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LOURY’S EXODUS

Glenn Loury was an intellectual hero of the Reagan right until his double life brought him down. Now he’s returning to the policy fray—with a new creed.

BY ROBERT S. BOYNTON

Just kick it in, man. Don’t make me shoot you." The mugger spoke soberly, his words sounding less like a threat than an appeal to reason. He stood across from Glenn Loury, with his right arm hidden in the folds of a long leather overcoat, which covered a bulge just big enough for a gun. It was 3 A.M. on a bitter winter night. A light snow was falling as the two faced each other in front of a well-known drug dealers' den in Boston. A few minutes before, Loury had withdrawn all the cash that his bank card's twenty-four-hour limit allowed, and bought three packets of cocaine. When he was accosted, he was heading for his car—a Saab, practically the standard-issue vehicle for Cambridge intellectuals—and was looking forward to the warm glow of a freshman's pipe.

Now two thoughts ran through Loury's head: Does he really have a gun? Do I have to give up the drugs? He tried staring back blankly, as if he didn’t understand the colloquial phrase “Kick it in.” At this, the mugger grew more insistent, edging closer and unbuckling his coat with his left hand to display a dull-gray pistol in his right. Aware that time was running out, Loury had another thought: If I can get him to take only one packet, I can keep the other two. It was a calculated risk, but such thinking came easily to him—after all, he was a Harvard economist. He fingered a packet and tossed it to the ground. The mugger, with his gun still trained on Loury, picked it up slowly and walked off. Loury made his way shakily to the Saab and prepared the drugs. He lit up and inhaled deeply. The sweet fumes rushed into his lungs; he needed the high now more than ever.

In March, 1987, just nine months earlier, Loury had reached the pinnacle of his career: he had been chosen to be Deputy Secretary of Education. A Harvard professor for the previous five years,
giving academic performance of black students, the disturbingly high rate of black-on-black crime, and the alarming increase in early unwed pregnancies among blacks now loom as the primary obstacles to progress." His belief that African-Americans' destructive behavior, and not white racism, was responsible for their plight quickly brought him access to the pages of Commentary, The Public Interest, and the Wall Street Journal. Neoconservatives like Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz—the house intellectuals of the Reagan era—welcomed him into their salon. Invitations to state dinners at the White House followed.

In addition to a keen intelligence and a forceful style, Loury had an impressive Horatio Alger background. Reared on Chicago's rough South Side, he had earned a B.A. from Northwestern and an economics doctorate from M.I.T. Harvard's tenure offer came when he was only thirty-three. His scholarship was rigorous and eloquent, he was personally charming and, most important, he was black. When Secretary of Education William Bennett tapped Loury to be his deputy, he was poised to become the Reagan Administration's second-highest-ranking African-American. With two years left in Reagan's second term, Bennett would be giving Loury a bully pulpit from which to push a conservative agenda in favor of school choice and against affirmative action. Because his writings promoted self-help and family values, Loury seemed the ideal spokesman to inform black America that, despite rumors to the contrary, it had a friend in the Republican Party.

Then, on June 1st, Loury mysteriously withdrew his name from consideration, offering vague "personal reasons" as the only explanation. The timing was particularly odd because he had already successfully weathered some damaging revelations: that he had fathered an illegitimate son while he was married to his first wife, that he had paid only sporadically for the son's support, and that he had been late in repaying student loans. Although these discoveries were certainly embarrassing, William Kristol, who was one of Bennett's closest advisers and had been a friend of Loury's since 1984, when both taught at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, had assured the White House that he was still "confirmable." Something else had to be responsible for his withdrawal.

Three days later, assault charges were brought against him by a twenty-three-year-old Smith graduate, who—unbeknownst to Loury's second wife, Linda, an economics professor at Tufts—had been living at his expense in a Boston apartment. The telephone was registered under his name; local papers called it a "love nest." The woman, who showed up in court wearing a neck brace, accused him of dragging her down four flights of stairs, shredding her clothes, and throwing her books and papers out the window. (The charges were eventually dropped.) Then, in late November, he was arrested for possession of marijuana and cocaine. On searching his car, police found a homemade pipe. A local reporter chanced on the arrest while reading the police blotter, and within days the story had been picked up across the country. Loury was again in the news, this time with potentially career-stopping headlines. As court dates and drug buys swirled around him, Loury was emerging as exactly the kind of person he had warned black America to avoid: a violent, irresponsible, drug-using womanizer who put his own pleasure above the demands of his career and the needs of his family.

In the years following Loury's run-ins with the law, he maintained a low profile, attending Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, finding religion, and patching up his marriage. After moving from Harvard to Boston University, in 1991, he flew himself into the technical economic theory that had first distinguished him within the profession, eschewing the provocative writings on race that had gained him notoriety outside it. For a few years, he simply didn't talk about race; he says he doubted that he would ever again have the stomach to withstand attacks from critics who had accused him of being a sophisticated Uncle Tom, an apologist for white racism, and worse.

Over the last three years, however, Loury has slowly reemerged from his self-imposed exile. Giving a lecture here, publishing a paper there, he has tempered his message to account for the personal pathologies that once influenced his thinking. A lot has changed in racial politics since he went underground. With the Newt era in the ascendant, many ideas that once seemed reactionary have attracted a following across the political spectrum. Now that Loury's arguments about the importance of intact families and the role of behavior in the formation of the underclass don't sound quite so radical, he hopes that his diagnosis may receive a second hearing.

There are many who believe that he simply has no credibility. "Glenn Loury is just another pathetic mascot for the right," says Martin Kilson, a Harvard professor of government and a longtime defender of affirmative action. "He pompously hands down critical prescriptions from on high about stuff he doesn't know anything about. He's a huckster, an intelligent hired hand." The New York University law professor Derrick Bell, who often clashed with Loury when they were both teaching at Harvard, agrees. "Even given the fact that all blacks have to engage in some hypocrisy just to survive in our racist society, Loury has gone beyond the call of duty," he says. But Loury has defenders as well. "Glenn refuses to view the black experience exclusively through the lens of oppression," Shelby Steele, the author of The Content of Our Character, says, and the critic Stanley Crouch is hopeful about Loury's prospects. "Look, a lot of people smoke crack and have kids out of wedlock and don't have anything important to say," he says. "For all his foibles, Glenn Loury does.

Loury, in what he says is an effort to reclaim his voice, has put together his first book, a collection of essays entitled "One by One from the Inside Out," which is to be published next month, by the Free Press. In it he attacks the bolehths of American liberalism, taking on subjects like affirmative action, black anti-Semitism, political correctness, and liberal racism. He remains a fierce critic of the civil-rights establishment, arguing that in the "post-civil-rights era" black leaders should concentrate on economic strategies for relieving black poverty instead of pursuing strategies of protest and legal restitution, and that the solidarity of black liberals (what he calls the "loyalty trap") blinds them to harmful aspects of black behavior and leads them to censure blacks who are will-
ing to talk openly about those problems. He also writes about religion, a topic that has become increasingly important to him since 1989, when he was "born again." After a life spent resolving the twin pleasures of personal hedonism and professional success, Loury says, he has found more authentic fulfillment through faith even as he has discovered a profoundly illiberal truth: "My pursuit of personal freedom—my constant quest to be free of constraint, to be unfettered—has been the source of much of my unhappiness." Only religion, Loury contends, provides the emphasis on work and character which is so desperately needed in America's ghettos. To synthesize the best of black nationalism and Christian morality, he has proposed a hybrid that he calls Christian Nationalism, "I have a certain affinity to the principles of black nationalism, like the mutual obligation of African-Americans to bond together," he says. "As a Christian I believe the decline in traditional values requires a religious antidote. Christian Nationalism may be a way to achieve both aims. There is a genuine cultural affinity between blacks and conservative Christians, aside from the kooky Pat Robertson types. Blacks have a good deal more in common with them than with the A.C.L.U., or the Jewish liberal intelligentsia. We should find ways of exploiting it."

As a response to the corrosive spiritual nihilism that critics like Cornel West have diagnosed as afflicting black America, Christian Nationalism, Loury hopes, can foster the values of self-help and self-discipline, which will enable African-Americans to take control of their fate. Alarmed that the most visible advocates of these traditional virtues are nationalists like Louis Farrakhan and his followers, Loury wants to disengage the moral lessons from the xenophobia and bigotry that mar organizations such as the Nation of Islam. He credits the truth of the Gospels with his own spiritual emancipation, and believes that it can help others. His book's last line is "No Jesus, no peace."

In conversation, Loury frequently makes use of the confessional mode, freely testifying to his past failings with bittersweet resignation. His is a familiar narrative: modest origins; adversity overcome; success by dint of hard work; moral lapses; and—the aesthetic closure that is the exclusive property of those who have found religion—evangelical redemption. Depending on the particular years he emphasizes, Loury seems less a "new" man than an entirely different one.

Despite these shifting personas, his self-interpretation is consistent. "That was then, this is now," he says. "Judge me by who I have become, not by who I was." In spite of his evident transformation, however, the question remains: Should the message of black self-help—the gospel of character and family values—be delivered by this messenger?

When the news of Loury's troubles emerged, his associates at Harvard were stunned. That day, he had co-taught a political-economy seminar with Robert B. Reich, who is now the Secretary of Labor. "I had never seen Glenn so brilliant and lucid," Reich said at the time. Given the cozy collegiality of an institution where professors easily drop partisan ideologies and team up to teach courses in leadership and government, it is striking that even Loury's closest friends never suspected that his life was careering out of control. How could we have been so blind, they have since asked themselves, as not to see signs of his distress?

Although Loury advocated integration as a strategy for healing society's racial wounds, he kept the two sides of his life strictly separate. By day, this conservative Republican was, in his own words, "the resident naysayer in the chorus of amens of the Kennedy School's soft left-of-center liberalism," and its only tenured black professor. By night, he led a different existence: frequenting Roxbury's seedy night clubs, using drugs, picking up women. He was riding high—"a superman, the center of the universe," he says.

To Loury, the chasm separating his personal behavior and his moral prescriptions was not a flaw but a point of pride: he took satisfaction in the ease with which he passed back and forth between the two worlds—a maneuver that he told himself would have been impossible for any of his colleagues, black or white. "I could argue policy with a black intellectual like Chris Edley during the

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day,” he says, referring to the Harvard law professor who was until recently the deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, “and that night enter a world! he knew absolutely nothing about.” Like his colleagues, Loury was a certified intellectual; unlike them, his urban origins gave him a connection to the streets, a trump card he often used to win arguments. He knew—he had been there. What good were all the advanced degrees in the world against someone who had actually experienced the ill of the underclass? “Don’t give me that shit,” he would say, “I’m from Chicago.” In his view, his experience gave him a more “authentic” sense of his racial identity than was available to other black professors. This was especially ironic since Loury was notorious for attacking the notion that there was any single way of being black: an expert at deconstructing the rhetoric of “comparative blackness,” he would skillfully reveal the covert ideological loyalty tests it concealed. Now, as his life’s once separate spheres collided, the impact shook the black intellectual world. His enemies saw his fall as confirming the hypocrisy that they had always suspected; for his admirers it was a genuine tragedy, a result of the terrible pressure that he had been subjected to for telling African-Americans truths they didn’t want to hear. For his part, he felt humiliated, exposed. “I just wanted to die,” he says.

The South Side of Chicago, where Loury was born, in 1948, has the largest concentration of African-Americans in the country. Stretching across twenty square miles, from the downtown Loop to Hyde Park and then on to the city’s southernmost edge, it contains dozens of neighborhoods, representing all economic strata. Early on a brilliant, freezing February morning, Loury and I sped through the city on a six-lane interstate highway. To the left were the infamous Robert Taylor Homes, a series of hulking, crime-ridden projects punctuating the horizon as far as the eye could see. To Loury, they represent the worst problems of black America—a dying community, trapped by liberal policies and unresponsive to the cures prescribed by misguided social programs. “I was afraid to go there even back in 1965,” he says.

Five miles south of the projects is Park Manor, the working-class enclave where Loury grew up. Predominantly white until the nineteen-forties, it was all black by the late fifties and remains so today. Block after block, well-kept one- and two-family houses perch on sloping lawns behind tidy rows of hedges. Loury, the older of two children, lived here with his mother, his sister, and his stepfather. Although Park Manor itself is quite safe, one has only to cross the nearby highway to find some considerably less desirable areas. Loury was surrounded by a sprawling working-class family, but the world of petty crime and casual drug use common in any poorer neighborhood was not far away.

Loury’s family is a study in contrasts. His father was a successful civil servant with the Internal Revenue Service who went to law school at night; his mother’s brother, Uncle Adler, was an assistant state’s attorney—a conservative Republican—who had attended law school with Chicago’s future mayor Harold Washington. “Whereas a lot of educated blacks of Adler’s generation were fiery nationalists and anti-system, he always saw the logic of playing the angles and working within the system, playing the game,” Loury recalls. “These other guys were always talking about stuff that just wasn’t going to happen—like the revolution—while he would tell me about the law and how to work it to your advantage. That appealed to me.”

Another uncle has some twenty-five children, by three marriages and a handful of other relationships; a great-aunt of Loury’s owned several apartment buildings but sometimes fenced stolen goods from her back porch to make extra cash. “My family spanned the entire continuum of engagement with conventional society,” Loury says. “And although I was on the most conventional end of it, I was nevertheless intimately connected to the rest.”

Neighborhood kids divided themselves into the “Grousters” and the “Ivy Leaguers”—designa-
tions that indicated more about styles than gang allegiances. "The Gousters
were knit shirts, wing-tip shoes, and hagg pants," Loury recalls. "They were
dick, bad, cool. Really good dancers, al-
ways in trouble and getting girls preg-
nant. We Ivy Leaguers wore V-neck
sweaters, button-down shirts, penny
loafers, and tapered slacks. We were
supposed to be square and soft. Couldn't
fight, couldn't dance—good boys. But,
of course, we got girls pregnant, too."
Indeed, Loury had two children by his
girlfriend when they were teen-agers.
They eventually married, but separated
after five years.

As was true in many black commu-
nities in the sixties, the fervor of black
nationalism was in the air. One of
Loury's maternal uncles often went to
hear the rousing speeches given by
Elijah Muhammad, the head of the Na-
tion of Islam. The same uncle left Loury
a collection of Malcolm X's recorded
speeches. One cousin changed his name
to Thabit to follow the nationalist poet
and activist Haki Madhubuti. Within
his family, Loury was known for his in-
tellectual precocity, and when he was
fourteen a cousin gave him a copy of the
anti-Semitic "Protocols of the Elders of
Zion" and told him, "It's time you learn
the truth about what the man is doing to
our people." Although Loury was im-
pressed by the nationalist rhetoric, he
was skeptical, too. "I was always a little
soft on that stuff," he says. "I wasn't as
radical as I was supposed to be, and that
disappointed some people in my family."

An outstanding student at the inter-
racial Harlan High School, Loury
graduated at sixteen. After a brief stint
at a local technical college, he quit to
work in a printing plant to support his
young family. Three years later, he won
a scholarship to Northwestern, and this
time he found that he was excited to be
a student.

Within a year, Loury was taking
graduate courses in mathematics and
economics. Soon he was on his way to
M.I.T., which had perhaps the finest
Economics Department in the country,
to study with Robert M. Solow and Paul
Samuelson. As the department's star
student, Loury quickly became Solow's
protégé. "Glenn was an extraordinarily
bright student, absolutely first class," Solow
says. "There is no doubt in my
mind that had he continued in eco-
nomic theory he had the talent to win
the Clark Medal"—an award that is con-
sidered a prelude to a Nobel Prize in
Economics. Loury was further to the
right than most black students, but he
was not yet noticeably conservative.
Indeed, his dissertation, "Essays in the
Theory of the Distribution of Income,
contained a technical defense of affirma-
tive action—although he never used the
phrase—as the only way to redress long-
standing economic inequality. But it was
also at M.I.T. that Loury came to
embrace the idea of meritocracy with near-
religious fervor. "I knew that the Jewish
and WASP kids from Yale and Princeton
sitting at the front of the class asking the
hard questions were where the real ac-
tion was, and that was where I wanted to
be," he says.

In 1979, after receiving his Ph.D.
from M.I.T., Loury began teaching
at the University of Michigan. That
year, he received a playful compliment
from a white colleague: "You really are
good, Glenn. We would have hired
you even if you were Jewish." Loury
was euphoric. "I liked that," he said. "It
was exactly how I wanted it: Don't do me
any favors. Discriminate against me if
you like—he pauses—'and I'll still
kick your ass.'"

While Loury was at Michigan, his
politics edged further to the right, but
the shift was inspired by labor politics
rather than by racial politics. It was the
late seventies, and the recession was hav-
ing a severely detrimental impact on the
state—an impact that was exacerbated
by what Loury saw as unreasonable
union demands. At a university known
as a hotbed of pro-labor activism, nei-
ther these anti-union views nor his ar-
guments for deregulation were looked
upon kindly. In 1981, after presenting a
paper to the N.A.A.C.P. in which he
advocated letting gas prices be deter-
dined by free-market forces, he was
called "the black David Stockman.
That was the first time—but hardly the
last—that Loury provoked the enmity of
the civil-rights establishment.

In his political exodus, Loury was in-
spired by the civil-rights leader Bayard
Rustin's 1965 Commentary essay "From
Protest to Politics," which argues that
economic hardship had become a bigger
problem for blacks than segregation.
Loury explains, "Rustin said, 'Look, this

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isn't a racial problem, it's an economic problem. We have to figure out how working people can raise their standard of living and survive automation and urban decay. That requires politics, not protest. African-Americans are largely working class, and, as an economist, I knew that working-class folk were going to be catching hell for quite some time. We had to help them. That's the problem we have to confront, not white racism.

Loury was soon recruited by Harvard, which was looking for a distinguished black social scientist to give its foundering Afro-American Studies Program a boost. Despite his relative inexperience—Loury had finished his doctorate barely five years before—he was offered a joint appointment with the Economics Department. In 1982, he arrived in Cambridge a tenured full professor. After years spent railing against affirmative action, Loury was now in the awkward situation of having clearly been hired as a result of its principles. For the first time in his life, he says, he was plagued by self-doubt. He had long, soul-searching conversations with the head of the Afro-American Studies department, Nathan Huggins, in which Huggins repeatedly reassured Loury that he was in fact qualified. "Just look around you," Huggins said. "Not every professor here is a genius—some haven't published a book in ten years. Do they feel bad because merit wasn't the only reason they were hired?" Loury wasn't convinced. "I didn't know if I had anything more to say," he recalls. "I thought that I had run dry. It was only a matter of time before everyone saw what a fake I was."

Sensing little support from the Economics Department, Loury spent most of his time in Afro-American Studies and began writing more about race. Two years later, he abandoned both departments entirely and accepted an offer to teach political economy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government—a move that relieved the intense pressure he felt to prove himself in economics. "I chocked," he says. "I was just too terrified that I would fail to make it in New York."

Moving to the Kennedy School was a good cover story for my little crisis."

Previously, Loury had always analyzed race through a prism of complex economic jargon. Now his essays began to appear in general-interest magazines like The New Republic and Commentary, and he suddenly had access to a much wider audience. He remembers the pride he felt one day in a Cambridge bookstore when he saw someone pick up a magazine and exclaim, "Wow! Glenn Loury has something in here!"

Many people, however, were not pleased with the things Loury was saying. One day, Loury recalls, he received an angry call from Benjamin Hooks, the executive director of the N.A.A.C.P., who had a copy of an unpublished essay of Loury's in which Loury criticized the organization for failing to address the plight of the (usually black) victims of crime. Hooks wanted the offending passage toned down. "Hooks told me, 'Look, I know these problems exist, but as a civil-rights leader my job is to hold white people's feet to the fire. How can I go around criticizing little black kids?'" Loury refused to make any changes.

In late 1984, Loury was invited to speak at a National Urban Coalition meeting. The audience included Carl Holman, the Coalition's president; Walter Fauntroy, then the District of Columbia's delegate to Congress; Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King's widow; and other civil-rights leaders. Loury gave what had become his standard spiel ("The real problem is the black poor. You've exhausted your moral capital with your whining. Legislative solutions won't do any good. Instead, the civil-rights movement is over, only to be met with silence. 'They were more hurt than angry,'") Loury says. "Holman told me, 'We appreciate your ideas, but you have to be more careful about who it is you say these things to.'"

As the meeting drew to a close, Loury says, Coretta Scott King was crying quietly.

Fame was a heady experience for Loury. As the country grappled with stubborn social problems in the aftermath of the civil-rights movement and the War on Poverty, his message of self-help was in great demand, and his opinions were sought in lecture halls and boardrooms across the country. He was frequently invited to Washington, and there became a friend of Clarence Thomas's: he and Thomas would discuss conservative philosophy and compare their experiences as embattled black conservatives. (When Anita Hill's sexual-harassment allegations against Thomas became public, Loury offered his friend prayers and support. "Even if what Anita Hill said was true—and I don't believe it was—what the Senate put Clarence through was outrageous," Loury says. "It was wrong that he was used as an occasion to fight over the legacy of Reagan and civil rights. I hated seeing him have to suffer through all that.") In addition to the support that Loury received from the growing ranks of black conservatives, he found himself allied with the white neoconservative thinkers, whose stock had been rising precipitously under Reagan. When Loury withdrew his name from consideration for the Department of Education position in 1987 and news of his infidelity and drug use came out, his fellow-neoconservatives were more surprised than horrified. "It was so strange that I think people decided that there was no point trying to understand it," William Kristol recalls. "He had these inner demons and we all hoped he would conquer them." Despite the revelation that Loury had essentially been leading a double life, his position among the neoconservatives didn't seem to be in jeopardy. A member in good standing of the editorial board of Irving Kristol's Public Interest, Loury began attending exclusive sessions where conservatives developed strategies to preserve the gains of the Reagan revolution.

Loury remembers one such meeting well—a gathering hosted by William F. Buckley and Richard Neuhaus at the Union Club on the Upper West Side. Among those present were George Will, William Kristol, Podhoretz, Midge Decter, and others were discussing the 1988 Presidential campaign. At one point, the National Review's publisher, William Rusher, denounced Jack Kemp for suggesting "enterprise zones" to help rehabilitate inner cities. Conservatives shouldn't try to out-Democrat the Democrats, Rusher argued, for there were simply no Republican votes in the black community to be won.

As the only African-American in the room, Loury felt a responsibility to speak. "I said, 'Hey, these ghettos are not someplace way out on the moon.
They're right here, and, much as we conservatives agree that government can't fix them all, we must at least talk about what we can do. We can't just write them off. If Kemp's ideas are bad, then we need to find better ones.”

Never perfect, the fit between Loury and the neo-conservatives was becoming increasingly strained. Few sensed Loury's growing ambivalence. The conservative thinker Charles Murray was one who did.

"I always knew something odd was going on with Glenn," he recalls. "I wanted to say, 'Hey, come out of the closet.' He's uneasy about being tagged a conservative, but his world view is hardly that of a social democrat. I know what he's against, but I've never known what he's for."

One day in 1988, while Loury was in New York for a Public Interest board meeting, he had a revelation. Touring the Metropolitan Museum with Lisa Schiffren (who later wrote Dan Quayle's "Murphy Brown" speech), he lamented the fact that, despite his prominence, he was completely isolated from his colleagues—that, in short, he had no friends. "But, Glenn, we're your friends," she reassured him. "You're a member of a historically liberal ethnic minority, who through your own intellectual evolution have come to dissent from its convictions pretty much down the line. You voted for Reagan, you're pro-life, for family values—you're one of us."

"That really shook me up, because she seemed so right," Loury says. "I just didn't feel like one of them. And I'll never be one of them, no matter what they think. What am I supposed to do? Become Jewish? That conversation was a wake-up call. It underscored just how isolated I was."

In a presentation that Loury made at the ex-radical David Horowitz's 1990 "Second Thoughts on Race" conference, he departed from his prepared speech. "My racial identity is useful to you," he said, reminding the audience that his relation to the white right was one of mutual exploitation. "My breaking ranks confirms you in your own apostasy. It helps you to see your deviation from the 'progressive' ranks as valid and nonracist because here I am, a prominent black, agreeing with you. If by some magic I were suddenly to become white, my brilliant, prescriptive, and courageous insights would just as suddenly be reduced to pedestrian commonplace complaints, of little political or personal comfort to you."

Loury's own second thoughts were getting the better of him; he called for white conservatives to fight their own battles. "I'm tired of doing y'all's work," he concluded.

Perhaps no event has better highlighted Loury's isolation in recent years than the publication, last November, of Charles Murray's and Richard J. Herrnstein's book "The Bell Curve," which argues that blacks are genetically predisposed toward lower I.Q.s—and lesser achievement—than whites. Although Loury considered Murray a friend, he was disturbed by the book's findings and, as a mathematical economist, extremely skeptical about its use of statistics. "Low I.Q. may be a problem in our society, but it doesn't have much to do with race," Loury says.

Earlier this year, after testifying before Congress about welfare reform, Loury ran into Murray at a luncheon held by William Bennett at his think tank, Empower America. It was the first time Loury and Murray had seen each other since the book appeared. "I said, 'Charles, I've written some things about the book and I'm going to write some more, but I want things to be on the up-and-up between us.'"

As Loury specified a few of his misgivings, Murray grew angry and cut him off. "Glenn, if I were in your shoes and couldn't write anything positive about the book, then I just wouldn't write anything at all," he said.

Loury says he was amazed by his friend's patronizing attitude; for one thing, what would it really mean for Murray to be in Loury's shoes? After a few more minutes, Murray abruptly ended the conversation, turned his back on Loury, and headed into the elevator, accompanied by the political scientist James Q. Wilson. As the doors closed, Loury says, he could make out only a few words of their conversation: the two social scientists were talking about wine.

Loury had further problems when he sought a home for a proposed critical essay on "The Bell Curve." The editors of Commentary, a magazine that had happily opened its pages to him in the past, informed him that they weren't interested in a piece; they had reviewed the book once, and they were planning to run Murray's own reply to his critics. Feeling let down by his neoconservative allies, Loury wrote a letter to the editor, Neal Kozodoy. "Someone once re-
marked to me, concerning magazines, that writers mistakenly see our relationships with the editors who publish us as ones of friendship, when in fact they are always, and only, business relationships," he wrote. "In our case, I had perhaps naively thought the matter to involve a bit of both. . . . You must know that your decision in this matter will affect my assessment of the real basis of our relationship. I can only conclude that, having done your sums, you are acting so as to further what you take to be your more fundamental interests.

Loury’s sense of betrayal surfaced during a conference at Harvard to celebrate Commentary’s fiftieth anniversary, this February. In a speech, Podhoretz announced that the last difference separating conservatives and neoconservatives—the latter’s attachment to the welfare state—had disappeared. So disturbed was Loury by these remarks that early the next morning he went to his office to amend the paper he was to give later that day. “Many neoconservatives marched for racial justice thirty years ago,” he read. “Then the demons were clear. They are less so now. But you cannot tell me that what now transpires in ghetto America does not constitute a great injustice to those tens of thousands of youngsters who never get a chance. Is there no longer room within the intellectual edifice of neoconservatism for moral outrage in the face of such injustice?”

Before he could even descend from the dais, Loury was cornered by Podhoretz and Decter. If Loury was so contemptuous of their efforts, what would they do to solve the problems of the underclass?

Loury confessed that he had no answers but was startled by what he saw as their stark logic: when no solution is found, simply abandon the problem.

“It felt as if they expected me to be a self-hating black in order to be a neoconservative. I can be dismayed, or even disgusted, at what black people do, but I can’t view my own people with contempt—can’t they understand that?”

Later that day, Loury confronted Podhoretz: “Norman, you say there are no more neoconservatives, because no conservatives believe that the welfare state is worth salvaging. But I still believe in the welfare state, so what does that make me?”

“Well, Glenn,” Podhoretz replied, “you may be the last neoconservative in America.”

Six miles south of downtown Boston, the affluent suburb of Milton is home to white-collar businessmen who commute to the city. Here Loury lives in a large New England-style house. This evening, sitting in his living room, he focuses on the events of the past few years. He speaks of what he calls “my troubles” more fully than he has before, his voice growing somber as he settles back into an overstuffed white couch. It is as if he were reading from his moral rap sheet. “In 1985, when I was at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, I’d go to the worst parts of Trenton to buy drugs, pick up women, and hang out in bars,” he says softly. “At conferences in Washington or New York, I’d sneak out after the meetings and dinner and stay out all night doing various sordid things.” He explains why he was trying to throw his twenty-three-year-old girlfriend out of the Boston apartment: he wanted to install a new lover, who was a heavy coke user.

After he withdrew from the Education Department appointment, Loury began freebasing several times a day. When the judge dropped the drug-possession charges in exchange for Loury’s entering a rehabilitation program, he began using more, even getting high while travelling to and from therapy. Once, after he’d given Linda numerous assurances that he had stopped, she caught him freebasing in the garage. When he returned to the house, she was on the floor pouting her fists and weeping. “I didn’t really care,” he says. “I said I was sorry, or something, but I didn’t really care.”

Similar scenes followed until one day, in February, 1988, Loury barricaded himself in a spare bedroom with an ample supply of cocaine and X-rated movies. For twenty-four hours, he did nothing but get high and watch pornography. The next day, he surveyed his life—a distraught wife, a debilitating drug habit, problems with the law, an uncertain professional future—and realized that things had spun out of control.

Loury agreed to spend a month at McLean Hospital, in the Boston suburb of Belmont, followed by a few weeks in a halfway house. A breakthrough came one evening while Loury was telling two white counsellors about all the enemies he had made by being black and conservative. “Then why are you giving them what they want?” he remembers the counsellors asking, deliberately provoking him. “Why are you showing your ass and acting like such a nigger?”

“I was outraged at their presumption,” Loury says. “I knew that in their own way they were trying to help me.
DEPT. OF SECOND THOUGHTS

But what did they know about being black? They were just projecting their own racist stereotype about black people onto me." He still flares at the memory. "But I eventually realized that, the way I had been acting, I had been doing pretty much the same thing."

At McLean, Loury was visited by a pastor who prayed and read the Twenty-third Psalm with him. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me": the words were familiar from childhood, but now he heard them differently. "For the first time in my life, I felt that I wasn't alone and that God could help," he says. That spring, he attended Easter services. As the organ swelled and the pastor preached, he thought of his sins and wept.

Linda gave birth to a son, Glenn, Jr., soon after Loury was released. They had tried for years to have children, and the symbolism weighed heavily: for them, it seemed nothing less than a miracle. Three years later, a second son was born, and they named him Nehemiah, after the Old Testament sage.

As an cue, three-year-old Nehemiah Loury scampers across the living room, tripping on his powder-blue pajama jumpsuit, and slams his dark, downy curls into his father's large stomach. Gently cradling his son, Loury tells the Biblical story of Nehemiah, a story that he believes has a great deal of relevance for African-Americans today.

Nehemiah, an adviser to the Persian king, learns that the Jews of Jerusalem have let their city fall into disrepair. Its walls have crumbled, the gates have burned, its people are unfaithful. This saddens him, and he asks to be appointed governor of Judah so that he can rebuild the city. "When Nehemiah gets to Jerusalem, there's a lot of resistance from all the corrupt, lazy people who don't want change," Loury says, in lecturing mode. "So Nehemiah asks the king for help. He can't rebuild Jerusalem by himself. He needs men, timber, mortar. But he also knows that nobody can do it for him. The Jews must rebuild the city themselves.

"What does it really mean for a city not to have walls?" he asks. "It's a powerful metaphor, and closely related to black people's situation today. A city without walls has no integrity, or structure; it is subject to the vagaries of any fad or fancy. Without walls, you are lost, as opposed to having some kind of internally derived sense of who you are and who you are to help you decide what you will and won't do."

Somehow, the gospel of self-help sounds more inspirational when it is told through Biblical stories of prophecy and redemption. Loury's exegesis is impressive, laden with metaphor and symbolism; he has obviously studied the story deeply and has thought about its meaning for some time. Yet there is something pat about the way he recounts Nehemiah's—and his own—story of redemption.

When I return home, I find a Bible and read about Nehemiah for myself. The great leader, the benevolent king, the ailing city—all there, just as Loury said. But as I read further I learn that Nehemiah did more than simply rebuild Jerusalem's walls. He also introduced far-reaching social and economic reforms that transformed the society itself, foremost among them being the abolition of slavery.

It seems that if you owed a debt in ancient Judah you might lose your land—and even be forced into servitude—if it wasn't repaid. When Nehemiah arrived, he urged the Jews to forgive one another's debts and free those they had enslaved. I am particularly struck by the fact that he encouraged them by example: cancelling all the debts owed him, he asked others to follow his lead. Nehemiah freed the Jews by first freeing himself; their bondage ended because his did, too.

As I continue through the Bible, reading of the miracles performed by wise prophets and faithful men, my mind keeps coming back to the many hours I have spent with Loury. Like him, I'm not quite sure how his story will end. Now that Loury has concluded his self-imposed tutelage—kicking drugs and finding God—I wonder whether he has truly emancipated himself or merely rebuilt the walls that keep him in.

THE LEGAL MIND AT WORK

"Judges lie, the lawyers lie, then clients lie,"—Alan M. Dershowitz, in U.S. News & World Report, October 25, 1993.