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## Editor's Note: Trotter Review, Vol. 1, Issue 1

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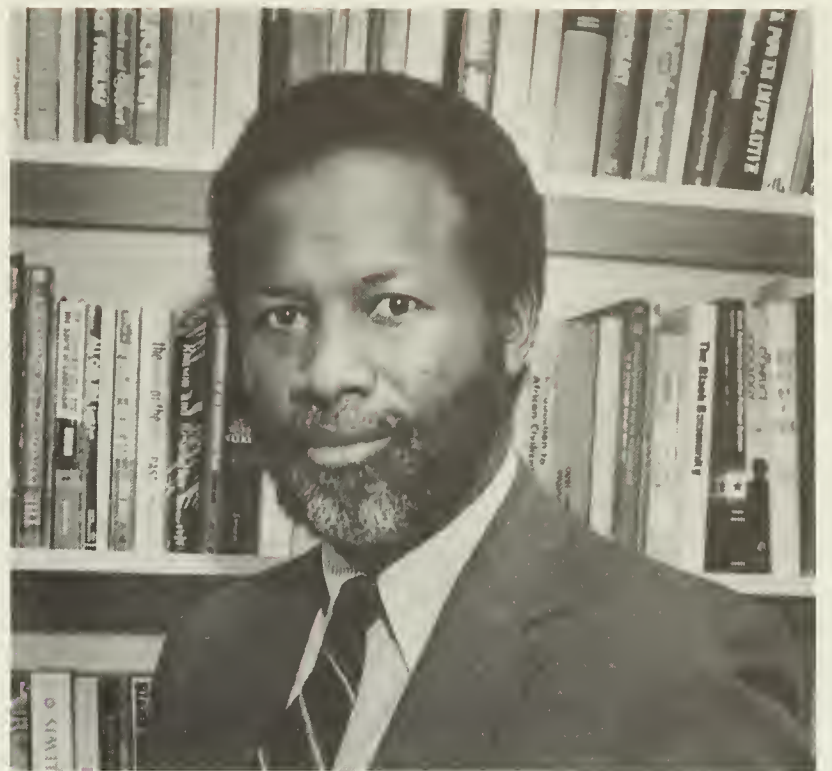
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# Editor's Notes

by  
Wornie L. Reed



This edition of The Trotter Institute Review addresses issues in economics and the entertainment media. Topics include employment, affirmative action, income, and the black experience as presented in movies. The articles address these concerns at what may be a critical point in race relations in the United States. At a time when the national mood suggests that civil rights and economic opportunities have been provided sufficiently to blacks and that nothing further needs to be done, these articles suggest how far we have to go before that is a reality.

Blackwell demonstrates that although the State of Massachusetts has a very low unemployment rate and is experiencing an economic boom, blacks and other minorities are not participating equitably. In fact, although the statewide unemployment rate of Massachusetts is low, unemployment and poverty rates are very high for blacks in Boston, as they are in other major cities in the United States. His study raises serious questions about the validity of the dictum that "a rising tide lifts all boats." The State's economic prosperity has not translated into low unemployment or low poverty rates among blacks in the inner city. Blackwell discusses how barriers may be removed to allow more access by blacks to jobs in the booming construction industry as well as the government and other areas of the private sector.

In spite of supportive Supreme Court rulings, affirmative action is under attack, principally from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. James Farmer, the civil rights leader who was instrumental in influencing President Lyndon Johnson to initiate the affirmative action program in the 1960's, reviews the history of the development of the policy and discusses current issues and implications.

As unemployment and underemployment abound in the black communities of our inner cities, some analysts are continually describing the increasing income of black households, and arguing that blacks are making tremendous gains in income and employment. Economist Jeremiah Cotton critiques one such study which was conducted at the Rand Corporation.

One of the primary arguments advanced through the years for the necessity of having books and courses on black history was that accurate socio-historic data are

needed to correct distortions and other inaccuracies about the black experience. In the Fall of 1986, two commercial movies demonstrated the need for such vigilance. These movies have been so loose with their socio-historic content as to provoke protests from groups in the black community. One of these movies, Walt Disney's re-released *Song of the South* (1946), is critiqued here by Patricia Turner.

Another recent film, New World Pictures' *Soul Man* (1986), has been criticized by such groups as the Black Law Students Association at Harvard for ridiculing the black experience. In this film, a white man darkens his face and pretends to be black so that he can receive preferential treatment for admission to law school. This film is seen as ridiculing the objectives of affirmative action and ignoring the racial oppression that precipitated its development.

Movies continue to be troublesome for those who are concerned about the accuracy of the portrayals of the black experience—and consequently the description of black Americans. Before the recent release of these two films, there was Stephen Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), which was praised for its artistry but criticized for its depiction of the black south and the black family. While defenders of the movie argue that it is merely fiction, critics note that one person's fiction is another person's facts, and that the movie has been heralded as a significant work about the black experience, suggesting that what was shown is the way black people are. This point is significant, for the movie, *The Color Purple*, is set in a specific place and time and presents its fictionalized story in structure and content as the way many of the black people lived; however, the life experiences of most southern blacks were not what was shown in this movie.

Patricia Turner's review of *Song of the South* demonstrates the continuing problem of the black image in movies.

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