally elected board.

Bundy's "wager—that Black Power could prepare the way for inclusion—had backfired disastrously" (p. 216). He had "bankrolled a band of separatists, then watched, not understanding, as the militants killed all hope of racial harmony" (p. 216). For young blacks, the lesson of Ocean Hill was clear: "Not only could they call on their sense of grievance to justify even the angriest race hatred. But they could win almost anything they wanted from the white world with defiant, disruptive protest of the kind that they had seen in Ocean Hill. 'What I learned from Ocean Hill–Brownsville, [the Rev. Al Sharpton said years later,] was that confrontation works' " (p. 220).

Detroit

As if the story of race relations in New York were not discouraging enough, there is also the story of Detroit. In essence it is the same, the story of attempted appeasement of blacks and its counterproductive consequences. The apparent hopelessness of the very idea of race relations, of meaningful communication between blacks and whites, is perhaps most clearly indicated by the two groups' different reactions to the 1967 Detroit riot, the "bloodiest and most destructive riot of a bloody bitter decade" (p. 238). For the vast majority of whites it meant that Detroit had gone "beyond the point of no return" (p. 238). It is hard to imagine, indeed, how any white's reaction could have been other than that Detroit must be escaped. Blacks, however, "particularly the black middle class, saw the disturbances as a welcome political watershed—not a riot, but a 'revolt' or 'insurrection.' . . . In the black mythology of Detroit, 1967 had become the point that blacks finally stood up for themselves—what *Ebony* magazine called 'the birth pangs' of a new city" (pp. 238–39). What this understanding meant as a practical matter was that blacks saw riots and the threat of riots as a source of power, a potent tool of extortion—and so they proved to be until finally nothing was left to destroy.

Max Fisher, an elderly, wealthy oilman, enlisted Henry Ford II and other business leaders to form the New Detroit Committee in the belief that discussions with black leaders could lead to the solution of Detroit's racial problems. Like McGeorge Bundy in New York, however, the committee members "felt they had to listen to the depth of black alienation" by including radical street leaders, apparently unaware that the radicals' interest lay not in lessening but in exacerbating racial conflict (p. 241). The business leaders soon found themselves listening to such statements as "If you fat cats don't give us what we want, it won't be our places that will be burning next summer. It will be yours," and there had better be "some crumbs on the table" (p. 243).

The committee soon began doling out payments to the militants in the sum of "\$10 million in thinly disguised riot insurance" (p. 244). All they succeeded in ensuring, however, was further extortion, lawlessness, and conflict. For example, the "Armed

Black Legion” wing of the “Republic of New Africa” (p. 244), committed to confrontation with its enemy the police, incited a confrontation at which a white policeman was killed. The police arrested 142 persons, but those arrested were ordered released by a black judge who came to the station house before they could even be questioned. “If a white judge’s law in Alabama must be obeyed,” he declared, “then a Negro judge’s law in Detroit must also be obeyed” (p. 249).

The judge’s action was unanimously condemned by whites but defended and justified by blacks. When a black activist at a New Detroit Committee meeting threatened to “burn the city down” (p. 249), Max Fisher, convinced that the city was on the brink of another riot, announced his support for the judge. “It was a hard call, but I was right,” he said later. “When you are a leader, every once in a while you have to take a position” (p. 250). “The law,” Jacoby notes, “seemed to hold less and less sway in the years after the incident,” and “the breakdown of legal authority was making life in black Detroit more and more difficult” (p. 251).

By 1970 Detroit had become a majority-black city, and in 1974 it elected its first black mayor, Coleman Young, “the people’s mayor” (p. 296), who would remain in office for twenty years. Under Young, the city deteriorated even more rapidly and permanently than did New York under Lindsey. The difference was that whereas New York’s leaders adopted a policy of catering to preachers of race hatred, in Detroit one of the preachers was directly in power, with the enthusiastic support of a black constituency that “thrilled to Young’s defiant style and unabashed race consciousness” (p. 307). “He’ll tell white people off in a minute,” his authorized biographer wrote. “That’s reassuring to a lot of black people” (p. 318). The Young administration couldn’t clean or light the streets, deliver jobs, arrest criminals, or explain its budget, a columnist wrote; “Still, the people kept on voting for Young—because he said what they wanted to hear about whites and white racism” (p. 346). The blacks were apparently surprised, however, that a policy of hatred for whites should reduce white sympathy for blacks; between 1977 and 1980 the percentage of blacks “who thought that whites could not care less for blacks doubled to 43 percent” (p. 350), which of course provided further basis for their hatred of whites.

The dilemma faced by the city’s black leadership on race relations policy is that although the presence and cooperation of whites might be essential to the city’s well-being, the driving out of whites made black leadership more certain and secure. Black control was assured in majority and increasingly black Detroit, but Young saw cooperation with the wealthy white suburbs, essential to economic improvement in Detroit, as a threat to his power. Rejection of all attempts at cooperation with the suburbs was therefore a basic feature of his administration. Proposals by liberal suburban white leaders for cooperation on regional water supplies, transportation systems, and so on, even with the suburbs assuming most of the cost, were met with “immediate angry rejection” (p. 317) by Detroit. “Those people who fled to the suburbs in the first place,” Young said, “aren’t going to help support Detroit now” (p. 316). Young and

his staff, suburban leaders finally came to realize, “saw metropolitan cooperation as a threat—an act of racial aggression by the suburbs” (p. 317). “Nothing . . . could have done more for race relations or to boost the flagging Detroit economy” (p. 346), Jacoby notes, than proposed transportation connections between Detroit and the suburbs. Negotiations, however, “led only to the usual name-calling” and “Young’s now familiar response: ‘This is racism. [They’re trying] to take over Detroit’ ” (p. 346).

The second pillar, indeed the first priority, of the Young administration was animosity toward the police. “A former radical and union tough, Young came into office not just seeking reform, but girding for war—race war” (p. 326). “As everyone knows,” he said, “law and order is a code word for ‘Keep the niggers in their place’ ” (p. 326). “Crime is a problem,” he conceded, “but not *the* problem. The police are the major threat . . . to the majority community” (p. 326). Everything Young said and did encouraged blacks to believe that the law was white and alien and that “fighting racism was more important than public safety” (p. 327).

The result was, of course, as Jacoby’s chapter heading puts it, “A Mandate for Anarchy” (p. 322), the end of the rule of law. During the summer of 1976, robberies at gunpoint and knifepoint became common on highways and buses, and even courtrooms became violent. Looting no longer required the excuse of a racial incident but “became an everyday sport: not something reserved for special occasions” (p. 334). A gang called the “Black Killers” rampaged through an expensive hotel overturning tables and stealing purses. The climax was an attack by 150 Black Killers and others on 8,000 concertgoers at the Cobo Hall Convention Center: “Dozens of people were robbed, one woman raped—by fifteen to twenty youths, in a public space” (p. 335). Bands of youths then roamed downtown streets for several hours, breaking windows and looting. Some youths were arrested, but no one would come forward to testify, and no charges were filed. “White perceptions of the city,” Jacoby concludes, “already soured by 1967, would never recover from the summer of 1976. . . . It seemed as if the riots had never stopped and were not going to” (p. 336).

The worse Young’s policies were for Detroit, the better they seemed for his popularity. In the mayoral election of the next year, “both the Detroit business elite and the national liberal establishment came out for Young in a big way. Henry Ford corralled friends and associates for a thousand-dollar-a-plate fund-raiser at the tony Detroit Club. Prominent blacks flew in from all over the country: Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson . . . and a variety of civil rights groups. . . . The mayor won in a landslide” (p. 346).

Atlanta

After New York and Detroit, the story of race relations in Atlanta is mercifully anticlimactic. Atlanta, Jacoby notes, has been “widely regarded as an emblem of improved race relations,” the “success story of the civil rights movement,” a place where blacks and whites seemed both to prosper and to live “more or less comfortably with each

other” (p. 360). Like Detroit, Atlanta became a majority-black city in the early 1970s, and soon thereafter the city elected its first black mayor, Maynard Jackson. Unlike Detroit’s black population, Atlanta’s seems to have stabilized at just under the supposedly dangerous 70 percent tipping point. Whites have not abandoned the downtown, and economic growth has continued; but race relations, Jacoby found, are nonetheless far from ideal, perhaps best described as “uneasy coexistence” (p. 371). She devotes a chapter to considering whether Atlanta’s racial situation is “as good as it gets” (chap. 17, p. 500). After her discussions of New York and Detroit, however, one can be grateful that race relations can get even as good as that.

Like Coleman Young, Mayor Jackson was devoted to “the goal of black empowerment” (p. 367) and therefore quickly turned to a program of “police reform” that was “more concerned with curbing the police than punishing criminals” (p. 368). The result, as in Detroit, was that “the crime rate . . . was out of sight—by the end of the decade, the worst in the country” (p. 368). Jackson also followed Young in seeing “regionalization as a hostile racial ploy to dilute black votes and curb black political power” (p. 369) and therefore opposed linking the city with its wealthy suburbs. At least partly as a result, Atlanta, despite its economic growth, remained “a desperately poor city—by one measure the second poorest in the country (after Newark, New Jersey)” (p. 367). The city bought off the NAACP in a busing suit by turning over the school system to NAACP control, with the result that the middle class, both black and white, abandoned the public schools, “leaving them over 90 percent black and among the nation’s worst” (p. 369). During the 1970s, 40 percent of the white population, 70,000 people, left the city, increasing the black share of the population to two-thirds.

Economic growth nonetheless continued in Atlanta, fueled in part by a half-billion-dollar airport renovation. A ring of gentrification kept a substantial number of middle-class whites and blacks downtown, and a second white “downtown” and wealthy residential area developed in North Atlanta. If the city was “not exactly a case study in integration” (p. 372), the races had at least achieved an “uneasy coexistence” (p. 371). This was seriously threatened, however, by a series of murders of poor, black children, twenty-nine in all, that took place in 1979.

The ready assumption by many blacks was that the murderer was white. James Baldwin, for example, “dismissed” expressions of white concern as inadequate compared to the “reaction to the fate of the hostages in Iran” (p. 374). Jesse Jackson topped him by declaring that “it is open season on black people” and that responsibility for the murders could be traced to opposition to affirmative action and to “Ronald Reagan’s conservative politics” (p. 374). That the murderer, Wayne Williams, turned out not to be white came as a huge disappointment, and “black interest in the case visibly plummeted” (p. 375). Even, or especially, middle-class blacks found the outcome difficult to accept, revealing a black–white chasm, Jacoby concludes, that “no one in the nation knew how to bridge” (p. 376). More to the point, it would seem to

indicate a suspicion of whites by blacks so great as to leave whites no response except to seek greater distance.

Jacoby's discussion of race relations in Atlanta focuses on the use of and demands for racial preferences in city contracting, particularly in connection with the construction of a light-rail system, the expansion of the airport, the renovation of the shopping and entertainment complex known as Underground Atlanta, and a downtown building boom. Racial preference in contracting by local governments apparently began in Atlanta with the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) under Jackson's predecessor, and it was expanded and extended by Jackson and his successor, Andrew Young. Racial set-aside programs in public contracting are little more than an invitation to fraud. If blackness is made a qualification for obtaining a government contract, one must find ways to appear to be black: "The preferred term in Atlanta was 'rent-a-skin'; a white-owned company nominally headed by a black man in order to snag a MARTA contract" (p. 384). Contracting with the city required a "joint venture" with a black: "I've got the money. I've got the black" (p. 420) meant one was ready to bid.

In 1984, on a suit by white contractors, the Georgia Supreme Court held an Atlanta racial preference ordinance invalid under a city charter provision that required that contracts be awarded to "the lowest and/or best bidder" (p. 441). Mayor Young's response was to order a moratorium on city contracting until the charter could be amended, which it was by adding the word "responsible" (p. 442) to the statement of bidder qualifications. The use of racial preference was then not only continued but expanded by way of increases in minority set-asides for city business from 25 percent to 35 percent. On a second suit, racial set-asides were again declared invalid by the Georgia Supreme Court, following the 1988 U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Croson v. Richmond*, which invalidated a similar program in Richmond.

The *Croson* Court recognized that "classifications based on race carry a danger of stigmatic harm" and "may in fact promote notions of racial inferiority and lead to politics of racial hostility" (p. 451). Racial set-asides were nonetheless allowed by the Court when shown to serve the "remedial" purpose of correcting past discrimination by government. This unjustifiable exception—it was not limited to remedying discrimination against specific individuals—gave birth to a new industry: the making of studies, paid for by a city, to show just how racially evil the city had been. Atlanta undertook such a study at a cost of more than half a million dollars. A year of work by more than a dozen experts produced an eight-volume, eleven-hundred-page report that purported to make the requisite findings. In fact, there was "not a scrap of hard evidence that the Atlanta city government had discriminated against black contractors" (p. 456). No case was found of a black firm being the lowest bidder and not getting the contract. The report was sufficient, however, for Atlanta not only to reinstitute set-asides, but to extend the requirement even to private contracting. As one black councilman, to a "chorus of cheers," told an audience made up largely of black professionals, "I am prepared to die for affirmative action, so help me God" (p. 453).

A 1986 U.S. Civil Rights Commission study of set-aside contracting programs found them rife with fraud: 20–25 percent of the beneficiaries in state and local programs were found to be shams. Of the \$70 million supposedly subcontracted to black-owned firms in the Atlanta airport contracts, 54 percent was spent in some form of sham. More to the point, the commission found that the programs did not serve their stated purpose: “Set-asides do not appear to have encouraged the formation of minority-owned firms” (p. 436). A study by a Georgia institute, though strongly supportive of set-asides, concluded that more than a decade of preferences in Atlanta contracting had produced “no more than a dozen clear-cut cases of [minority business] success” (p. 448). In fact, Jacoby concludes, “the city’s joint venture efforts, public and private, had helped enrich only a handful of already wealthy men” (p. 467). For example, more than half of the money that did go to black firms in the Atlanta airport contracting went to a single, already established and successful firm in no need of preferences. Of the \$14.2 million spent on set-asides in one year, 82 percent went to ten already well-established and politically connected firms. The effect of the set-aside programs, Jacoby concludes, was to increase cynicism and interracial distrust. Because of the programs it was unlikely, one observer noted, that “most whites will ever see civil rights the same way again” (p. 495).

Race relations that nonetheless remained relatively peaceful in Atlanta through the 1980s may more recently have taken a turn for the worse. The 1992 Rodney King verdict was the occasion for an outburst of violence in downtown Atlanta by a gang of black college students and other youths. Although decidedly minor by Los Angeles standards—less than \$100,000 damage was involved—“the event was a turning point” for the central city and took a severe “psychological toll” (p. 498). The attitude of black youths Jacoby interviewed who had taken part in the rampage reflected the attitude that had become standard elsewhere. With scant education and no prospects, “they were still burning with the anger [the event] had brought to the surface” (p. 499). “We gonna shake this mother up” (p. 499), one warned. “Blacks took this stuff in the 60’s,” said another, “we ain’t gonna take it—even if we gonna die” (p. 499).

Most ominous for the future of race relations in Atlanta, as in the nation, however, has been the advent and growth of “Afrocentrism”—virtually a prescription for race war. Asa Hilliard III, a professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta and a leader in the Afrocentrist movement, was “widely lauded around town as a distinguished scholar and role model for young blacks” (p. 508). Along with Leonard Jeffries, a professor at the City College of New York, Hilliard is one of the original “melanists” (p. 508). Apparently confusing melanin, a pigment that darkens the skin, Jacoby points out, with neuromelanin, a brain chemical, they teach that it makes blacks generally superior to whites. “Melanin theory caught on big in Atlanta” (p. 508), Jacoby reports, and at Hilliard’s urging the school system adopted an “African Infusion Curriculum” (p. 508) that would weave Afrocentric teaching into all subjects.

Repeating the error of McGeorge Bundy in New York and Max Fisher in Detroit, Atlanta acceded “to the demands of the angriest and most radical black leaders in the field” (p. 510). In effect, “Hilliard’s explicit hatred of white people” (p. 510) became public education’s central subject, the ultimate fruit of the identity politics that began with the acceptance of racial preferences. “Affirmative action and the new color consciousness and the anger that come with it,” Jacoby concludes, “are breeding a generation of racism far more virulent than anything that came before it” (p. 512).

What Hope for the Future?

Jacoby ends her long and devastating discussion of the state of race relations in New York, Detroit, and Atlanta with a very brief chapter, “Where Do We Go From Here?” She recognizes, in something of an understatement, that “many of us are beginning to give up hope that there is a way out” (p. 530). Indeed, given the unrelieved but all too accurate grimness of the picture she has painted for 530 pages, it is difficult to see that any other conclusion is possible. She purports to see some reason for hope, however, in each of the three cities. In New York, Mayor Giuliani has come down hard on crime, abolished a special office for black issues, largely dismantled community control of the schools, and “refused to play cat and mouse with race men” (p. 531). Detroit qualified as a federal empowerment zone, which would bring in large grants, tax breaks, and new investment, though the city council remained “reflexively anti-business” (p. 535). In Atlanta, the racial picture “is still much better than either New York or Detroit—or most of America, for that matter” (p. 535), which is faint praise. Jacoby quickly undercuts even this tepid optimism, however, by noting that “the misguided white impulse to win blacks’ favor by dwelling on their alienation,” the root cause of our race problems, “is more common than ever now” (p. 538).

Jacoby concludes with a brief statement of recommendations for improving race relations. The first and hardest step, she says, is “deciding that integration is what we want” (p. 543), but she qualifies the statement by saying that this is “not much of a leap” (p. 543), and she finds recognition of the need for integration even among participants in Louis Farrakhan’s Million Man March. In fact, however, no difficult decision as to the need for integration is involved for an overwhelming majority of white Americans, who have no doubt that a viable multiracial society is not possible if the population is to be divided for a multitude of purposes into separate racial groups. This conviction does not mean, of course, that every institution or activity must be racially mixed or “balanced,” as much as we may be pleased when that kind of intermingling happens to occur. Indeed, it means the opposite, that we must cease to be concerned with racial proportions and return to the principle, violated by racial preferences, that people, as Jacoby puts it, must be treated “as individuals, not as members of a group” (p. 541).

Jacoby is undoubtedly right that “integration won’t work without acculturation” (p. 539), that is, a “change in people’s habits, their attitudes toward school, work, and the law” (p. 539). She recognizes, however, that “many blacks don’t like the ring of this—the idea of values imposed from the outside” (p. 539). In fact, most of today’s black leaders are intensely resistant to any suggestion that the source of blacks’ difficulties is internal, the result of their own behavior, rather than external, the result of white racism. In any event, it is extremely difficult to formulate and implement concrete, practical programs to bring about the necessary changes. It may be that we couldn’t “win the War on Poverty” (p. 539) because of deficiencies in acculturation, as Jacoby says, but the experience gives us no reason to think we can be more successful with still more such social welfare programs.

Along the same line, Jacoby argues that self-help and reliance on the free market will not be enough to solve the problems faced by blacks. There is a need for government funding and tax breaks to promote social services, she thinks—though preferably on a small local scale rather than a large federal scale. We have, however, already spent unimaginable sums on programs of social services to the poor and to blacks in particular, and it is arguable that the expenditures have been not only unhelpful but counterproductive. There is also no basis for Jacoby’s optimism that racial problems might be eased by such measures as finding “ways to sponsor achievement-oriented [black] students” (p. 540). There has been no shortage of efforts along these lines, but they encounter the insuperable difficulty that the number of such students is very limited.

Jacoby is surely correct that our present dire situation in race relations is due to “feckless leadership: racemongering demagogues [and] patronizing civil elites” (p. 541–42). There is also no quarreling with her assertion of a desperate “need for better leadership, both black and white” (p. 541), leaders who will, first of all, “stop sending the message that because of racism there is no point in trying, that blacks are fundamentally different from whites and right to ground their lives on a bed of old grudges” (p. 542). As in the case of acculturation, unfortunately, it is difficult to see how the necessary changes can be brought about.

Jacoby does have one recommendation, however, that is clear, specific, and capable of implementation. The central message of her book is that essential to any hope of improved race relations is the abolition of all racial preferences. The use of racial preferences, the experience of New York, Detroit, and Atlanta proves, is “playing with fire” (p. 541), a “recipe for alienation and resentment” (p. 541). “The law cannot work,” she concludes, “unless it is color neutral, and the government should not be in the business of abetting or paying for the cultivation of group identity” (p. 541). The great value of her book is that it fully demonstrates and documents the validity of these conclusions.