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Dona Hamilton, Charles V. Hamilton. *Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. xiii + 225 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-10364-0.



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Early in the New Deal era, civil rights organizations—primarily the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL)—opened a second front in their struggle to achieve justice for black and poor Americans. This front has long been overshadowed by its legal battle for civil rights, which is so amply chronicled that it is widely perceived as the organization's only purpose. Over the years, however, civil rights groups have also endeavored to attain economic parity for African-Americans and the poor. This effort often goes unnoticed or misread. The purpose of this book is to isolate and thereby to make visible the sixty-year effort by civil rights groups to achieve economic justice for all Americans, black and otherwise.

The New Deal created a two-tier system of federal social support. The first tier, retirement and unemployment insurance primarily, required at least limited participation in the economic system. The second tier of social security consisted of relief payments and make-work federal jobs. Second-tier programs reeked of welfare, charity, the handout. The difference between the first tier and the second was a real job, which meant an opportunity. From the beginning, civil rights groups explained that second tier benefits were second class, creating dependency and stigmatizing recipients. What the poor wanted was not the stigma of second class status but

meaningful work. Over time, allies came and went, the national mood fluctuated between liberalism and conservatism, civil rights groups came and went, tactics shifted, and government social policy swung wildly. The NAACP and NUL hammered the same themes for sixty years. In their publications, Congressional testimony, and meeting after meeting with uncertain coalition partners, they advocated a single tier social security system with fair and full employment. For sixty years, they failed, and those doomed to the second tier became increasingly stigmatized.

When in 1996 the much-maligned welfare programs finally began to die, their replacement was block grants and state-controlled workfare, an inferior version of the public relief programs of the New Deal. Sixty years of effort had gained nothing. The block grants to the states also overthrew the other requirement of the civil rights groups: federal control. State and local control often meant discrimination, even for federal programs. And benefits were not standard because some states were poor; others were wealthy. Entitlement programs, standard across the nation, historically were more equitable, thus the consistent demand that the federal government control both welfare and entitlement programs.

Civil rights groups failed to achieve their economic agenda. Most of the time, their efforts were invisible.

The civil rights organizations were right. When given opportunity, as affirmative action shows, blacks have moved into the economic mainstream. When stuck in second-tier make-work and welfare programs, they remain in poverty. Nevertheless, their message fell on deaf ears. Hamilton and Hamilton have masterfully isolated a neglected strand of the history of the civil rights organizations. They exhausted the files of the Urban League, the NAACP, and key players such as A. Philip Randolph, Lyndon B. Johnson, and others. They examined the appropriate journals, newspapers, and secondary texts. Their evidence supports their contention that there was a second agenda. Unfortunately, in isolation the second agenda stands revealed as a weak and futile effort.

Although this work is worthwhile as a needed clarification of the record, it provides no cause for optimism about the prospects for fair and meaningful work. As the authors are aware, the winning of civil rights took more

than half a century, even with the sometime support of the legal and political systems and white constituencies. Poverty was never illegal or immoral, and there was no strong support system for its eradication. The anti-poverty effort of the black organizations, as that of all other economic reform groups, had no chance of success. The effort was always second priority. It rested on words, not actions. The 1960s move of economic protest to the streets came despite the NUL and NAACP, was counter-productive, and produced backlash. The other agenda achieved visible gains, making economic justice appear to be greed. Although civil rights organizations won the cheap, somewhat symbolic, agenda, on the second front, where money was on the line and the perception was that gains would come at someone else's expense, they fought a futile struggle against history.

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