

New Negro Can't Escape From Shackles of Ghetto

Recent comments in this page dealt with the subject of the Negro family. We felt urged to do so because in the nation's mind the problems of poverty, crime delinquency and illegitimacy are more and more coming to be viewed, somehow, as Negro problems.

We did so not as a rebuttal of the many sound reasons for concern about the quality of Negro family life, nor as an argument against the widely discussed United States Labor Department Document, commonly called the Moynihan Report, which illuminated some very harsh realities regarding the nature of basic weaknesses in Negro family life.

We pointed out the little recognized fact that in cities such as Detroit, thousands of Negro families are making their way happily and successfully towards what is known — for better or worse — as the middle class. In Detroit for example, a vast majority of the city's more than 160,000 Negro families live gracious, wholesome and productive lives.

These successful young families represent a new breed of Negro who not only wants his rightful share of whatever goodies are available in this society, but is willing to work like the devil to get them. The problem families need attention and help but the image of Negro family life which they are responsible for must not be permitted to overshadow the healthy image of the "new Negro".

Having re-emphasized that point, we wish now to make the further point that the new Negro himself constitutes an increasingly serious problem. As he deserts the ghetto to begin the arduous journey into the middle class, he leaves in spirit as well as in body.

The desire to get away from poverty and all the problems usually associated with it is as typically American as the hot dog and it is high time more Negroes did so. But try though he may, a Negro, except in rare cases, can never get away from being a Negro.

Even the most prosperous of us in Detroit will be eternally damned and hampered by the nearly 25% of our Negro families whose annual income does not

reach \$2,000. Nor can middle class Negroes successfully remove their children from the influence of children from homes of our less highly favored "brothers".

There are some "golden ghettos" with lawns kept neat by landscaping services and with expensive shrubbery accenting beautiful and costly homes. Detroit is far more fortunate than most cities in the number and extent of these pockets of good housing where Negroes who so aspire can at least exhibit the outward symbols of middle-classness.

But no matter where he moves, he cannot get away from the fact of being a Negro. Thanks to Urban Renewal and the white flight to suburbia, there is no golden ghetto that is not surrounded or adjoined by poor housing and poor Negroes. And there is no school to which the middle class Negro can send his children that is not attended also by large numbers of children of the poorer brothers.

For many reasons, middle class Negroes do not yet have ready access to the well insulated residential islands of suburbia. Until that day arrives, the position of the aspiring Negro family and the progress of its children towards higher status will be endangered by the problems which were pointed out by Daniel Moynihan and others before him.

We do not intend to suggest that prosperous Negroes should join the flight from the city. To do so, would be to shrug off a rightful responsibility for helping to solve the problems of the city which made their prosperity possible. Nor would it be helpful to further widen the gap between poor Negroes and the more prosperous ones. The gulf already is wide enough in spirit if not in body.

We do suggest that while we must take pride in the emerging new Negro and the favorable new image he makes possible, we must not turn our heads from reality however distasteful it may be. Nor can we safely assume a "let George do it" attitude with respect to responsibility for solving those distasteful problems. If they are problems for a minority of Negroes they are problems for all.