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Redemptive Organizations and the Politics of Hope*

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ABSTRACT

The politics of hope of this article is rooted in the local leadership of low income, repressed communities. One central element of the politics of hope is redemptive organizations. These organizations are a variant of voluntary associations that are distinguished by their explicitly political purpose of social transformation and concomitant requirement of personal sacrifice and transformation. This article specifies the internal characteristics of redemptive organizations and their role in change over time. The history of four rural, southern, low-income, and predominantly black communities offer numerous instances of redemptive organizations that deal with educational, economic, and political conditions. These organizations link change efforts from Reconstruction through the civil rights movement to the present. As such, they offer insight into constituent elements of social movements.

Voluntary organizations play a peculiar role in American society. De Tocqueville commented on this early in our history, and recently, Robert Bellah and his associate authors (1985) reminded us about voluntary associations and their peculiar significance for Americans. They elaborated on de Tocqueville's analysis of voluntary agencies in American life to include a set of explicitly political organizations related to those that James Q. Wilson termed "purposive" and "redemptive" (1973).

This article deals with redemptive organizations, a set of voluntary associations with explicitly political purposes of social transformation and a concomitant requirement of personal transformation. It traces their role in political change efforts over more than a century in four different communities. These

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longitudinal and comparative approaches permit us to develop further the internal characteristics of redemptive organizations that Wilson offered. They also permit us to explain their role in change which Wilson and other studies (Stoper, 1977) do not elaborate. This discussion of redemptive organizations and their role in change touches on some of the current analysis of "mediating structures" in public policy (Berger and Neuhaus, 1977). Much of this analysis is either conservative or apolitical. The redemptive organizations of this article, on the other hand, are explicitly political and have the purpose of reducing racial inequality. This examination may permit us to understand redemptive organizations as one constituent element of social movements and to apply the concept of mediating structures to progressive political movements.

Data for this article is taken from the history of four rural, predominantly black counties in the South. These counties are among the poorest in the country; three of them played an important role early in the civil rights movement. For example, Citizenship Schools, developed on Johns Island, spread throughout the South from 1956 to 1964, and provided training for tens of thousands of black southerners who had been stymied in their efforts to register to vote by the literacy requirement (Glen, 1988:155-72). Haywood County witnessed the first major effort to register black voters in a rural area of Tennessee. This effort occurred in 1959 and 1960 and set precedents of repression and resistance in the South (Hamilton, 1973:30-31). Local leaders organized an independent political party in Lowndes County, Alabama, in the aftermath of the Selma march in 1965. Their action and their party's symbol, the black panther, was a formative element in the black power movement (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967). Leaders in Lee County, Arkansas, began their efforts to register blacks as voters late in the civil rights movement in 1972. A community health center there became a center of political and economic change and a celebrated model of the War on Poverty.

Initially, I selected each of the four counties to study because local leaders organized, initiated, and conducted exemplary community health services which gained national and international significance. Upon further research, it became evident that the local community health organizations, each of them redemptive organizations by the definition we shall use, had precursors and precedents in the civil rights movement and in other change efforts extending like a chain of events back to Reconstruction.

The hope entailed in these organizations is more in the process of change that they exemplify and less in their achievements. Although their achievements are significant, these counties remain distinguished by poverty and its consequent deprivations. Their histories are punctuated by collective efforts to improve the living and working conditions of people who are still among the poorest in America. These histories also contain the repression of some efforts at change which is an important factor in explaining the continued needs of these

counties. The elements of these histories demonstrate the vitality and efficacy of redemptive organizations despite the American preference, sometimes violently expressed, for individual, apolitical approaches to public problems such as racial inequality.

The health programs of this study provided new access to health care for underserved people and provided them a range of services including nutrition, home repair, and improved water quality that redefined health care. They were part of broad political change including voter registration and the election of African-Americans to public office. In other words, the people associated with these health programs understood illness and disease to be symptoms of racial inequality and poverty and they set about to deal with the causes rather than the symptoms of illness. They are part of the successful movement of community health centers in reforming American medical care (Sidel and Sidel, 1984).

These efforts took place in different areas. The Douglas Community Health Services is located in Stanton, Haywood County, Tennessee, approximately 50 miles northeast of Memphis. The Lee County Cooperative Clinic is located in the county seat of Marianna, Arkansas, which is 70 miles southwest of Memphis and 125 miles east of Little Rock. The Lowndes County Health Services Association is in the county seat of Hayneville, Alabama, approximately 30 miles south of Montgomery. Finally, the Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation is located on a set of islands that begins about 20 miles southeast of Charleston. These islands stretch south for 30 or 40 miles and include Johns, Wadmalaw, Edisto, and Yonges Islands.

Redemptive Organizations and Voluntary Associations

Voluntary associations of citizens to achieve a public purpose are common and long-established elements of American political life. Studies of this phenomenon often begin with Alexis de Tocqueville who, with his extraordinary powers of observation and the perspective of someone new to a situation, articulated for Americans one distinguishing characteristic of their political system. Thomas Berger and Richard Neuhaus tapped this characteristic in their discussion of mediating structures of neighborhood associations, family, church, and voluntary associations (1977). These structures, small and proximate to individuals, mediate between them and large social, political and economic forces, including bureaucracies. David Price, in reviewing the work of Berger and Neuhaus, criticized it for a conservative bias; some associations have to be changed to promote the empowerment of people that Berger and Neuhaus envisioned. Price added that their work ignores that any study of associations among poor or repressed groups must take into account "the difficult process of facilitation and community-building that is required" (Price, 198:382).

Robert Bellah and his colleagues distinguish among voluntary associations in American society and also stress the danger of oversimplifying their role in American political life. There are, according to Bellah and his associates, three forms of American politics that incorporate a role for voluntary associations: the politics of community; the politics of interest; and the politics of the nation (1985:200–204). There are important differences in the nature of action of voluntary associations in each of these forms of politics. Within the politics of community, voluntary associations most resemble de Tocqueville's description of cooperation to deal with a common problem and Berger and Neuhaus's notion of mediating structures. In the second form of politics, the politics of interests, voluntary associations are most properly termed interest groups. And in the politics of the nation, voluntary associations are most properly termed social movement groups.

In addition to this variety of terms and forms of voluntary associations, their goals vary in each form of politics. The politics of community assume existing social arrangements and furthers them by either endorsing them directly or indirectly by assisting less-advantaged persons primarily through private, not public, and individual, not social, effort. The pluralist interpretations of American politics, the politics of interest, borrow from the idealization of the free market to espouse a society in which groups compete for political influence. The public realm becomes the compromise of competing groups organized among individuals with related interests. Voluntary associations in the politics of the nation represent a new set of political actors organized among or for people previously unrepresented, or with limited forms of participation in the public realm. This form of voluntary action has the greatest consequence for social and political change to promote equality.

Wilson discussed a set of explicitly political organizations such as those which Bellah and his associates related to the politics of the nation. In Wilson's analysis, these organizations are purposive and differ from others because they seek political, economic, and social change that will benefit, directly and primarily, people other than their members. They are different from other voluntary associations that function primarily to benefit their members, such as trade associations and other interest groups, or to provide social benefits to people with common interests or backgrounds, such as fraternities and sororities.

Purposive organizations have as their primary goal the benefit of society in general or some group within it that is disadvantaged or oppressed. The primacy of these purposes and their importance is so high that members of these associations are willing, ordinarily, to risk friendships over them or to antagonize those who disagree with them and to perpetuate tension within their own organizations. Principles always seem to be paramount and proximate in pursuit of the purposes in these forms of organizations (Wilson, 1973:30–46).

Redemptive organizations are one set of purposive organizations. These

organizations are redemptive in the sense of redeeming society of some evil, redeeming an organization by providing a social and political purpose to supplement its emphasis on internal concerns, or redeeming its members by offering them a means to leave the "evil" and the mundane and to pursue the "good" and noble. They are distinct because their members work directly for the benefit of others and expect that they and their colleagues will exhibit personal traits and work habits that exemplify the changes they are trying to institute (Wilson, 1973:46-51). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) exemplifies a purposive organization in that a majority of its members simply contribute to it and support its purpose. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is often portrayed as a redemptive organization (Wilson, 1973:47-48; Stoper, 1977) because the majority of its members engaged directly to acquire the social transformation that was its purpose.

This distinction is not hard and fast. Obviously, SNCC had contributors and supporters who participated indirectly in their work. Conversely, the NAACP staff often found themselves in situations of total commitment to social transformation. Likewise, local chapters of the NAACP, such as the one in Haywood County in 1939, had the redemptive characteristics of working for others, working for transformation, and, because of the danger entailed in membership, they attracted only people with deep commitment to the purpose of the organization.

Interwoven in the histories of these four communities are numerous redemptive organizations which were local. Local redemptive organizations are often overlooked in discussions of this form or organization but they bear the strongest resemblance to mediating structures because they are small, proximate to individuals, and often rooted in families and church, as well as a locality.

The local redemptive organizations include efforts to improve the education, work, and political status of local black residents. There are numerous schools in the histories of the four counties of this study that played prominent parts in change efforts. Some of them have records, such as the Penn, Fargo, and Calhoun schools. Many of them have no records and are known only because they are mentioned in the records of federal programs such as the Freedmen's Bureau. There are numerous instances of labor organizations to protest existing conditions and to establish new ones. We have various amounts of information about them. Research on sharecroppers' strikes of the nineteenth century is emerging (Foner and Lewis, 1983; Strickland, 1985). We have more knowledge about sharecropper organizations and strikes of the Cotton Pickers in Lee County in 1981, the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America of 1919, the Alabama Sharecroppers Union of the 1930s, and, best known, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union of the same time (Foner and Lewis, 1978; Cortner, 1988; Rosengarten, 1984; Grubbs, 1971).

There are also two sets of political organizations among the redemptive organizations of these counties. The first set, Loyal or Union Leagues, occurred

during Reconstruction and encouraged the political participation of the newly enfranchised black people of the South. The second set occurred during the civil rights movement and took various names such as “concerned citizens” or “civic and welfare league” in different places. Most prominent among these organizations are the Citizenship Schools and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which was a locally organized third party that ran black candidates for political office. The success of the party was limited but its symbol, the black panther, was promulgated by one of the SNCC field workers in Lowndes County, Stokely Carmichael, as an emblem of hope that black men and women could gain political office and power.

National and regional purposive organizations impacted on these redemptive organizations. These include the various freedmen’s relief societies, the American Missionary Association which supported schools for the freedpeople during Reconstruction, the Rosenwald Fund which supported schools in the South in the early twentieth century, the NAACP, and the SCLC. These organizations provided assistance in the forms of funds and other resources to local leaders and for local change efforts. The actions of these associations suggest the important role of purposive organizations in supporting redemptive organizations and their similarity for the staffs of purposive organizations who are likely to work directly with local leaders in change efforts.

Redemptive Organizations—Internal Characteristics

Redemptive organizations have unique internal characteristics, as Wilson indicated. They stress a personal commitment to social and personal transformation. Examining the several redemptive organizations in our four counties over a century, we can elaborate on these characteristics and identify others.

To Measure and Transform Society

Redemptive organizations propose to transform society. This change may take different forms and require various strategies. One strategy is to end society-wide acquiescence in wrongdoing. Such acquiescence is complicity in a social problem, such as lynching, and the problem’s solution requires that the many end their acquiescence in the actions of the few. The NAACP and other groups, some of them local, worked to end lynching by changing public opinion and legislation and used local incidents to point out the need for social transformation (Zangrando, 1980). Other redemptive organizations may work directly for transformation of a local situation. SNCC’s work in Lowndes County is an example (Carson, 1981) as are the various labor strikes of agricultural workers. Sometimes these strategies of national and local change blend. The NAACP acquired important national publicity because of its role to limit court-sanctioned

lynchings that were the aftermath of the efforts of local sharecroppers to organize in Elaine, Arkansas, in 1919 (Cortner, 1988).

To Improve the Public Standard

Redemptive organizations urge public agencies and agents to higher standards in the performance of their duties. The National Freedmen's Aid Association criticized, to his embarrassment, General O. O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, when he cut relief rations to the freedpeople (Bentley, 1974:77-78). Likewise, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, and others, prodded the New Deal's agricultural programs to do more for southern agricultural workers (Grubbs, 1971).

Some of this criticism comes from the success of redemptive organizations in outperforming public agencies in their responsibilities. The NAACP criticized and upset the FBI for its investigations of lynchings. For seven years, Thurgood Marshall traveled around the country investigating lynchings of black people. In some cases, such as that of Elbert Williams in Haywood County in 1940, he quickly assembled affidavits giving the names of the lynch mob members. In contrast, he found in case after case that the FBI seemed unable to do the same. In the Elbert Williams case, he complained that the FBI agents conducted their investigation in the presence of the sheriff who, according to affidavits and two eyewitnesses, led the lynch mob. By 1947 Marshall wrote to NAACP director Walter White that, "I have . . . no faith in either Mr. Hoover or his investigators and there is no use in saying I do." He then wrote directly to Attorney General Clark with his criticism of Hoover (NAACP files).

To Measure and Transform Their Members

In addition to transforming society, redemptive organizations propose other changes. They may work to change their members and their own organizations to a degree sufficient to provide a specific, alternative method of living, working, and exercising authority. Individual members of such organizations may seek redemption from practices they understand to be corrupt, unfair, and immoral.

Consequently, high personal standards are part of the commitment to transcendent organizational goals and are apparent in redemptive organizations. The six qualifications of the American Missionary Association for missionaries among the freedmen included missionary spirit, health, energy, culture and common sense, personal habits, and experience. The work ruled out people with "singularities and idiosyncracies of character" because of its "gravity and earnestness." Likewise, "nowhere is character . . . more important" (Stanley, 1979:142-44). Both the Fargo and Calhoun schools had exacting standards for

the students and parents who participated in their annual conference for local farmers.

School leaders at Fargo, Arkansas, for example, asked the 1945 conference participants a set of questions that seem like an examination of conscience intended to promote moral behavior, self-improvement, and self-reliance.

Do you own your own home? Do you attend church? Do you attend the Negro Farmers' Conference? Do all your children attend school? Does your boy belong to a corn club? Do you have a year-round garden? Do you have milk and butter all year? Have you any hogs? Do you buy corn, hay or meat? Do you cooperate with your neighbors? How many rooms in your house? Is your house screened? Do you have a pump? How far does your wife have to carry water? Do you get wood in the summer? Do you use your money for the things you borrowed it for? Do you get the Agricultural Farm Bulletin? Do you have a sanitary toilet? Do you encourage your children to be thrifty and honest? Do you take your son into your planning and farming account? Do you cooperate with the farm and home agents? Is your attitude what it should be?

For the Benefit of Others

These organizations seek social transformations that will benefit others. In some cases, such as SNCC and the schools of the Reconstruction era, members of redemptive organizations work for the benefit of others who are unrelated to them. They often work with, live, and risk like the people they are supporting in a change effort. Members attain the satisfaction of contributing to something they believe in and to the pursuit of principle. Members of redemptive organizations take on the problems of others directly rather than through contributions. Still other redemptive organizations, such as labor and political organizations in these counties, have benefits for people directly related to their members. Their members may derive direct benefit as well, if the organizations are successful. According to interviews with people active in the civil rights movement, members take on the risks associated with efforts to change repressive institutions because of benefits for their children rather than for themselves.

Redemptive organizations work clearly for the benefit of others and the status and reputation of members are judged by their contribution rather than by their education or prestige. Administrators of the community health centers fired well-educated black people who could not make sacrifices that did not have immediate benefit for them directly and welcomed white allies who were willing to make such sacrifices. The attitude of members toward people outside

the organization can vary among redemptive organizations and change over time within the same organization, as we shall see. There is common and general agreement, however, that the work of these organizations is to make the greatest number of people better off rather than to create well-paying positions of authority for a few people. Are the programs reaching those in need? How many are being helped by how much? These are the measures a redemptive organization takes seriously and applies to itself often and in agonizing detail.

Redemptive Organizations and the Process of Change

In addition to their internal characteristics, redemptive organizations make distinct contributions to the process of change. Again, the histories of change efforts in each of the four counties of the study permit us to identify some of these contributions.

The Worst Cases First

Redemptive organizations often deal with the worst cases first. The freedmen's relief societies were attracted to the Sea Islands because of the isolated and deplorable conditions of the freed people there. The founders of both the Calhoun School and the Fargo School were likewise attracted to their areas by the severe need. SNCC chose to work in Lowndes County because of its notorious reputation (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967). In all of these cases, there was an attitude of making change in the "worst" place to prove that it can be made anywhere.

Providing New Examples

The efforts of redemptive organizations serve as models for legislation and public programs directly or indirectly. This is perhaps clearest in the impact that the Penn School and the Calhoun Land Trust, among several such efforts of land redistribution and technical assistance for black sharecroppers, had on the Resettlement Administration (Woofter, 1930; Baldwin, 1968). Likewise, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Alabama Sharecroppers Union took the feudal conditions of sharecropping, exacerbated by federal policies and local violent repression, to Washington to acquire changes in the legislation of the AAA or its administration (Burke, 1935). Certainly, the freedmen's relief societies worked hard, and with some success, to influence Reconstruction policies. The work of the Medical Committee for Human Rights which provided health services to civil rights workers and others in 1964, contributed greatly to the community health centers of the War on Poverty.

A Fulcrum Point of Change

Most clearly, redemptive organizations provide their members, and others, a means with which to address a problem or need. The Freedmen's Bureau had a means to address the education of the freedpeople because of the relief societies. People of all races had the opportunity to address racial equality more effectively because of the NAACP. Most importantly, however, these organizations gave people who were oppressed and discriminated against, the opportunity to address their condition directly.

A Space for New Practices and the Imagination

Redemptive organizations provide space for new standards for a repressed group. This function has been described as a half-way house for social movements (Morris, 1984). The Haywood County Farms Project was the largest terracing project in the state and its black participants were the first to have electricity. Residents on the Calhoun Land Trust were the first black people in the county to live in painted houses. In this space, the members of redemptive organizations set examples for one another. C. P. Boyd, a leader of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, had an experience of new race relations within his church in Iowa. Septima Clark observed how Esau Jenkins, a leader on Johns Island who impacted the early civil rights movement throughout the South, saw blacks and whites live and work together at Highlander Folk School in a new way. The impact on Jenkins was profound as it was on a black teacher from Columbia, South Carolina, who recounted her experience at a 1954 Highlander Workshop.

For the first time in my life I have found myself in a place where the brotherhood of man was lived instead of just being preached—where discrimination in relation to our living at Highlander was never discussed because it didn't exist. We lived together in a dormitory where we shared a common bathroom and there was voluntary exchange of such personal possessions as bathing suits, bathing caps, toothpaste, soap. . . . The reason I mention *how* we lived at Highlander is because to a Negro in the South the sense of personal dignity and respect which goes with these simple acts is more meaningful than a hundred sermons or a dozen interracial meetings (Tjersandsen, 1980:208).

Some observers marveled at the ability of Highlander's director, Myles Horton, to get white and black people to eat at the same table. When asked how

he did it, Horton enumerated three simple rules: "Prepare the food; set the table; ring the dinner bell."

Redemptive organizations do not always live up to their ideal, obviously. Hierarchy, racism, and sexism within their organizations often undermine the ideals they pursue. Even so, the extraordinary criticism and controversy these organizational failures engender testify that redemptive organizations have, as a goal, to go beyond convention in setting examples.

Cooperation in Change Efforts

The opportunities for change provided by redemptive organizations represent new forms of unity and cooperation that express the purpose for which the organization works. Specifically, redemptive organizations provide more space for cooperation between the races and among the socioeconomic classes than American society ordinarily provides. For example, educated black men and women who staffed the early schools of the American Missionary Society were provided the opportunity to impart education to others. The community health centers functioned somewhat similarly. Middle- and upper-class black and white college students from around the country often acquired their first life-changing experience with collective action through SNCC or events sponsored by the SCLC.

Redemptive organizations differ in their cooperation with others. The Union Leagues and several labor organizations were secretive and exclusive because of the danger of violent repression. After a time, SNCC became exclusively black to better express the power of black people, and, in so doing, strained its relationship with other civil rights organizations. Other organizations, like all of the local redemptive organizations in these four communities, maintained broader alliances and pursued strategies of legislative, administrative, and judicial change as well as direct action.

New Forms and Amounts of Leadership

African-Americans did more than participate in the redemptive organizations of white people. They established their own and conducted them in the face of overwhelming odds. Recently organized efforts to establish health care had important precedents in black-led efforts to establish schools in the 1860s and 1870s. In both instances, local leadership for new services far exceeded the ability and resources of government agencies to respond and in both instances, at different times, the action to establish such programs was understood as extremely political because it exceeded what wealthy landowners were willing to provide. The local redemptive organizations are most numerous in the labor movement such as the Progressive Farmers and Household Union, the Southern

Tenant Farmers Union, and the Alabama Sharecroppers union, to mention a few.

The Progressive Club, the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, the Concerned Citizens of Lee County, and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization are just some of the local redemptive organizations recounted in interviews about recent events in these communities. The significance of these efforts is seen in the reprisals they invited and the support and excitement they generated. The former are measured in gunshots and arson and the latter in the actions of people to give what they could. People in these organizations speak of once-in-a-lifetime experiences of working like a family and of the excitement of “doing good.”

Some factors conspire to underestimate the role of black people in change efforts. Southern black men and women taught in the first schools for the freedpeople but we know of them primarily from the letters of the northern men and women who replaced them (Gutman, 1987). The officers of the Colored Alliance were black men, but press coverage of that group and its planned strike of 1891 was dominated by the superintendent, a white man.

Repression

The underestimation of the role of repressed people in their efforts to change their condition is one small part of the efforts to repress redemptive organizations—which is another of their characteristics. The school houses and churches that hosted meetings of the Loyal Leagues in the 1860s were burned just as frequently as those that housed the change efforts of the civil rights movement. The labor organizing efforts of sharecroppers from the 1860s to the 1930s touched off five race riots in three of the four communities of this study. It is not surprising, then, that two of the groups that began the community health centers that initiated this study have lost control of them to the political and medical elites of the area.

Sowing the Seeds of Change

Redemptive organizations have unspecified outcomes and impacts. The work of these organizations disseminated across the South and has been carried on over time through the efforts of extraordinary individuals. For example, the work of the American Missionary Association fashioned Hampton Institute which supplied teachers to Calhoun Colored School. Hampton also trained Booker T. Washington who founded Tuskegee along the lines he was trained. Floyd Brown embodied the teachings of Tuskegee and imparted them to his students at Fargo. Fargo’s students included E. C. Burnett who took them to heart and tried his best to pass them on to his students that included Olly Neal,

Jr., who was prominent in the change efforts in Lee County in the 1970s. Avery Institute also influenced tens of thousands of black southerners through the work of Septima Clark and the Citizenship Schools (Brown, 1986).

In like manner, the activities of a redemptive organization provide models for others in different places and at different times. John Hulett brought with him experience with the Alabama Christian Movement which he replicated in Lowndes County. The Lowndes County Christian Movement fostered the development of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization which contributed to the national black power movement.

Another form of unspecified outcome is the formation of new redemptive organizations. For example, many student leaders of the 1960s acquired formative political and organizational experience in civil rights efforts. Similarly, redemptive organizations may take on new goals of transformation. The Medical Committee for Human Rights, for example, initially supported civil rights workers but later worked, especially in the Chicago area, on the health status and care of people in prison, occupational safety and health, and health care for the poor. Likewise, a redemptive organization begun in one era may provide a basis for reform in another. The American Missionary Association, for example, provided an administrative home, support, and a staff member, Andrew Young, for Citizenship Schools, one hundred years after its origin (Glen, 1987:169-72).

Redemptive Organizations and the Politics of Hope

Gunnar Myrdal, Swedish economist and Nobel Prize winner, in some ways paralleled the work of de Tocqueville. Myrdal studied American race relations with the critical eye of a foreign observer (1944). Although Myrdal's subject was different from that of de Tocqueville, Myrdal also stressed the role of voluntary associations. Myrdal observed the political inference of the importance that Americans place on voluntary associations. Americans, it was Myrdal's judgment, substitute education, private leadership, and the action of voluntary associations for politics (1944:709-11).

Myrdal reached appropriately for hyperbole in describing voluntary social institutions and associations, given the importance we place on them to achieve public purposes. He explained that the American Creed plays upon churches, schools, universities, foundations, trade unions, and voluntary associations "as upon a mighty organ" (1944:80). They are sources of social healing. They minister to the sick and disadvantaged. They provide avenues of improvement for individuals that we suppose represent social change when enough individuals take them. They provide the hope for social change that Berger and Neuhaus recently renewed in their work on mediating structures. However, they are not, by and large, sources of political change. In fact, their proliferation and role are

indications of the American aversion to political solutions for public problems and the inadequacy of private responses to public problems.

Redemptive organizations share the voluntary characteristic of mediating structures and other forms of voluntary associations. They differ sharply, however, in asserting the public nature of problems they address and the need for political, social, and economic change that the solutions to these problems entail. They are part of a politics of hope because they measure by a standard in excess of convention and maintain a belief that progress can and should be made only by changing the status quo. Even in the criticism of injustice, inequality, and just plain wrongdoing, redemptive organizations are part of a politics of hope because they measure their criticism by the ideals we hold for ourselves. They remind us of our aspirations and point out that our practice contradicts them.

Similarly, Myrdal began with the enduring problem of racial inequality and the corresponding inadequacy of traditional political mechanisms to promote greater equality but articulated an alternative political arrangement, a politics of hope. Myrdal offered a vision of leadership and education combined with mass participation for social and economic change. This new form of politics

...if it ever developed, would realize in the highest degree the age-old ideal of a vitalized democracy. It would result, not only in a decrease in the immense class differences in America, but more fundamentally, it would effect a higher degree of integration in society of the many millions of anonymous and atomized individuals: a strengthening of the ties of loyalty running through the entire social fabric; a more efficient and uncorrupted performance of all public functions; and a more intense and secure feeling on the part of the common citizen of his belongingness to, responsibility for, and participation in the commonwealth as a great cooperative human endeavor—a realization of a fuller life (1944:716).

Bellah and his associates also describe a new social ecology which is distinct from the alienating aspects of the prevalent individualistic, autonomous American culture. This social ecology includes the recognition of the social complexities and the mutual dependence of its members; the reduction of inequalities and excesses of great wealth and great deprivation; an increase of intrinsic satisfaction in work related to an infusion of public purpose into work; and finally, the restoration of "the dignity and legitimacy of democratic politics" (1985:287-89). They speak of this social ecology as "the successor and fulfillment of the Civil Rights Movement" (1985:286) bringing to fulfillment elements of a social transformation initially glimpsed within that and other social movements.

The Civil Rights Movement itself, however, was the successor of change efforts of which redemptive organizations were a constituent element, just as they were constitutive elements of the Civil Rights Movement. In the histories of four rural, black, southern counties, we can glimpse the slow and cumulative transforming power of redemptive organizations and their role in social change such as "vitalized democracy" or a "social ecology."

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