

Summary of the Discussion

The large difference noted between scores for mathematical and for reading attainments leads me to ask if this is due to social or to non-social factors and of what kind? Secondly, I would like a clarification about the terms "positive discrimination" and "affirmative action" and whether these are interchangeable or different?

(Prof. Loury). These differences in intellectual performance are substantial and I believe their source is social rather than reflecting innate differences between African and European populations. Although we cannot reject out of hand the possibility of there being an inherent element involved, the weight of evidence does not support this hypothesis. As far as social determination of these differences is concerned, neurological science has established the importance of the child's early years for cognitive development. Other studies have shown verbal stimulation, nutrition, poverty and culture to be associated with mental development. Thus a socially based account largely seems to explain these differences.

Secondly, the term "positive discrimination" is not used in North America. However "affirmative action" is employed to cover both attempts to avoid discrimination and also pro-active efforts to increase the proportional representation of some out-group in work or school. I use the term in the latter sense to refer to practices which go beyond merely assuring procedural equity.

For Africans outside the USA, it does seem that Afro-Americans have made some progress since the second world war. I would like to know how far this progress, for example the increase in black American businessmen, is due to the organization and struggle of black people. Equally one notes their political and academic promotion which leads one to ask what role the universities have played in this progress?

(Prof. Loury). In my discussion of incorporating populations which were historically disadvantaged I have stressed that there is a problem still to be solved, but I do not wish to understate the amount of progress that has taken place. Since Gunnar Myrdal published, *An American Dilemma*,

the post-war representation of black Americans in the universities faculties has moved from nearly zero to a considerable number working in the prestige institutions (though with variations according to departments). Similarly their importance in political life is substantially greater today and this success in politics has translated into an influence which would not have been seen prior to the war. In sum, African Americans are the richest and most privileged people of African descent anywhere in the world. At the same time, some four out of ten black children live in poverty, some 7% of adult males are in prison and the reading ages of black children lag behind those of their white peers. We need to keep both of these aspects in view.

How far can the findings presented be generalized to the Hispanic population of the USA and to the people of the Third World in general?

(Prof. Loury). I think there are a number of parallels to be drawn with the Hispanic population, though its diversity prompts caution. However if I had aggregated together older Spanish families, recent immigrants from Mexico, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, etc. I would have found disparities for them, though not of the same magnitude as for Afro-Americans, and would have raised similar questions about affirmative action for effecting their incorporation. Perhaps controversially, I regard the Hispanic population as being more analogous to the European immigrant populations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and mean by this that the African American group does remain a unique and discrete problem. Because of the prosperity of the USA and its opportunity structure, the problems of black or Hispanic Americans are very different from those living in impoverished Third World countries or ones whose institutions do not permit social mobility.

Speaking as a white Zimbabwean, it strikes me that the indigenous population have a dynamic cultural resource on which to fall back in the midst of their suffering and poverty. Although this is double-edged because it also keeps them back, nevertheless this cultural support seems to me to be lacking for black Americans, because its roots have been largely destroyed. Would you agree that this accounts for much of their poverty and impoverishment?

(Prof. Loury). As an economist, this is outside my expertise, but all the same if one wants to understand racial inequality in the USA then one has to think about culture. I would not say that American blacks have no

cultural roots: indeed you can see its influence throughout jazz and popular culture. But the consequences of historical repression are manifest in a cast of mind which leads the community to reinforce attitudes that curtail opportunities. For example, in the housing projects people do not engage in Gary Becker-style cost-benefit analysis about jobs or night-school: instead of behaving according to the rational-choice model, they respond in terms of their identity — and the expectations attached to it may be jarringly inconsistent with objective opportunities. This is the error of those who compare Afro-Americans with the immigrant populations, for culturally the black could not do what the immigrant has done. Discussions of justice cannot ignore what history has done to this group in disabling them from seizing opportunities. That is the cultural problem and we cannot wash our hands of it, but must address education, the Churches and other institutions that shape culture, and which with great effort can re-shape its orientation.

The assertion in the presentation that present disadvantage is more attributable to a deficit of social capital rather than legal rights leads to the ironic observation that it seems just as the achievements of the Civil Rights movement culminated in the Act of 1964, this legal victory was also precisely the point at which the social battle started to be lost. Was there anything in our understanding then of freedom and equality which actually contributed to unleashing this power of social capital?

(Prof. Loury). I agree that the broad success of the Civil Rights movement throughout American society did have some adverse consequences by undermining the ability to reinforce values which would restrain individual liberty in order to sustain communal, social and familial bonds that are important to social capital. Liberty and equality are not the highest values if they mean loosing the individual from any fetter or responsibility. Yet somehow the aim of liberating African Americans from the legal status of second class citizens became elided with the suspension of judgement and selective relaxation of authority — for example, social workers would refuse to evaluate conditions in black homes negatively, for fear of the charge of imposing white middle class values. This did not itself destabilize the black family (witness family disarray throughout the USA), but this undermining of values that restrain the exercise of individual liberty did not help it either.

Were it to have been an indigenous American addressing us, do you think a different picture from yours would have been presented?

(Prof. Loury). The indigenous American Indian would register an even greater magnitude of disadvantage than I have presented for African Americans and would have dwelt upon the effects of life on Indian reservations, alcohol problems, school drop-outs, etc. I think attention would also have been drawn to the different legal and political status of their territorial sovereignty, as recognized in treaties with the American government. Recently the native American tribes have set up gambling casinos there, which are not permitted outside — a fact mentioned only in order to underline the differences brought about by legal independence and autonomy. For blacks, their future should really be one of full integration into society, as is probably the case for those Americans from Ireland and Italy, but I do not believe that the same could be said without qualification for indigenous Americans.

Returning to the question of differential performance levels between black and white, it would be interesting to know whether if the data were disaggregated there were differences in performance related to blacks from different social classes, places of residence, etc.?

(Prof. Loury). If the data is disaggregated, middle class blacks and those from higher income families do perform better. However, if blacks are compared to whites of the same class, a gap in performance levels of approximately the same proportion would be found, thus confirming that the aggregate statistic holds. Controlling for class still leaves a significant difference in the academic performance of these racial groups.

Why, given their general disadvantages, do black Americans do so well in sport and especially competitive sports?

(Prof. Loury). This is undoubtedly the case and has become pronounced with the ending of prohibitions (e.g. now 85-90% of professional basketball players are African Americans). Some explanations focus on natural differences in physical endowments, which are outside my competence to assess, but social factors are important too — after all there was a time when Jews were over-represented in sport relative to their representation in the population. Culturally, black kids spend hours playing ball and attach hero status to star players. This is a crucial change because these players are cultural icons, looked-up to by blacks and whites alike. However the danger of this is that it lends credence to racial stereotyping of black physical prowess whose sub-text is their mental inferiority.