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December 3, 1993

Senator--

Armstrong Williams responded positively to the piece on civil rights. He called the tone of the speech "strong," but said that a strong tone is needed at this time.

Attached are Armstrong's specific comments.

I will revise the piece to reflect these comments.

Dennis

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Senate Republican Leader
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COMMENTS

(1) The Draft on black social problems is fine as is, as far as it goes.

(2) Some thought should be given also to similar problems involving the family breakdown, illegitimacy, delinquency, etc., in the welfare sub-culture of whites (particularly in Appalachia), Hispanics, Asians and others. The impact of the welfare subculture, in other words, cuts across ethic or racial lines. (It may be that blacks got into the welfare system earlier and in greater numbers than some groups -- and came into it with the least social advantages.) (Also, a small minority of offenders, relative to the total population, are said to be responsible for an enormous amount of total crime.)

(3) Many black families are intact. They may be a minority of black families, but where there are stable two-parent or even single parent homes where children are being brought up on decent and productive values related to social responsibility and the work ethic, these family members are living out the American dream. This is the same as for whites, Hispanics, Asians or others who prize individual independence and self-reliance and avoid becoming dependent.

(4) The media focus attention almost exclusively on problems, so that our social problems become role models through constant exposure. Our media need to report success stories as often as they report failures. The idea that solutions are not newsworthy and that only problems are newsworthy needs to be reexamined.

(5) The people at the grass roots, regardless of race, know more about the problems of troubled neighborhoods than anyone else if they live in those neighborhoods. We need to establish channels from the bottom up -- as well as the top down -- for dealing with our social problems. The people themselves could provide many solutions if they were asked and if their answers were taken seriously as expressions the realities in which they live. From their answers might be inferred many workable solutions.

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Draft

America, slayer of Communism and the world's sole superpower, is terrified of black teenagers.

Twenty-five years after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., this sense of terror looms as large as any skyscraper on the landscape of urban America. As black crime increases, so too does white fear. This fear leads to distrust, black resentment, and often to visible racial animosity.

Indeed, having a frank discussion about race may be as difficult as finding a friend in Washington. By any measure, the cost of plain talk can be high: Whites who argue against racial preferences or who cite rising black crime rates are often branded as "racists." They may even try to lace their arguments with quotes from like-minded blacks, as if compelled by a need for "political cover." Blacks who challenge the pevailing orthodoxy on, say, affirmative action are labelled as Uncle Toms or as biologically black but little else.

In matters of race, the political and cultural elites are content to engage in a carefully choreographed rhetorical dance. Code words, like diversity and cultural pluralism, have replaced meaningful discussion about illegitimacy, single-parent households, violent crime, welfare dependency, the absence of moral values among our young--the forces of social decay, in other words, that are crashing against the black community like a tidal wave and poisoning relations among the races.

Republicans, like myself, have a share in the blame. When it comes to civil rights and race, we have been very good at communicating what we are against: quotas, set-asides, other racial preferences. But we have not been as effective in communicating what we are for. Furthermore, our passion against racial preferences has not been matched by an equally outspoken passion against racial discrimination. Sure, we all express our outrage at individual acts of discrimination, but this outrage is often rote. For some Republicans, the big rhetorical guns are reserved not for the black victims of racial discrimination, but for the white victims of racial preferences.

This has played right into the hands of the Washington-based civil rights establishment, which has hoodwinked black America into believing that the forces of social decay can be stopped with an ever-expanding menu of "rights."

One high-priced item on this menu was the monstrously irrelevant Civil Rights Act of 1991. This legislation, which codified an area of employment discrimination law known as the "law of disparate impact," happened to be the top legislative priority in Congress for more than two years. Civil rights leaders like Benjamin Hooks, the president of the NAACP, were effusive in their praise of the bill, saying that it was

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"essential to restoring the principle of equal opportunity."

Yet, two short years later, if you were to walk into any federally-subsidized housing project in the country and ask its residents about the Civil Rights Act of 1991, you are likely to be met by a wall of blank stares. Why? Because the law of disparate impact has no impact; it is irrelevant to the millions of black Americans who spend their lives wading through the dangerous shoals of the underclass.

Progress is possible only if we take a full accounting of reality. If we are to craft a relevant civil rights agenda for the 1990s and beyond, we must get all the facts on the table--the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Crime. The first civil right of every American should be freedom from the fear of crime. Unfortunately, this civil right is in tatters, as the rate of violent crime has increased by an astronomical 560% since 1960. Violent crime exacts an unusually expensive toll on the black community. Black males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, for example, are eight to ten times more likely to be murdered than white males in the same age group. Residents of our nation's capital, a predominately black city, are more likely to be killed than the citizens of war-torn San Salvador, Northern Ireland, or Lebanon.

At the same time, crime has reached pathological proportions within the underclass communities of black America. In 1989, one out of every four black American males was either in jail or on probation--a larger proportion than was in college. Nationally, blacks account for 58 percent of all arrests for weapons violations, 64 percent of all arrests for violent crime, and 71 percent of all robbery arrests. Blacks also account for 73 percent of all lawful self-defense killings by civilians; not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of those killed are other blacks.

And where is white corporate America amidst all this mayhem? Preaching the message of self and immediate self-gratification. Popular television ads sell sneakers to the theme "Just Do It," and a new brand of soda is promoted to the top-40 song "Right Now." Until public outrage became too great last year, a prominent record company peddled an album called "Cop-Killer," justifying the album's ugly message of hate and violence as a reflection of the sense of alienation experienced by the black underclass. It did not ask whether the album itself may have contributed to the alienation.

Cultural messages like these bore deep into the hearts and minds of our impressionable young. We underestimate their influence at our own risk.

Preventing and punishing crime, and exploring the cultural and economic circumstances that breed crime, should be at the

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core of any meaningful civil rights agenda. Quite simply, this is a life and death matter, for black and white alike. And, indeed, nothing would do more to soothe the tensions among the races than a plummetting crime rate.

The Breakdown of the Family. During the past two decades, the social-science evidence has been building to an unmistakably old-fashioned conclusion: The prospects for kids from broken homes are significantly less bright than for those kids raised in intact two-parent families.

In the mid-1960s, my Senate colleague, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was denounced as a racist when he suggested there was a link between black poverty and the prevalence of single-mother families in the black community. Today this link extends to crime: More than 70 percent of all juveniles in state reformatories come from homes without fathers.

If current trends continue, the two-parent black family will soon be on the endangered species list. In 1960, for example, 23 percent of all black children were born to unwed mothers. Thirty years later, in 1990, 65.2 percent--or nearly 2 out of 3 black children--entered the world without the benefit of a resident father and mother. Worse yet, government-sponsored welfare programs have encouraged young, unmarried women to get pregnant and have children.

Restoring the black family to its former prominence may be as difficult as putting Humpty Dumpty back together again, but this goal should be central to a new civil rights strategy. What better way to promote the principle of equal opportunity than giving all of our children the chance to grow with the security of a loving, nurturing family?

Education. Next to family, education is perhaps the most important guarantor of equal opportunity. In the crusade to improve schools and make quality education more accessible, there has been no lack of government effort: From 1930 to 1987, real spending on education increased five-fold. Between 1970 and 1985, education spending as a precentage of GNP rose from 2.8 percent to 6.8 percent. Affirmative action programs have aggressively placed black students in our most prestigious universities.

Yet, today, SAT scores are at historic lows, dropout rates continue to climb, and even some of those blacks who have benefitted from affirmative action suffer a deep ambivalence about the merits of these programs. Thirty years ago, teachers cited gum-chewing, tardiness, and classroom talking as their most common disciplinary problems; today, the most frequently cited problems are teenage pregnancy, guns in the schools, and delinquency. In some black neighborhoods, educational success is frowned upon as a "white thing to do," and those who are indeed successful face the harsh condemnations of their peers.

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Giving parents the option to choose the school, public or private, which they consider most desirable for their children is a small step in the right direction. But school choice proposals, alone, will not turn things around for black America.

There must be a fundamental sea-change in cultural values, where educational achievement is viewed as desirable, and where the self-discipline and drive necessary for achievement are nurtured. Much as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped change people's attitudes about the wrongfulness of racial discrimination, it is the responsibility of government--and, more importantly, our nation's social and cultural institutions--to reinforce those values so necessary for educational success.

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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. As Martin Luther King, Jr. himself observed: "Many people fear nothing more terribly than to take a position that stands out sharply and clearly from the prevailing opinion. The tendency of most is to adopt a view that is so ambiguous that it will include everything and so popular that it will include everybody."

Twenty-five years after Dr. King's death, the time for ambiguity and sugar-coating is over. We must strive to construct a civil rights agenda that is relevant, rather than merely popular.

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