

(INTERVIEW WITH WINSTON LANG)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED SEPTEMBER 1991)

1943.

1943 in my own personal experience was very disheartening. We did go to school with all ethnic groups. We did choose our friends on the basis of who's a good guy and who's a bad guy, and many of my friends were non-black. To see a riot happen and to see people attack my friends, that was a very disheartening experience. There is one thing that makes me remember. I was graduating from the 8th grade and the law was put into affect that there could be no large gathering of any group for any reason. This was during the riot. Therefore, my mother couldn't come see me graduate from the 8th grade.

Our drug problem in Detroit started, I would think, during the 60's. You have a lot of ideas coming to the forefront. Black pride was coming to the forefront. With these ideas came a kind of liberal outlook on most things that had been sort of frowned upon before, drugs being one of them. As long as someone is doing something in their own place, it doesn't hurt anybody. Then the sexual expression, as well. People started living together, wanting to see if they could get along with one another and if they couldn't get along with one another, they moved on and lived with someone else. It was that kind of attitude toward family relationships, stable relationships, that emerged, a more liberal attitude toward any kind of a social behavior. As long as you were doing it and not hurting anybody. Then the liberal attitude towards morals became progressively worse. Individual or couples

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actions began hurting other people.

When you talk about the destruction of the families and the role that having a job, or not having a job played, two instances come to mind in terms of the way I've heard it described. One is that now you have the ADC, Welfare, whatever, that more or less caused the family to break up. The attitude used to be: If there's a man in the house, you get nothing. If he isn't there you get something. That was a wrong approach, if true.

In more recent years when the attitudes seem to have changed somewhat, they have again said to the 14 or 15 year old girl, maybe it starts at 18 or 19; but when she comes up pregnant and the whole family is suffering from the lack of income, then she needs additional income to help feed the baby. They are just barely getting breakfast on the table for the household and a baby comes along that needs diapers and formula. Here again you have money, or lack of it, entering the picture. It used to be that as long as you live with your parents, you are not going to get any money. So, the girl would move out. This is idiotic, because then they move out into apartments of their own, it is going to cost the system more to pay for her living alone than it would to pay for the formula and the baby and everything else at home. And then, it becomes an awful temptation for the guy that did the impregnating to fall right back into the scene, where she is now living alone and you've got the whole pattern repeated.

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Our so-called sociological answers to the use of government money have been a miserable failure in this particular area. Those are actual forces that helped to disintegrate the family.

In terms of a guy walking out because they didn't want the responsibility, I think it is a misnomer. I think they may have walked out ostensibly under certain circumstances, where they knew the family could get more money.

As stated before, my mother was a widow with six kids, during the depression. We didn't know one day of hunger. But my sister's husband remembers his father going out and catching pigeons and squirrels in order to have something to eat. We never went through that, because at that time they had mother's pension, the forerunner of ADC.

Mother was on the mother's pension and was working. The social worker told her she couldn't work. The worker visited one evening and said, "Mrs. Lang, I came by earlier and you weren't here. Where were you?" Mother said she was at work. The worker said, "Mrs. Lang, the reason we're giving you this money is so that you won't have to go out and work." Mother said, "If I don't go out and work, my kids will not have the same things other kids have, and I want to see to it that they have as much as I can possibly give them. They take care of themselves very well. It's one, or the other." The social worker just sort of turned her head and pretended that mother wasn't working. We were fortunate; but when you talk to other

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people and they said they almost starved and they had both the father and mother in the house, you can see the picture. There was no work available and they weren't going to give families anything as long as there was a man in the house. The social system added to the disintegration process in many cases.

In the middle 60's I worked with a street gang. I remember taking one of the gang member's mother somewhere. She told me, "Mr. Lang I appreciate what you are trying to do for my boys. They are not bad boys, really. They were doing fairly well in school, but their father and I broke up and I had to go on welfare and I haven't been able to really buy them the kind of things that they should have. They had holes in their shoes and their pants, other kids laughed at them. They just simply told me, "Mother, we are not going to school to be laughed at. It was just so embarrassing."

The son of this same woman said that one time his mother was cooking and she realized she didn't have any salt. She told him to run down to the corner store and get a box of salt, something that should have taken 5-10 minutes at the most. What happened was that he had food stamps with which to pay. He would go and get the salt, and one of his friends would come in, and he didn't want the friend to know that the family was on food stamps. He would put the salt down and pretend he was looking for something else. That friend would go out and he was about ready to pay for it and here comes

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another friend. It happened maybe two or three times in a row. What should have been a ten minute journey at the most, turned out to be a half hour. Finally, the store cleared and he paid for the salt with stamps and got home and then got a whipping, because his mother thought he had been goofing off.

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