that racism remains a
horrible blight on this
society has been made
painfully clear by the
sadistic police gang
beating of Rodney
King, and the moral
impunity of the
jams police of that
race that have ignored
the nation's second
city. Thus a signif-
ificant fraction of the
African American
population is trapped in a
depression of crime and un-
desirable integration. The
problems of the underclass,
which is a national tragedy, and
that a much smaller proportion—per-
haps no more than 10 percent—may be
trapped in a life of crime and self-
destruction, we all know and dread.

Through historically linked, these
three problems have evolved as dif-
ficult social cancers that, while propor-
tionately harming the African Ameri-
an part of the nation, increasingly threat-
e the entire body politic. Combining these issues, worsens racial divisions and thwarts sound policy.

The best analysis of the subject of
the sociologist Christopher Jencks
and William Julius Wilson, have shown that
while the pathologies of the under-
class are not unique to the United States, the
African American part of the nation very much
increasingly threatens its entire body politic.

The problem of the black working poor is
simple: it is identical to the problem of
the white poor: they work hard for a living,
and their wages are declining as a result of
structural economic changes and the
unemployment of the 80's that
substantially increased income inequality.
African Americans have been disproportionately
affected by these changes and as a result the racial
differentiation in income has grown. It is a
distortion, however, to neglect the
convergence of this group with the white poor.

Dividing the poor along racial
lines and making poverty a black
problem, we obscure the growing
chasm between rich and poor in this
country. The task of solving the
problems facing the poor requires
an understanding of the
genealogy of poverty and of the
structural changes that have
caused it.

Orlando Patterson, professor of
sociology at Harvard, is the author of "Freedom in the Making of Western Culture." Chris Winship is professor of
sociology, statistics and economics at
Northwestern University.

Theories of the underclass, which is a
cultural phenomenon, fail to explain
why the underclass is peculiar to
African American society. The
underclass is a national phenomenon,
suffering from a commonwealth of
problems.

The underclass is a national
phenomenon suffering from a
commonwealth of problems.

No Innocents Here