



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Race, 1981.



Race  
Daniel Jeremy Silver  
December 27, 1981

Racial prejudice is an ugly fact of American life. It affects the way millions upon millions think and act. It does not, of course, look for the reality of the issue, but it thrives on fear and training in the home and very primal feelings about in groups and out groups and we don't have to look very far, very often, from our own circle of friends to see its manifestations. We don't have to look far from our own city to see the ugliness of race. The City of Parma is now under Federal jurisdiction because it used every pretext in the world to avoid having public housing built within its community. It offered a number of rationalizations but the reason was that Parma is a largely white community and didn't want blacks. And one can look at the distribution of the black population in Cuyahoga County and recognize that these same feelings dominate Bay Village and Avon Lake as well as Parma; that the Cuyahoga River separates in a strange way those on one side of town who, to some degree at least, are willing to live in and among blacks and those on the western side of town who are unwilling to live in and among blacks.

Now, I begin this way because I don't want anything that I say this morning to suggest to you that white racism and black racism are not significant problems which Americans must face, they're not ugly or vicious and destructive of all that we traditionally say our country is about, but because I want to take a hard look at this concept of race to report to you what a number of thinkers, both black and white are saying, which thought suggests that we have used race both as a term which allows us to come to grips with prejudice and ugliness and is a term which may in fact cover up any number of other problems, and that if we want to solve the problems of the other America and of black America and of white America we need to be a little more sophisticated, a little more subtle, in our understanding of what race means in the context of our society for these thinkers suggest to us that a myth of race has arisen which argues that if we remove all of the restrictions to the advancement of people of color, that ad-



vancement will almost inevitably take place. In point of fact, they suggest that one could remove theoretically all of the laws to advancement, not only the legal bars which have been removed in the past thirty or forty years but the social and the prejudicial ones which still exist, and that there is a whole other community of blacks, a third of the black population, the left-out, the left-behind, who could not, because of the social pathology of the world of which they are a part, really take advantage of affirmative action or programs of this kind. And that if we want to deal with this other America, this other black America, this other brown America, we're going to have to deal with a very much more difficult problem, a class problem, a problem of poverty, of disadvantage, a problem of social pathology, many of whose manifestations we do not yet have any idea, really, how to deal with.

Now, one of the men who has been thinking along this line is a man named Thomas Soule. Dr. Soul is Professor of Economics at UCLA and then at Columbia, and he's now head of the Black Study Program at Harvard University. Dr. Soule likes to begin with a quotation from Will Rogers in which the inimitable American wit said: It ain't ignorance that is so bad, it's knowing what ain't necessarily so. And what Soule suggests is that what many of us know, the conventional wisdom, ain't necessarily so. Example - most Americans, he said, carry about with them an assumption that our society consists of a majority, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, surrounded by a number of disadvantaged minorities, all of whom show a falloff in levels of income as against the majority, in occupational status as against the majority, most of whom show higher numbers in the family, more dissolution of family ties and higher rates of crime, and this, he says, ain't necessarily so. If we look at America, he says, the supposed majority, white, Anglo Saxon and Protestant, numbers about 15 percent; German Americans, Americans of German descent number 14 percent; black Americans number between 13 and 14 percent; and so on. And so he suggests that the model we ought to carry around



with us is the model not of a majority with a number of minorities much smaller than it but that of a mosaic of minorities, a mosaic of groups each of whom is struggling with a very different set of problems but each of whom has a say in the political sphere because no group is so overwhelming in numbers that they in fact dominate the political sphere. And he said when we look at the supposed fall-off, let's say in income, or the supposed falloff in the status of occupation, we find again that this ain't necessarily so. Any number of minorities outearn the supposed majority: Jews, Japanese Americans, Americans of German descent, Americans of Polish descent, Chinese Americans, all of these groups outearn the white Anglo-Saxon minority. And note that among these groups two are of color, Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans. And he points out further that when one looks at the second generation of black West Indian Americans these, too, outearn the average white, Anglo Saxon Protestant family. And so, he says, we can't blame low income purely on color or purely on discrimination. And then he says that if you turn to look at status occupation one finds that 14 percent of all American wage earners are in the professions or in the technical fields of equivalent status but that a number of groups have much higher percentages. Among these Philipino Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, German Americans, Jews and second generation black West Indian Americans. And again, he says, this must give us pause about those truths we know which ain't necessarily so.

And he said one of the assumptions that Americans carry around with them, one of the conventional wisdoms, is that discrimination and color are the causes of economic disadvantage, of being unable to take part in the great American dream. And Soule likes to compare the experiences of Mexican Americans and of Japanese Americans. Both came to this country at about the same time early in the nineteenth century. Both came largely to the same area of this country, the West and the Southwest. Actually, the Japanese Americans came with more disadvantages than the Mexican Americans because their language was entirely different than our alphabet and because, in terms of color, in terms of racial type,



they were much more different than the so-called majority Americans than were those of Mexican descent. And when one looks at the record of Mexican Americans and of Japanese Americans one finds in point of fact many more civil and political restrictions were imposed upon the Japanese Americans and upon Mexican Americans. The Japanese Americans for decades were not allowed to own land in certain states of the West and, of course, we managed to cap off these restrictions by interning the Japanese Americans in camps during the Second World War. And if the Japanese Americans are second only to Jewish Americans in the level of their economic well-being and the Mexican Americans earn half of what Japanese Americans earn today. And the answer, he says, therefore, is not a simple question of discrimination or of color but it goes to family pattern. One of the great differences between Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans is that the average Mexican American family has six children and the average Japanese American family has less than three children. Culture, tradition, family composition, all these, he says, must be taken into consideration when we consider why disadvantage occurs and what the proper political, social and economic responses to disadvantage, to discrimination and poverty must be.

And he said when we look at black Americans specifically there's a great myth, he claims, abroad in the land. It's a myth which is basic to Roots and other movies and books of that type which explain everything that happens to the black community on the basis of the cost of slavery, the destructive cost to human personality of slavery, and of the reconstruction period and of the century of economic disadvantage subsequent to that. Without denying the cruelty, the violence, the viciousness, the ugliness of slavery and of all that Americans have done to black Americans in the past, Soule suggests that many of the statistics of social pathology which seem to be emerging from the black community, high crime rates, a high number of families in which there's only a woman as head of the family, these are in point of fact relatively recent phenomena or



phenomena which can be explained in terms of the normal sociological consequences of passing through the bleak urban ghettos of our cities. High crime rates were typical of Irish and German Americans and Jewish Americans and white Anglo Saxon Protestant Americans when they went through the East Sides and the Houghs and the Watts of our major communities. The point he makes he makes very effectively. He said, why do we call a police van a paddy wagon? Because in the 1870's and the 1890's they were almost always filled with Irish. And I spoke to you a year or so ago about the Jewish American gangster and the myth that all Jews, you know, are virtuous, upright and we've never had our group who went through the streets of New York and Chicago and Philadelphia and Cleveland and ended up in gangs and ended up doing all kinds of things which properly ended up in prison. Part of the crime rate of blacks has to do simply with that they are the newest immigrant group into our cities, passing from the rural south into the urban world of the twentieth century. Part of the statistics of the breakdown of the black family have nothing to do with slavery, according to Thomas Soule. He makes the claim, and he has the statistics to back it up, that until the Second World War the overwhelming majority of black children were raised in homes where there were both parents and that there was in fact a family structure, and that it is only since the 1950's that one has seen this dramatic rise in the number of black children being raised in homes where there is only a woman as head of the family. The statistics are that in 1950 17.2 percent of black homes were female-headed, and by 1977 40 percent of black homes were being headed by women who were managing the home as best they could, keeping the family together as best they could, earning what they could and surviving on welfare. And it is precisely, he says, because of the welfare system, precisely because of the way in which it was enforced and enacted by our government that one found this statistic of social disadvantage, social pathology, emerging to the point where it did because families could survive with government assistance provided the man was not in the home;

The New Deal, Dr. Wilson argues, a number of very basic structural changes occurred



and so if the man came out of the service, the man came out of prison, or the man simply lost his job it was to everyone's advantage for the family to break up and the woman to become the head and, therefore, qualify for Aid to Dependent Children and other programs of that type. He blames not slavery but the welfare state, welfare policy rather, for this particular index of social disadvantage.

Now, what Soule has tried to do, as far as I understand it, is to make us look at a whole number of indices of social disadvantage, a whole number of phenomena which have to do with the passage of people from the role of immigrant into the society as a whole in order for us to understand better what needs to be done to allow the society to bring into itself the largest color minority which still remains outside the mainstream. And he argues further that because we have dealt almost always with rather crude statistics we tend not to see some very dramatic changes which have taken place in the black group itself.

We read of the large number of black youth who are unemployed and perhaps unemployable. The number in some of our center cities touches 40 percent. At the same time we do not read in the same static how many of black youth, compared to 20 or 30 years ago, are going to Harvard, Yale and Princeton and are going into fields which require high technological competence. There has been a very substantial move over the last 30 years in that direction. To underscore this point, and to perhaps, I think, make it a little more effectively, a professor of sociology and head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, a man by the name of William Julius Wilson, has written a book which he calls The Declining Significance of Race, and in that book Dr. Wilson makes this argument, that until, really, the Second World War it was fair to discuss the whole issue of the needs of the black community, the rights of the black community, in terms of race because, in point of fact, the number of black men who could escape from discrimination, escape from underemployment, gain for themselves a place in the society, have some effective political power, was miniscule. But, beginning with the New Deal, Dr. Wilson argues, a number of very basic structural changes occurred



in our society. With the expansion of government, and the fact that Civil Service was in place, an increasingly large number of blacks were able to find employment in the public sector and to be protected in that employment and to move ahead routinely to positions of some seniority and some power. The labor unions made a major contribution. The labor unions were, for the most part, the one structure in our society which did not discriminate against black membership, and so blacks were able to join the unions, to be guaranteed the same rights as those in unions had, and this is particularly true of the big unions, not the craft unions, and to gain seniority, to gain position within the union structure, and when during the Second World War the need for manpower and woman power in our defense plants exploded these workers were able to come in, to put in their years, to be accepted into the unions, and by the end of the Second World War, particularly in the great wide sweeping unions like those of the automobile unions, those of the steel workers and so on, the blacks were thoroughly entrenched, treated as equals, that they had political power, that any number of tens of thousands of black workers were able to gain new levels of income, new levels of security and new levels of political importance.

And then there was the opening up of the political system, the passage of Fair Employment Practices laws in the states and then by the Federal government voting right acts, the Brown vs. the 1954 School Board Decision and a whole number of actions which opened up the society by law to those blacks who were advancing and that these laws coincided during the 50's and the 60's with the period of great American prosperity and economic expansion, and that during this era great advances were made, significant advances were made by blacks as they joined the American body politic.

The rate of these advances, he says, has slowed down during the 70's as America has suffered from recession after recession, the oil shock, and we have not had the same kind of economic prosperity we had before. Nevertheless, it is Dr. Wilson's contention that what took place in the 30's through today period is



irreversible, is now structured into law, and that unless the whole economy turns sour and remains sour, unless we have another Great Depression, about two-thirds of our black community are now solidly in the middle-class. One-third of this group is in the professions or in the status professions. Another third is among those who are earning sizeable income as blue-collar workers.

In 1940, given 1977 figures, one family in 200 in the black community was earning the equivalent of \$25,000 a year or more. In 1977, using the same figure base, one black family in 4 was earning that kind of income. Now, what Dr. Wilson suggests is this, that as blacks took advantage of these new laws, of these new bits of economic opportunity, they began to move out of the ghetto as every other immigrant group had in fact moved out of the ghetto. They moved into suburbia and they took on the characteristics of suburbia, and they began to make their way as Jews and Japanese Americans, as Chinese Americans, German Americans, WASP Americans, had done naturally and against some prejudice in the generations before. But, at that same time there was a left-behind group, a group representing about one-third of all blacks in the United States, a group which lacked the skills, which lacked the ability to take advantage of the opportunity which was available, a group which had been so affected by the social pathology of the earlier generations that it was unemployable or it had opted out of the work force or it was tuned into the drug world or its prison record was so heavy that it couldn't escape from the burden of the past. Whatever the reasons, Dr. Wilson says that there are now about a third of the black population of our country who are in a sense locked into the urban ghettos and that no amount of civil rights legislation by itself will allow them to escape. At the same time that the indices of black earning are on the rise, that though it is true that among this two-thirds of the black who have made it out of the ghetto, male income is slightly less than comparative income, female income is slightly more than white female income for comparative jobs, those differences are beginning to diminish, to disappear. But with the statistics we are now seeing, the statistics of the falloff in black in-



come, that there are tremendous numbers of blacks who are unemployed, that this is taking place almost entirely within the other black America, the black America which is locked into the ghetto, the black America for which no one, including, he says, those who espouse civil rights, have, really, answers to how to deal with these problems. Affirmative action, school busing, getting the blacks tied in with the blacks of Africa in the Third World for power reasons, these issues which are the issues of the civil rights groups today, will not in any way, the Soules and the Wilsons, both black men, will not in any way touch the problems of this other black America, and that if we want to deal with these problems, which are to a very large degree intractable, we're going to have to look not at race so much as at class, that is at poverty, and we're going to have to look at multiple disabilities within whatever remains of family structure and we're going to have to look at programs where we involve any number of care personnel, professional personnel, in dealing with just one family or just with one child, that the issue for this other America is not the issue of race but it's the issue of class, of being left behind, of being illiterate or semi-literate, or being incompetent in terms of earning a living or being unmotivated to earning a living, by being so tied in to the peer group with which one is raised that one cannot escape from their attitudes and their feelings which are all street, limited, low. And the tragedy of all of this, to the Soules and to Wilson and to others, is that at the very time when one has made such strides with two-thirds of the American black population, those who lead that two-thirds and many of the civil rights groups, have opted out from concern with the other black America and are simply involved with programs to enhance their own advantages, the advantages which are so new and so important to them. These men stand as advocates to another issue, an issue which they say we will overlook to our own hurt because Dr. Wilson reminds us that the civic explosions of the late 60's and early 70's when they were racial explosions, Watts and Hough, the explosions in Miami a year ago, these were not



explosions by the middle-class, the two-thirds of the black community, but by this other black community, full of frustration, full of anger, full of inadequacy, and I would make the point that precisely at the time when sociologists and social thinkers are beginning to be able to identify for us rather carefully this real problem which lies at the root of so much in our American system, we are saddled by a government which is moving in the opposite direction, determined to pay no attention to these problems. And I'm of the conviction that Mr. Reagan can be concerned with having enough fire power to deal with the bandits in the international world but that he can invest so much of the nation's wealth into the national defense that he forgets that an explosion can occur within as well as without, and that if attention is not placed, costly attention is not placed on this other poor America it's precisely the area in which the destructions of our city, the urban explosion, will occur.

Mr. Reagan has said that he has created a safety net at a certain point and he will not allow the poor to fall through its holes. Well, I'm not so sure that he knows what a safety net is and I am sure that the safety he thinks he has created has gaping holes within it. But, assuming that he's right, assuming that when money is passed through and block grants to the states, the states in their wisdom do not act politically but act as we would want them to act and see to it that every dollar that comes through is a dollar passed on through services, the services which the Reagan administration is allowing to remain in place are services which will only keep bread on the table, only provide a modicum of heat for the winter, only provide a modicum of a roof over one's head. Nothing is being spent on the programs which are designed to go out into this community where the problems are so manifold and invest the time, the energy, the man power resources, the urgency which alone gives us a chance to break people out of it, to limit population, to teach children birth control, to help them learn in school systems where the learning does not now take place. All of those programs, from Head Start right on up, are threatened by Reagan economics. What he assumes is



that given a dollar somebody in the other black America will be able to spend it as usefully and as fully as somebody who is outside the ghetto and that's simply not true. What is needed by these people is guidance and help and support and encouragement and interference in their lives by those who understand and empathize with them, by professionals who can give them guidance on how to keep a budget, how to get to a doctor, how to take care of their health, how to save their children from the harmful influence of the city, how to pull a family together, how to change the nature of our welfare bureaucracy so that it pays for parents to stay together, all kinds of things need to be done. It may in fact turn out to be more expensive to educate a single child from the slums than to educate a single child at Harvard so we're going to have to be willing at some point to pay that price because the truth is that the population explosion in our country is taking place in these slums, in black America, the other black America, the other brown America, and that the reason that the statistics seem to be reversing themselves, that is, black poverty seems to be increasing, the black unemployed seems to be on the increase, is because this is where the children are. The blacks who have made it out, the two-thirds, are having three children, not six and eight and ten, and unless we now apply ourselves to the problems of the other black America, these problems will multiply and the problems of race will again come to the forefront because they will become the dominant group, not one-third but one-half and more. And particularly if the economy continues to be straightened as it is in these hard times, these people will suffer and anger will build up, guns are available, the dangers are clear and they are implicit. And that is where the Soules and Wilsons and the others would have white America and the middle-class black America put their thoughts in the next years.

Those of us who have made it out of the ghetto who are Jews know that anti-semitism still exists. We've done rather well despite it. We've lived our own lives. We've made our own way. We have been able to survive in this so-



ciety. We're never going to have a society in which prejudice doesn't play a role. The question now is not really can we eliminate gentile racism. Blacks of skill, blacks who are trained, blacks who are energetic, will be able to take advantage of the society. The laws are in place. They can be tinkered with, they can be improved on, but the basic laws are now in place. But what is not in place in America is a strategy to deal with poverty, to deal not with the poverty of those who once worked, who are out of work, because as soon as there are jobs they will work again; these people are motivated, they know what structure is, that's a question that the economists will have to solve but it can be dealt with. But how to deal with the poverty of those whose lives have turned some of them into animals, how to deal with the poverty of those who from the time they've been in the cradle have never had a chance to be loved, to become a human being; how to deal with the poverty of those who are in their teen ages and later who are farrow in their activities, who are always on the edge; how to deal with the poverty of those who live in ignorance, who don't know how to provide for their health, who don't know how to budget for their family, how to do the simplest things which we take for granted, that's the issue which will face Americans in the 1980's provided we can face the other issues and it's an issue which is difficult. It's a costly issue. Reagan economics cannot provide for it, does not provide for it but it's one which we will not provide for if we do not to our own peril.



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