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TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS TO MEET ENERGY DEMAND  
AND THEIR ECONOMIC IMPACT ON BLACK AMERICA

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Black America"

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by

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Frequently, I am asked: "How does and will the 'energy crisis' affect black people and what can we do?"

The answer is "the 'energy crisis' does and will continue to affect, in a very major way, the existence level of the poor and powerless."

Blacks, because of discriminatory practices, comprise a disproportionate part of the poor and powerless and so will suffer disproportionately in the "energy crisis." What those who comprise the poor and powerless must do is to become sufficiently informed about the problems and learn of the options for solution, so that they may support the actions and measures which will be most effective in minimizing undesirable effects on their health and welfare in both the short- and medium-term time periods.

The first part of the reply is a statement of fact. The second asks people to try to accomplish a very difficult mission.

Rich and poor alike, all now pay the same for a gallon of gasoline, a gallon of home heating oil, a kilowatt-hour of electricity. A "wealthy" family may pay less than 5 percent of its income to heat its home. For a poor one, heat represents 25 percent of its much smaller income. Never mind that the affluent's home is warmer and larger. The home of the poor is more likely to be less well constructed and insulated and probably employs highly inefficient heating equipment so as to result in an expensive, chilly, drafty, unhealthy environment. The poor pay in dollars, comfort, health, and economic mobility.

What white America, and Black America, too, must realize is that poverty and helplessness go hand in hand; that race, religion, country of origin, etc., make no difference if one is poor.'

Regressive energy policy decisions are regressive on all the poor. All the poor must be concerned with the directions in which government and industry cope with the "energy crisis."

Energy issues are complex. Energy is a vital part of food commodities, industry, home, school, foreign policy, and war machines. What may appear to be a positive action in one area frequently results in a highly negative effect in some other vital (basic human needs) sector. Simplicity may be appealing but can be dangerous. The poor must beware of the "obvious." Vigilance has to be practiced at all times.

Tax abatements to encourage the installation of \$2500 solar-energy hot water systems will aid those who can afford to invest \$2500 in the homes they already own or are buying. State and federal governments must make up the loss, attributed to solar-energy installations, in the tax revenues. They do so only by increasing taxes on everyone. The poor, who do not own homes, must pay more in taxes (via rents, foods, etc.). The poor, then, subsidize the "wealthy" so that they, the "rich," can save money by installing solar-energy hot water systems.

#### Government Actions

##### a. Conservation/Insulation.

There are some government-sponsored and funded actions that can help "poor" people. The government has funded, to a limited extent, a direct-grants program designed to provide house insulation for the elderly whose income is below a certain level. Eligible persons pay only

"wholesale" prices (up to \$250) for insulation materials. Workmen, paid by the government, install the insulation at no cost to the person. This should be expanded to include all low-income families.

b. Conservation/Supplementary Fuel

During the winter of 76/77 special legislation appropriated money for the poor to supplement their fuel purchases. The needy must search out and make use of such opportunities.

The poor will not be able to operate gas-eating jalopies. Their needs can be most economically met by public transportation. The priority should be on energy-efficient public transport, bus, and rail, instead of air travel or highway construction.

More programs of a similar nature must be initiated to ease the burden of the incredible increases in the prices of fuels.

Proper space conditioning is vital to health, welfare, learning, environment, etc. The present and future of the poor is closely coupled to the price of energy and national policy on energy conservation because if homes are uncomfortably cold or warm (in the South), children do not grow or learn well.

Energy Policy

The following comments are purposely not scientific discourses of energy research and development. We shall briefly review, in an elementary fashion, energy issues and the prospects of technology in the solution of problems, always in the context of their impact on the "poor and powerless."

We hope to provoke discussions and, as a result of exchanges, arrive at postures that can be recommended for social and political organizations to consider in their representation of the interests of the poor and powerless, and in particular, black people.

## I. . National/International

The Carter Administration has to deal simultaneously with a number of problems, on both macroscopic and microscopic scale. The implications of each judgment reach such relatively minor issues as to how much should a rich person pay in order to drive a big car to potential pollution of the oceans for thousands of years, to armed conflict (war over petroleum).

U.S. national policy can have direct implications for Black America which can be ignored, or considered trivial, by white America.

## II. . U.S. . Domestic Issues

The principal energy issues and some brief comments are:

A. The U.S. imports about 45 percent of its petroleum. The OPEC cartel controls both supply and price. There is considerable breast-beating, crocodile tears, and righteous indignation expressed as to the "moral obligation" of the OPEC to the import-dependent industrialized nations.

The oil business, like every other business, is conducted by the OPEC and the "seven sister" multinational petroleum companies according to business principles established thousands of years ago:

- a. pay as little as possible for the product
- b. charge as much as you can for the product
- c. use whatever situation, natural or artificial advantage one has in negotiations.

B. World energy use, even now, has permanent damaging effects on the planet. Exploration, extraction, processing, transportation, consumption and disposal or residues, can no longer continue without international responsibility and cooperation. Where will, for example, England and other European countries dispose of radioactive waste.

In the Northeast USA, agriculture and waterways are seriously affected by acid rains which are the result of the burning of sulfur-containing fuels in the Midwest.

C. It is now recognized that the health effects due to energy consumption cannot be measured in an isolated laboratory. When combined with the other insults attributable to pesticides, chemicals employed in the processing, preservation, and preparation of foods and clothing, etc., the synergistic behavior is frightening. The poor are particularly vulnerable to pollution.

D. The standards of health, convenience, and lifestyles of the industrialized world are coveted by the lesser developed countries. Their numbers exceed ours and their impatience brooks no requests to expect less and to wait for even that. The pressures due to the expectations of these countries will be felt by the poor.

E. The complex interrelations of the industrialized and non-industrial countries, the finiteness of supply and the fragile nature of the planet require systematic analysis and cautious action. The poor are ill-equipped to understand these issues and have no champions.

F. We are still dealing primarily with short-term prices and, in so doing, are ignoring long-range policy. Our concern should be towards medium- and long-term issues. It is not too difficult for the "rich" to endure temporary "hardship" for long- or even medium-term benefit.

III. Each and every measure proposed by Mr. Carter, both domestic and international involves the four following considerations:

- a. Technical feasibility
- b. Economic viability

- c. Social acceptability
- d. Political possibility.

a. Technical feasibility is not an absolute. There are honest differences of opinion between competent researchers and engineers. In addition, there are opposing choruses of professional optimists and professional non-optimists. Decisions for one or another technology imply decisions as to the skill levels, and numbers of employees.

b. The government-funded infrastructure required as a result of nuclear power plants (monitoring safeguards, insurance subsidy, etc.) are now being recognized as important factors in the prediction of economic viability. These costs will be reflected in increased taxes and prices of staples.

c. The social acceptability of a technology, until recently, was not questioned. Society is being educated, both overtly and indirectly, as to the price for industrialization. Pollution of waterways, blight surrounding industrial centers, shortening of life expectancy, risks, long-term obligations, etc., are major national concerns and must be major concerns of the poor, also.

d. The international and domestic political implications of each action are ever present. Can Mr. Carter veto legislation to build dams if the construction trades picket for jobs and the industrial lobbies bear pressure? Powerful forces, considering short-term gains in employment and profit, can override any altruistic longer-range gain-making proposals.

In light of the above, what can the poor and powerless do? the answers lie in conservation, awareness, and involvement.

- a. Reduce energy consumption. Energy is just another commodity.  
We can all use less.
- b. Become informed of the energy requirements of household appliances, autos, and houses (life-cycle costing).  
Many energy conservation measures are cost-effective under limited or special conditions. Misapplication of others can result in hazard to health and possessions.
- c. Participate in government so that their interests are served. Through social reform we can change things.
- d. Beware of the fly-by-night, rip-off artists who offer equipment, services, devices, and materials to "save energy and money." They are already active. Their numbers, imagination, and sales pressures are increasing.

In closing, I would summarize as a reply to the original question.

The energy crisis is here to stay for a very long time. Black America, because of vulnerability due to discriminatory practices and comprising a disproportionate part of the poor and powerless, will be affected in major ways - health, education, and general welfare.

The principal technology option available is to use less energy (conservation). Blacks have no unique capability to devise low-cost alternatives.

The economic impact of the "energy crisis" will be very great. Always bear in mind that energy-savings systems are, more often than not, automated. They replace low-level labor. They are, in fact, more reliable in the long run. Unemployment is added to the specter of higher prices for the poor.

Blacks can, by understanding and participating in the political process, legitimately see to it that the economic and welfare effects are minimized. They can and should seize opportunities to better their condition. New trades and businesses will result from the Administration's energy policies. They must be seized for there is little in the way of "previous experience in energy crisis situations" that be required so as to bar entry.

The best decisions for the country and the world will most likely be accompanied by economic discrimination. If social equity is required, then tax subsidies and special compensation should be given to the truly needy via a well-structured energy hardship program and not through tax dollars given or taxes not collected or collected at all income levels.

There is precedence and existing infrastructure for food stamps - why not "energy stamps?"