Jamaica, and Barbados—in the United States serve as evidence against the theory that systematic racial discrimination has blocked black upward mobility. In 1969, for instance, 15.2 percent of West Indians were in the professions, compared to a 14 percent national average for all Americans. Today, such black families earn almost as much as the average American family—$34,924 per year—and 37 percent more than does the average U.S. black family ($22,778).

Furthermore, several opinion surveys show that a majority of U.S. blacks say they have not suffered from racial discrimination in the education, job, or housing markets; nor, according to these surveys, have a majority of women suffered from sex discrimination in the office.

"Any policy that aims at treating [any] Americans as group victims of discrimination, rather than as individuals," Beer concludes, "is based on sociologically untenable ground."

Reckoning Poverty

"Mismeasuring Poverty and Progress" by John C. Weicher, in *The Cato Journal* (Winter 1987), 224 Second St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

Measuring the U.S. poverty rate is no easy task.

In 1969, Washington chose to gauge the official poverty line in terms of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rather than the cost of food, as it had been doing since 1965. That decision, argues Weicher, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was a "mistake" that "has colored and distorted perceptions of the poverty problem."

For measuring poverty, says Weicher, the CPI places too much emphasis on the cost of buying a home—and not enough on the cost of living in one. In any year, only three percent of U.S. households purchase a dwelling; the costs that they confront have little relation to those faced by Americans who already own homes (80 percent of U.S. households), or who rent. In addition, inflation strongly influences housing prices, further accentuating what Weicher calls "a gross distortion of actual behavior" in the CPI tabulations. Not until 1983 did the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics alter the CPI to more accurately reflect housing costs, using instead a "rental equivalence" index.

As a result of CPI-borne distortions, Weicher contends, the number of poor people and the poverty rate in the United States have been overstated, and continue to be. In 1982, for example, the official poverty rate was 15 percent, while the rate as adjusted by Weicher, using the post-1983 CPI, was 13.2 percent. That same year, poor Americans numbered "officially" 34.4 million; the adjusted number is 30.3 million.

Recalculating the poverty line also alters the pattern of U.S. poverty. For example, the official poverty rate reached its lowest level in 1973. Weicher's adjusted rate bottomed out in 1978. Such adjustments accentuate the "feminization" of poverty, raising the proportion of female-headed poor households from 48.1 percent to 49.8 percent in 1984. Geographically, the retabulation lessens the increase in the urban poor: officially, the number rose from 6.0 to 6.7 million between 1970 and 1980; with the adjustment, the number climbed only from 5.7 to 5.8 million.

Weicher believes that reviewing U.S. progress during the 1970s, in terms of adjusted poverty rates, could have a great impact on future policy decisions. For example, use of the adjusted CPI could have saved the federal government $100 billion in Social Security spending during the past decade, and reduced the national debt by four percent.

If the old poverty figures were recast, says Weicher, "We would feel a little better about our progress, our economy, and our society."

PRESS & TELEVISION

Campaign Spending

"Campaign Money and the Press: Three Soundings" by Frank J. Sorauf, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Spring 1987), 2852 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-7885.

Is something amiss in media coverage of political campaign financing?

Sorauf, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota, argues that stories about campaign funding reveal a "progressive" slant, owing to "structural biases" of the U.S. media and the liberal "political assumptions" of reporters, editors, and writers. Generally anti-Big Business, anti-political machine, many U.S. journalists act as if they were "the grandchildren of the Progressive muckrakers," finding irksome a campaign finance system that permits political action committees (PACs) to influence elections through dollars.

As examples, Sorauf cites three campaign-finance "events" covered by the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*.

Reporting on the Supreme Court's decision in March 1985 to uphold the unconstitutionality of limits on presidential campaign spending, the newspapers gave the story front-page play. "But why?" asks Sorauf. Because the decision signaled "an opportunity lost to curb campaign spending? Or because it vibrated with popular fears about money in politics?" The media played up PAC spending, de-emphasized non-PAC spending, and magnified the decision's scope and "its permissive consequences."

In March 1985, the lobby Common Cause reported the 1984 congressional campaign spending totals. The coverage focused mostly on big dollar figures. But, as Sorauf notes, the media largely ignored the fact that the rates of growth in campaign spending had leveled off; total spending for House seats fell from $205.4 million in 1982 to $205.1 million in 1984. Considering the high rates of spending increases between 1976 and 1982—194 percent by congressional candidates—Sorauf finds the downturn very significant. Yet no news organization treated it as such.

A third episode: Between 1974 and 1984, the number of PACs registered with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) grew steadily, from 608 to 4,009. Yet the FEC's announcements, in 1985 and early 1986, that the number of PACs had declined for the first time (to 3,992) attracted little attention. The *New York Times* dismissed the drop as a "seasonal blip." The rapid growth of PACs had been "big news," Sorauf observes.