

## THE POOR IN AMERICA

### CONCEPT

(Contrasting economic situation of Negroes and whites. Are we poor?)

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN FREEDOM SCHOOLS

#### 1. Who are the poor people in America?

Do we have enough money, enough food to eat, and enough clothing to keep warm, and enough beds in our house so that everyone in our family can have a place to sleep? Do we have electricity, and running water, and refrigerators, and toilets? Do we have other things, like T.V. sets, food freezers, clothes washers and dryers, air conditioners, and cars? Do we need some or all of these things? Are we poor?

#### 2. Who is not poor in America? Are most white people you know about poor? Are some white people poor?

What kinds of houses do white people you know about live in? Do they have electricity, and running water, and toilets, and many of the other things we mentioned before? Are most of them poor?

(Why people are poor)

#### 3. Why are people poor?

- Some people say it's because we are lazy, or stupid, and don't really want to work; is this true?
- Is it because we are Negro?
- Because we live in the South?
- Because we have little education and few skills?
- Because there are not enough jobs? Why not? Are our jobs being taken away by machines?
- Because we are old?
- Because we are sick?
- Because nobody, including the federal government, cares enough about poor people to do anything about poverty?
- For all of these, and some other reasons?

(Who decides who shall be poor and who shall not: the owners of the plantations, farms, and factories; also discriminatory labor unions. )

#### 4. Who decides what kinds of jobs Negroes can get?

- The white man who owns the plantation?
- The white man who owns the farm?
- The white men who own and run the factories?

- Who are the owners of most of the plantations and farms where we live? Why are most of them white and few of them Negro? How much money do these owners make? Why do they make so much more than we do: is it because they work harder than we do? What kinds of houses do they live in?

CONCEPT

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN FREEDOM SCHOOLS

- What are the biggest plants and factories in your town? Your state? Who runs them? How do plants make money (legal and illegal ways)? How much money do the men who run the plants make? How much do the people who run the machines and do the other labor inside the plants make?
- Do you know any Negroes who work in the plants? What kinds of jobs do they do? What kinds of jobs do the white people who work in the plants do? How much do Negroes who work in the plant earn?
- Whites? Is there a union in the plant? Does the union help Negroes as much as it helps the whites, or does the Union also discriminate against Negroes? (Does the union make sure that Negroes who do the same work as whites get paid as much as whites? Does it make sure that Negroes get promoted to better, higher-paying jobs as often as whites? Does it make sure that the plant hires Negroes? Does the union protect the jobs of Negroes who try to register to vote, or who, in other ways, support the civil rights movement?)

(How we can change things so that Negroes and other poor people will have jobs, and better, higher paying jobs.)

4. How can we change things so that Negroes and other poor people can get good jobs?
- What is a "good" job? How do we feel about the work we do? Does your mother like her job? Your father? What is work?
  - Should we organize ourselves into unions so we will be strong against the men who hire and fire -- the bosses?
  - If we do organize into unions, should they be independent, or should they be part of larger, already-existing unions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?
  - Should we try to gain power through the vote?
  - What other kinds of things can we do?

## RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR USE IN DISCUSSION ON THE POOR IN AMERICA

Most Americans are not poor. In fact, most of them are rich compared to other people around the world, and to most of us. The average family of four in America makes about \$7,000 to \$8,000 each year. Most Americans live in homes they own themselves (although many of them own them on long-term mortgages); these homes have electricity, running water, and bathrooms. Many of them (in fact, one-sixth of them) have clothes dryers, food freezers, and air conditioners.) Most Americans take good care of themselves, too; they visit their doctor 5 times a year, and their dentist 3.

But among all of these fairly rich people live 40 to 50 MILLION poor people. A family that earns less than \$3,000 a year is poor, because \$3,000 is not enough to buy all of the food, clothing, schoolbooks, and other things people need, not to pay the rent, the doctor bills, the phone bills, and other bills that a family has to pay.

Why are poor people poor? Some people, usually the rich ones, say that "poor people are just too lazy to work hard; they don't really want to work, and besides that, many of them are really too stupid to get a job. Therefore, the poor don't deserve anything better. They should be poor." But we know that many of us, and many of our mothers and fathers, work very hard. Our fathers bend over all day long in the hot sun picking and chopping cotton. Our mothers scrub floors, and toilets, and wash clothes, and cook meals for white women all day long. And sometimes we work too, for long hours, in the fields. Yet still we are poor. So we can't be poor because we are lazy and don't want to work; we work very hard, but we are poor. Why?

We are poor because we are Negroes and because we live in the South. There are not many jobs in the South, and many of them -- especially the ones Negroes can get -- don't pay very much. There is a law, passed by the U.S. Congress, that says everyone who works in some kinds of jobs must get paid at least \$1.25 per hour. But most of the jobs we do are not covered by this law; all people who work on plantations or farms, and all maids are not covered by this law. They can be paid whatever the boss can get away with paying them. So many of us get paid only \$2.50 or \$3.00 for working a whole day in the cotton fields; many of us get paid only \$10 each week for working as maids for white women.

To see what kinds of jobs people who are not white (95% of all people who are not white are Negro; others are Puerto Rican, Indian, and others), look at the Table below:

<u>JOB</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE OF NON-WHITES HOLDING THESE JOBS</u>
Professional, technical	4.7
Managers, officials, other bosses	2.1
Office workers, clerks	3.7
Skilled craftsmen, foremen	4.7
Machine operators	10.8
Service workers (like gas station men); (Not including maids)	20.2
Laborers (not including farm and mine workers)	25.7
Household workers, like maids	54.3
Farmers and farm workers (sharecroppers, migrants, etc.)	14.4

You can easily see from this Table that Negroes and other non-whites have very few good, well-paying jobs, and most of the hard, bad-paying, dirty ones.

RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

Now what about how much money non-white people make? The Table below shows what a big difference there is between what most-non-white people make, as compared with what most white people make.

Whites	\$5,424
Nonwhites	3,058

Nonwhites, then, earn only a little more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of what white people make, or 56%.

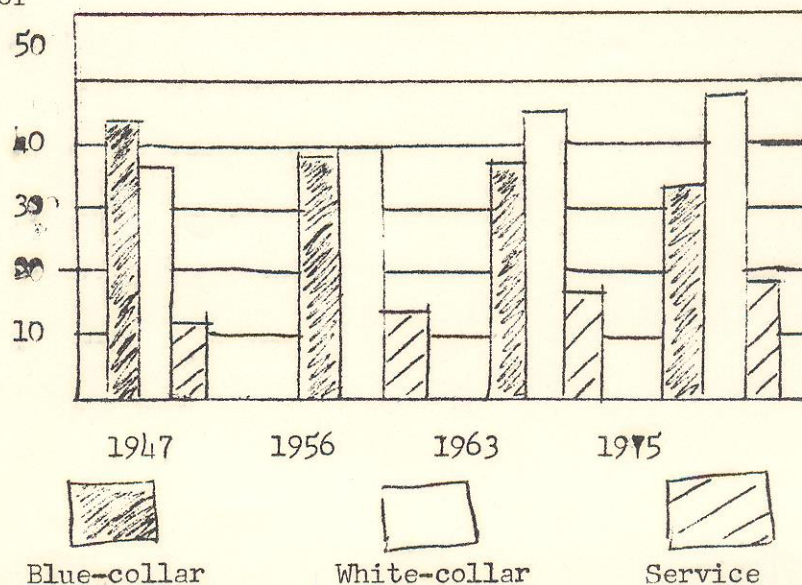
What does automation, or the replacing of working men by machines, have to do with this?

Our country has always believed in the idea that if a man worked -- if he helped to produce the good people in our country need and want to buy -- then he could earn enough money to buy these goods for himself and his family as well. But now the machines are doing the work of producing the goods, and the men have no jobs. This means they earn no money to buy the goods with. So many of the goods -- like rice and cotton -- are not bought. Instead, they are stored, by the U.S. Government, in huge storage bins, warehouses, and other places. The Government spends \$1 billion each year storing these things. Meanwhile, about 40 to 50 million people live in poverty.

How many people loose their jobs because of the machines? No one knows excatly how many, but some people guess that it is around 40,000 every week. We do know that the unemployment rate (the number of people out of work) is 5.5% of the total labor force. This is twice as high as any other major industrial country. Teenagers have an even higher unemployment rate; it is 15%, and for high-school drop-outs 30%. For teenagers who live in the ghettos of northern cities, it is often as high as 50%.

Machines are not taking everyone's jobs away. They are taking away mostly the jobs we call blue-collar -- the jobs where people work with their hands as farmers, miners, factory hands, and the like. The number of blue-collar jobs open to people is dropping ev ery year. But the number of jobs open to white-collar workers, like doctors, teachers, lawyers, technicians, and the like, is increasing every year. Service jobs, too, are increasing. The Table below shows that this is so.

Percent of  
total em-  
ployment



## RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA

Most of the people who write about, or talk about the problem of automation think that the responsibility for doing something about poverty lies with the federal government. This is because they think that only the federal government has enough money and enough power to really solve the problems of poverty and unemployment. The federal government has done some things already. Let's look at what these are.

There are three main programs the federal government has developed recently to deal with the problem of unemployment and automation. These are:

- 1) The Area Redevelopment Act, passed in 1961
- 2) The Manpower Development and Training Act, passed in 1962 (MDTA)
- 3) The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 --Johnson's War on Poverty.

### The Area Redevelopment Act

This act provides federal help (in the form of loans, grants, advice, and training programs) to areas which are economically underdeveloped. An area is considered a "redevelopment area" if it has continued and widespread unemployment. In order to be eligible for federal assistance, a local committee in such an area, which must be representative of the community, gets together and outlines a plan for economic development of that area.

Over 75 counties and other areas in Mississippi were listed by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1963 as eligible for ARA programs -- many of them because of the low incomes of Negro families. Despite this fact, there were no ARA training programs in Mississippi in 1961. In all, only about 160 Negroes in the entire South were trained under the ARA, even though Negroes make up a very high percentage of the unemployed in the South. Part of the problem with the ARA in the South is that its programs must be approved by the state concerned before loans can be made. This makes it difficult if not impossible for Negro communities to benefit from ARA programs; and, as a result, the ARA has had no real importance in the South for Negroes.

The major thing wrong with the ARA program is that it is too small. In its first three years, the program trained only 35,000 workers and helped create between 110,000 and 115,000 jobs (according to the U.S. Department of Labor.) There are approximately 4 million unemployed people in the United States, and perhaps another 4 million who would seek work if they thought there was any chance of finding it. So you can see that this small government program was not nearly big enough to solve the problem of unemployment.

In June of 1963 the Senate agreed to set aside new funds so that the ARA program could continue. But the House refused to agree to this, so the program has been discontinued. It will get no more additional money.

## RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

### The Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA)

This program, paid for jointly by the states and the federal government, and run by the states, was set up to train workers for jobs which had been found through research, labor market surveys, and other means. In other words, it was not set up to create new jobs, but rather to match unemployed workers with jobs that were already available. To be in this program, a person had to be: one of the following:

- unemployed, and a member of a family whose income was less than \$1200 a year
- working at a job below their skill level
- working much less than full time
- working in a job that would soon be taken over by a machine
- between the ages of 16 and 22 and in need of training and more education

The main things wrong with this program, like the ARA, is that it is too small. In 1963, the MDTA had 1,622 projects, with 59,595 men being trained. In the four states of the Deep South (Ala., Ga., La., and Miss.) there were 51 projects, with 2,099 men being trained. The breakdown by states was:

	<u>Projects</u>	<u>Trainees</u>
Alabama	30	1,569
Mississippi	5	125
Lousiana	---	---
Georgia	16	405
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Total	51	2,099

### The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 — Johnson's "War" on Poverty.

There are five key programs set up by this Act:

- 1) The Job Corps will offer work, training and new surrouddings for 40,000 boys and girls in 1965 and 100,000 by 1966, with most of them coming from the slums, and being high-school drop-outs. The young people will be paid \$50 a month. One staff person will work with every 5 young people in the program. Training will take place in national parks, forest facilities, veterans hospitals and other areas far away from the slums.
- 2) Youth Work-Training program for about 200,000 young people. This will try to keep potential school drop-outs in school. The students will earn enough money in various jobs in federal, state, and private agencies, to allow them to stay inschool -- or to return to school if they have already dropped out and wish to return.
- 3) Work-study programs will give 140,000 college students part-time jobs and vacation work in labs, libraries, and so foth, with costs shared by the U.S. Government and the University. This is to help students get enough mon ey to stay in school.

RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

- 4) Community Action Program will give funds to communities to help them fight poverty in their community. Plans will be made by the people in the community. These will probably be things like community centers, playgrounds, adult-education facilities, and health clinics.
- 5) Adult Work-Training programs will try to retrain and find jobs for people on relief. There is a literacy program for adults included.

Again, the problem with this program is that it is too small. A mere \$784 million has been set aside for it. To see how small this amount is, we can compare it with the other 42 agencies and programs of the federal government which deal in some way or another with poverty; their total budget was \$15 BILLION in 1964. So Johnson's "War" is not really a "War" at all. It is more like a minor skirmish.

There are two other things wrong with this program. First, everybody who is to receive anything through the program must first sign a loyalty oath. Secondly, every program proposed by the people of a community is subject to a veto by the Governor of the state.

(Information from the Research Dept. of the United Packinghouse, Food and Allied Workers, and from the Act.)

## RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

### UNIONS, BOSSES, AND NEGROES

One way that working people have been able to get higher wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions is by forming a union. A union is simply a group of people who join together and tell their 'boss' that they will not work for less than a certain amount of money, for more than a certain number of hours, and only under certain conditions. If the boss refuses to agree to their demands, and to sign a written contract, then the workers strike; that is, they refuse to work until the boss agrees to their demands. Some people say that we should organize ourselves into unions and strike against our 'bosses' -- the plantation, farm, and factory owners. Can we do this? What are some of the problems we would face? What are the risks we would take? What could we gain? If we do organize, should we form independent unions, or should we join up with one of the big unions that already exists? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this?

There is one big problem that working people face when they join unions and strike, especially in the southern states. If they have jobs which are not very skilled jobs (that is, jobs which somebody else would learn to do quickly without much training), then they can be replaced very easily when they go on strike. And when there are many, many people who don't have any jobs at all (as there are in the South), then these people who don't have jobs can be hired to take the place of the people who go on strike. What happens then is that the people who want on strike sooner or later lose their jobs completely (one year after their contract runs out, if they were in a union before). But the boss doesn't lose any money because he has been able to hire new workers to take the place of the strikers.

The only way to prevent this from happening (short of violence), is to organize EVERYBODY in the whole town -- to organize all of the workers and all of the people without jobs, so that they won't take the jobs of the people on strike. This is very hard to do, because the people who don't have jobs usually want jobs so much that they will take the jobs of the people who are on strike no matter what the people on strike say to them. It is hard for these people to see that it would be better, in the long run, if nobody agreed to work for a boss unless he paid them enough and met their other demands as well. So this is one big problem we would face. We would have to organize nearly everybody in order to win a strike.

There is another problem with unions in the South. That is that if we organize on the plantations and the farms, and demand higher wages, then the farm or plantation owner might decide that it would be cheaper and less trouble for him in the long run if he brought in machines to do the work which we do now. And there are machines which can do most of the work we do; so the farmer could bring these machines in tomorrow if he wanted to. He would then have to hire only a very few people to run the machines, and the rest of us would all be out of work.



## RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

### UNIONS, BOSSES, AND NEGROES, CONT.,

Finally, there is one more thing we should think about, one more problem we might run into if we organize. If we organize all of the maids in a town, and they demand higher wages and shorter hours, some of the white ladies who now hire maids wouldn't be able to afford them any more. They would fire the maids and do the work themselves. Some of the white ladies who now have jobs (because their maids do all their housework and cooking, and take care of their children for them), might have to quit these jobs; But most of them would probably find a way to do this work themselves and still keep their jobs. (They might, for example, share the baby-sitting job with their neighbors). So, if we organize ourselves we might find that some of us would keep our jobs and get higher wages, but many others of us might find ourselves out of work.

But let's suppose that we think about all of these problems, and we decide that the circumstances where we work are such that we think we can better our lot if we organize into unions, and, possibly, strike. The next question we need to think about is whether we should form independent unions, or whether we should join ourselves up with one of the big unions that has branches (called 'locals' ) all around the country. To answer this question we need to know something about these big unions -- about how they treat Negro workers.

Most of the big unions have written, formal policies against discrimination; but many of them don't pay much attention to these formal policies, and they do discriminate against Negroes. Some of the most important ways they discriminate are:

- 1) excluding Negroes from membership
- 2) having segregated 'locals'
- 3) controlling whether any Negroes are hired in the plant, and if so, how many
- 4) controlling what kinds of jobs Negroes get, and whether or not Negroes get promoted as fast and as far as whites

#### Membership and Segregated Locals

Very few unions still exclude Negroes completely from their membership; in fact, only 3 still do. By the Civil Rights Act of 1964, such exclusion is now outlawed.

In the past, unions which didn't keep Negroes out altogether often formed segregated locals. Often, Negroes wanted to keep the locals segregated as much as whites did; This was because in the segregated locals Negroes could hold offices in the Negro union, and have some say over their own affairs. They knew that if they joined up with the white local, they would have little chance of holding office and little say about anything that went on in the union. This is still the case in some places, particularly in the South, where segregated locals still exist.

## RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

### UNIONS, BOSSES, AND NEGROES, CONT.,

#### Hiring

Sometimes unions set up a 'hiring hall'; the bosses agree to hire nobody except people the unions sends to him through the hiring hall. By excluding Negroes from membership in the union, the union can keep Negroes from getting any jobs in a particular plant at all. Or they can carefully control the number of Negroes who do get hired and what kinds of jobs they get.

#### Job Opportunities

In addition to the hiring halls, unions sometimes set up referral systems. In this case, Negroes must go to the union first to be referred to a job opening. Unions which discriminate refer Negroes only to the worst, lowest-paying jobs; often, whites don't even have to use the referral system but are informed of job openings by the union by telephone.

Another way unions keep Negroes from getting good jobs is by keeping them out of training and apprenticeship programs. If the Negro never gets a chance to get trained for a skilled job, he is 'not qualified' when an opening occurs in that job category.

But the main way that unions control the jobs that Negroes get is by putting pressure on the employers. They tell the employers that if Negroes are hired, or hired for good, high-paying positions, then the white employees will strike. (Often this is a bluff; and a firm statement by the employer (the boss) is enough to put down any resistance white workers have to Negroes being hired.)

#### Unions in the South

Unions in the South discriminate more than do unions in the North, as we might expect. Some of them have set up separate lines of promotion for whites and Negroes. Negroes can be promoted up the job line just so far, and then no farther. Thus, there is a top limit to the kinds of jobs Negroes can get and how much they can earn. Usually, Negroes' jobs are limited to unskilled, menial laboring and service jobs. Sometimes Negroes are allowed to transfer into better, higher-paying jobs, but only by losing all of the years of seniority they have accumulated since they began working in a plant.

One cannot criticize all unions in the South, because there are some where Negroes are organized and protected and promoted as fairly as whites. One finds this to be true in the fertilizer, food-processing, logging, lumber, meatpacking unions. These unions are exceptions to the general rule, however. Overall, unions in the South have hurt rather than helped Negroes.

## Discrimination by Bosses

Bosses, men who run the plants, discriminate against Negroes just as do some unions. The most important ways they discriminate are:

- 1) In recruiting workers
- 2) In hiring
- 3) In making work assignments
- 4) In promotions
- 5) In training of workers

### Recruiting.

This is sometimes hard to see, because discrimination in recruiting goes on 'behind closed doors.' Sometimes there are special unwritten agreements or 'understandings' between public or private employment agencies and the bosses, whereby the agency will not refer Negroes to the bosses for hiring. (The Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes this illegal.)

Another way bosses discriminate in recruiting workers is by recruiting them from all-white high schools or colleges, or from all-white neighborhoods.

A third way is for employers, bosses, to **recruit** workers only from among friends and relatives of people (mostly whites) already working in the plants.

Finally, discrimination occurs in the hiring halls, as we mentioned above.

### Hiring

Discrimination in hiring is much easier to see than discrimination in recruiting. Most bosses will now hire some Negroes, but usually only for semi-skilled or unskilled jobs. (54% of all domestic workers are non-whites; many service workers, like janitors, are non-whites. Few only 4.7% of all profession and technical people are non-whites.)

Since the civil rights movement began to demand more and better jobs for Negroes, some of these better jobs have been opening up. But many times Negroes do not have the skills that are needed to fill these jobs. The question of what should be done about this -- whether special training programs should be set up, night-classes for high-school drop-out, or what -- is one we should talk about.

### Promotion

There are many different ways Negroes are discriminated against in promotions. Sometimes Negroes are simply overlooked, when a position opens up at a higher level in the plant. Sometimes these new positions demand special skills which can be learned only through training, and Negroes are excluded from the training programs. And sometimes Negroes are allowed to transfer to these better, higher-paying positions only by losing all seniority privileges.

RESOURCES FOR USE IN DISCUSSION OF POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.,

UNIONS, BOSSES, AND NEGROES, CONT.

Why employers practice racial discrimination

In addition to prejudice on the part of some employers, there are other reasons why they discriminate against Negroes:

- 1) They are afraid that white customers, employees, labor unions, or the general white public will object, and that their businesses will suffer.
- 2) They do not think that qualified Negroes can be found for many of the higher-level positions.
- 3) They don't feel like changing old practices unless someone pushed them to do so.

Discrimination by Employment Agencies: Public and Private

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 now outlaws discrimination by these agencies. But it will be a long time before such discrimination ends, especially in states where there is already an Fair Employment Practices Commission. The federal government will not step in in such cases until it is clear that the state commission isn't doing anything about discrimination. This takes time to prove.

RESOURCES FOR DISCUSSION OF THE POOR IN AMERICA, CONT.

UNIONS, BOSSES, AND NEGROES, CONT.,

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act makes some of the discriminatory practices we just talked about illegal. The Act says that:

- 1) No employer may fire you or refuse to hire you or discriminate against you in your wages and conditions of employment, or segregate or classify you in any way that might deprive you of job opportunities or of your rights as an employee, because of your race, color, religion, sex or national origin.
- 2) No employment agency may refuse to refer you for employment, or classify you, or discriminate against you in any other way, because of your race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- 3) No labor union may exclude you from membership, or discriminate against you, or segregate or classify its membership or refuse to refer you for employment or limit your employment opportunities in any way, or try to get an employer to discriminate against you, because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

These rules, if they are enforced, should do a great deal to end blatant discrimination. (They might be less effective in ending the more informal, difficult to prove types of discrimination -- like unwritten agreements by employers to hire only whites, or few Negroes; or the use of personal influence to get jobs for whites).

To enforce the Act, a federal commission of 5 members is to be set up. This commission may cooperate with state, local, or other private or public agencies to make sure that Negroes get equal job opportunities. If there is already a state Fair Employment Practices Commission in operation, the federal commission may agree not to interfere with the work that this Commission is doing unless it feels it is necessary, in order to enforce the Civil Rights Act. The commission also has powers to make studies and recommendations, to mediate disputes, to conduct hearings, and to examine witnesses.

This part of the Civil Rights Act goes into effect this July. It applied, during the first year, to employers or unions that have at least 100 members; in the second year, to those which have 75 or more; in the third year to those with 50 or more, and in the fourth year, to those with 25 or more.