

A New Civil Rights Agenda

By BOB DOLE
AND J.C. WATTS JR.

We are now engaged in a contentious and difficult debate over the merits of affirmative action and the role of preferential policies in our society.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this debate is not its passion or its complexity, but its irrelevance. The simple truth is that preferential policies don't mean anything to the millions of Americans who each day evade bullets, send their kids to substandard schools and wade through the dangerous shoals of our nation's underclass.

Making government policy by race only diverts us from the real problems, the problems that affect all Americans of whatever race and heritage. Rather than having a potentially divisive argument over affirmative action, our most pressing need is to develop a civil rights agenda for the 1990s, one that is relevant to the needs and challenges of our time. Here, perhaps, is a starting point for this discussion:

Out-of-Wedlock Births

1) *Restoring the family.* That there is a crisis in the American family is no longer a matter of debate. In 1965, when a young Daniel Patrick Moynihan rang the alarm bell about the breakdown of the black family, the out-of-wedlock birthrate among African-Americans stood at 26%. For whites, it was less than 5%. Today, those figures have increased to 68% for blacks and 22% for whites.

A generation ago, President Lyndon Johnson delivered the commencement address at Howard University. He said, "The family is the cornerstone of society. . . . [W]hen the family collapses, it is the children that are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale, the community itself is crippled." Today, we are seeing the confirmation of President Johnson's theory.

Look at the social science data: More than 70% of the juveniles in state reformatories come from homes without fathers. Sixty percent of rapists and 72% of adolescent murderers grew up without fathers. Children from single-parent homes are 40% more likely to repeat a grade in school and 70% more likely to be expelled. And the daughters of single parents are more than twice as likely to have a child out-of-wedlock.

Restoring the black family to its former

prominence should be the central goal of a new civil rights agenda. How? By fixing a perverse tax structure that discourages marriage. By reforming a corrupt welfare system that has substituted government dependence for personal independence. By transforming a culture within the broader society that promotes self-indulgence over self-restraint. And by supporting those institutions within the black community—especially its churches—that provide the kind of moral foundation upon which productive lives can be built.

2) *Educational opportunity.* A good education is a springboard to opportunity. In the crusade to improve schools and make quality education more accessible, we

ratively and literally killing off our inner cities. Last week, 12-year-old Quinton Carter of Queens Village, New York, was shot dead in a dispute with a 16-year-old over 25 cents. It is no longer shocking to hear about children killing other children in arguments over sneakers or other items of clothing. The Justice Department estimates that one out of every 21 black men can expect to be murdered, a death rate double that of U.S. soldiers in World War II.

Joann Agard, a neighbor of Quinton Carter, says that "parents need to get kids into church again and teach them about the Bible. The children need God in their lives again." We happen to agree that one of the major causes of crime today is the

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have made money no object. Since 1960, total expenditures on public elementary and secondary education have more than tripled.

Yet after all that effort, test scores have fallen, dropout rates have declined only marginally, our international academic standing has decreased, and many of those students who have benefited from preferential admissions policies suffer a deep ambivalence about the merits of these very policies. According to the National Assessment Governing Board, only 12% of black high school seniors are "proficient" readers, while 54% have "below basic" reading skills. Many schools no longer provide safe learning environments. According to a 1991 Justice Department report, 37% of all violent crimes and 81% of all crimes of theft committed against young teenagers occurred while they were at school.

Giving low-income, inner-city parents the option to choose the school, public or private, that they consider most desirable for their children is an important step in the right direction. Govs. George Voinovich of Ohio, Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, and John Engler of Michigan have all transformed school-choice from an intellectual concept into a practical reality. They are making a difference.

3) *Fighting crime.* Violent crime is figu-

collapse of the two-parent family, our society's traditional transmission belt of virtue. Without stable families, there will be less virtue, more poverty and more crime.

We must also invest more law enforcement resources in our inner cities. Last year, Congress passed a crime bill that created an \$8.8 billion program to hire more police, yet none of these funds was targeted specifically to those areas of the country where the violent crime rate was the worst. We need to revisit this program to ensure that a portion of these funds go where they are most desperately needed.

We must also emphasize punishment. Today, violent criminals are only one-fifth as likely to serve their full sentence as they were in the 1960s. Convicted rapists serve on average only five years in prison; drug traffickers, only two. Governors like George Allen of Virginia are trying to bridge the gap between crime and punishment by abolishing parole for violent offenders. We must support them.

4) *Improving access to capital and removing regulatory barriers.* Many of the barriers to opportunity are regulatory ones, often rooted in local and state policies—restrictive zoning ordinances, local wage and bonding requirements, and occupational licensing regulations. Bob Woodson of the Center for Neighborhood

Enterprise tells us that "real opportunity will come for low-income people with the removal of economic Jim Crow laws that restrict access to capital and impose burdensome regulations on small business start-ups and non-profits."

At the federal level, we must find ways to provide capital for new and expanding businesses. We should encourage home ownership in the inner cities by giving incentives to lending institutions to help people realize the American dream. And we should immediately repeal the discriminatory Davis Bacon Act, which was passed in the 1930s with the explicit aim of keeping low-wage blacks out of the labor market for government construction contracts.

The Old Boys' Network

5) *Recruitment and outreach.* We must remain committed to the traditional form of "affirmative action"—aggressively recruiting qualified women and minorities as applicants for jobs and other opportunities. The key is to guarantee the opportunity to compete, not rig the results of the competition with quotas, set-asides and other preferences. These recruitment efforts, when done properly, can go a long way to break down the old boys' network.

6) *Enforce the antidiscrimination laws.* Finally, we must conscientiously enforce our antidiscrimination laws. Those who violate the law ought to be punished, and those who are the victims of discrimination must be made whole. Unfortunately, our nation's top civil-rights law enforcer, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is burdened with an unacceptably high 90,000-case backlog. We must give the EEOC the tools it needs to do its job properly.

With deep tears running through the social fabric of black America, we must rethink what we mean by the term "civil rights." This task will not be easy and will require some courage. It also demands imagination. We must leap beyond ideological labels and construct a civil rights agenda that is relevant, one that actually addresses the daunting problems facing not only black Americans but Americans of all races and backgrounds.

Mr. Dole, the Senate majority leader, is a Republican candidate for president. Mr. Watts is a freshman Republican congressman from Oklahoma.