machinery of white supremacy."

To win back their moral authority, white Americans and American institutions "have had to betray the nation's best principles" in dealing with race-related matters, Steele contends. In the case of inner-city poverty, for instance, they are unable to say "that government assistance will only follow a show of such timeless American principles as self-reliance, hard work, moral responsibility, sacrifice, and initiative—all now stigmatized as demonic principles that 'blame the victims' and cruelly deny the helplessness imposed on them by a heritage of oppression." Instead, white American authority must exhibit remorse and "compassion."

In this show of "deference," Steele says, white American authority is not abdicating in favor of black Americans, but merely seeking "to fend off the stigma that weakens [its] moral authority."

Since the 1960s, Steele says, race-related reform in everything from welfare to affirmative action "always asks less of blacks and exempts them from the expectations, standards, principles, and challenges that are considered demanding but necessary for the development of competence and character in others." And by doing this, he concludes, such reform has opened the door to "the same atavistic powers—race, ethnicity, and gender—that caused oppression in the first place."

Fostering Dysfunction

"Foster Care's Underworld" by Heather Mac Donald, in *City Journal* (Winter 1999), Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

The nation's foster care system, intended to aid abused and neglected children, has become part of the problem, allowing extended families "to accommodate, and even profit from their dysfunctions," contends Mac Donald, a contributing editor of *City Journal*.

More than a half-million children are in foster care nationwide, with 50 percent living with an unrelated family, 29 percent living with relatives, and the rest in institutions, group homes, or other settings. "For every child put into foster care," Mac Donald says, "the foster family . . . gets a subsidy two to three times larger than what ordinary welfare pays. Whole communities of grandmothers are living on the money they receive for their abused or neglected grandchildren."

The per child payment typically is about $500 a month (and can reach $800, if the child is disabled or emotionally disturbed). "For people on public assistance, [that] is a lot of money," a caseworker at a large foster agency in New York City told Mac Donald. "They're not using it totally on the kids."

Kinship foster care—which child welfare authorities must try to arrange before putting a child with unrelated foster parents—is "a humane idea," Mac Donald says, and undoubtedly often works. "But it has also become a major financial support system, perversely turning the production of neglected children into a family business," in more than a few cases.

In the name of "family preservation," the system seeks to have children remain with their abusive or neglectful parents whenever possible, Mac Donald notes. But the traditional two-parent home has exploded "into a dizzying array of intersecting family fragments. . . . [To] speak of 'family preservation' in this context is fanciful; which combination of fathers and mothers and half-siblings should we demarcate as the family unit?"

Further aggravating the situation is the pervasive problem of drug abuse. A recent study of foster care in New York City found that three out of four of the birth mothers abused drugs, and one in four of the children in foster care was born with drugs in his system.

Intended to rescue children, foster care "often merely moves [them] from one troubled home and community to another," Mac Donald writes. Adoption, of course, is preferable, but not all children can be successfully placed in new families. For many disturbed youngsters, boarding schools may be the best solution, she believes. Minnesota "has begun to create stable, academically rigorous boarding academies for children from dysfunctional families," she says. Though attacked by critics as "orphanages," boarding schools could give the most unfortunate children "a fighting chance."