

NAACP selects excellent leader

The NAACP seems set to return to the civil rights debate after electing a new chairwoman over the weekend.

Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, was elected chairwoman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on Saturday, replacing embattled chairman William Gibson.

Evers-Williams, a resident of Bend, Ore., is an excellent choice for the post. Having seen firsthand the harm that discrimination caused when her husband was murdered during the civil rights struggle over 30 years ago, Evers-Williams will bring a valuable perspective to the national organization that few others could. She will also help to attract attention to the cause of civil rights in America.

When elected, Evers-Williams stated that a goal of hers was to get the NAACP back into the civil rights debate. With affirmative action being questioned by the new Congress in Washington, now is the time for the NAACP to have a stronger and more vocal representation nationwide than ever. Evers-Williams has stated that she wants to be active in the fight against repealing affirmative action.

She also stated that she wants to return the organization to the grassroots, the same people who started the organization and kept it strong for almost 90 years.

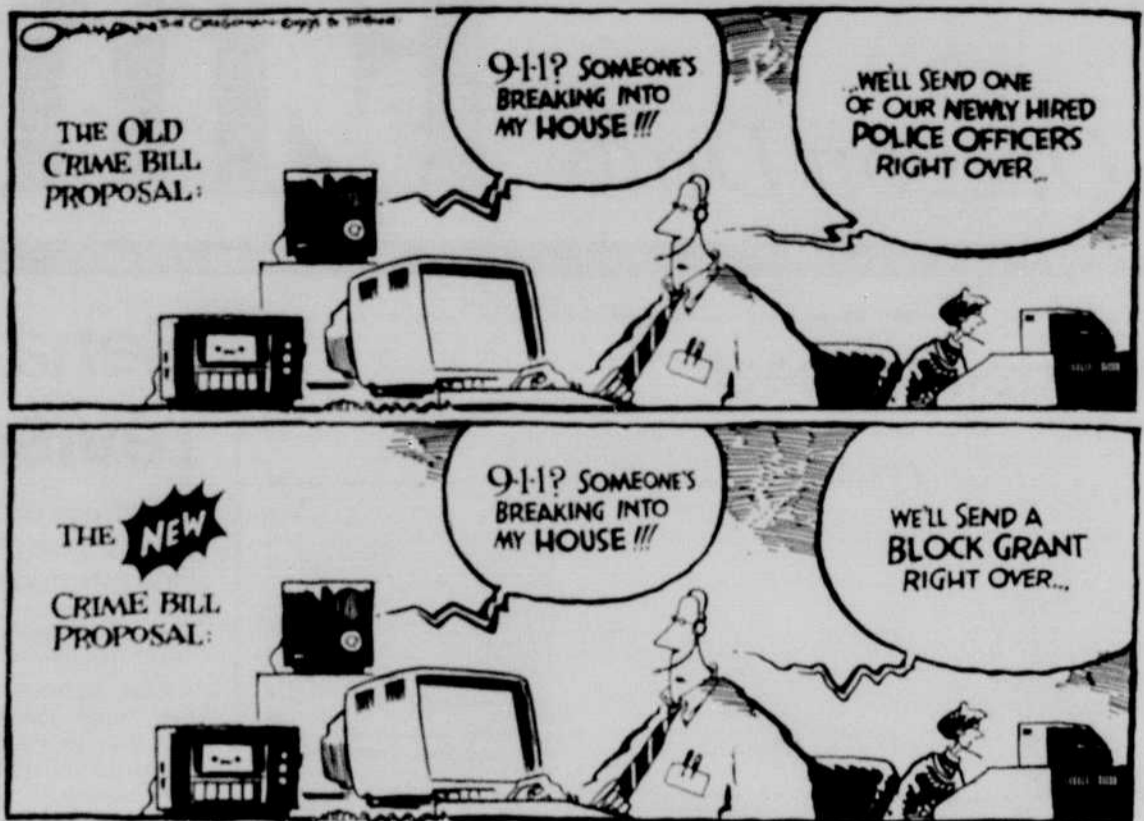
Unfortunately, civil rights questions have been overshadowed by alleged mismanagement of money in the NAACP over the past year. Gibson had been charged by some with misusing NAACP expense accounts and charging a number of limousine rides and hotel suites to the organization. Although it is necessary for the group to investigate these charges, it is even more important that the NAACP attempt to stay focused on the goal of fighting for civil rights.

The division continued when about 700 NAACP members passed a no-confidence motion expressing opposition to Gibson's continued leadership. It was clear that it was time for something to change at the NAACP. The change came from Evers-Williams.

It is clear that, just like in the civil rights struggle, division among people does more harm than good. With powerful leadership, Evers-Williams is one person who can help bring the group back together again.

The reasons Evers-Williams belongs on the NAACP are clearly stated by Evers-Williams herself. "I am here because I love the NAACP. I believe it must survive. I believe it must thrive," she said. "Duty beckons me. I am strong. Test me and you will see."

Hopefully the NAACP will take her up on her offer and restore the group to its position of greatness, continuing to work for civil rights throughout the country. It's what the NAACP does best, and it's what the country needs now. Myrlie Evers-Williams will help the group deliver.



■ OPINION

Racism wrong in all instances



BRIAN WOMACK

Something in this country is very wrong. People are being judged not by their talent or skills, but by their gender or color of skin.

These victims of discrimination are becoming more and more resentful toward the people that judge these criteria.

This rampant discrimination I speak of is, of course, affirmative action.

Minorities and women in this country are being hired ahead of equally or more qualified white males simply because a quota must be filled.

Americans aren't entirely happy about it either.

In a *Time/CNN* poll of 800 adults taken last month, 77 percent of whites thought affirmative action sometimes or frequently discriminates against whites. Even among blacks polled, 66 percent answered the same way.

In a survey taken by the *LA Times* in late January, 39 percent of respondents said affirmative action programs have "gone too far." This is up dramatically from the 24 percent who had the same opinion a mere three and half years ago.

Bob Dole has recently questioned the very reasoning of affirmative action. Possibly hinting at the second 100 days of the Republican reign in Congress, he said, "Should future generations have to pay for that? Some would say yes. I think it's a tough question."

Why have these feelings grown to such a degree?

A good example comes from the newspaper industry where white men are purposefully not being hired. The following three examples are from an article published in the November 1993 *American Journalism Review*.

In 1990, at the *Dallas Morning News*, Kevin Merida leapfrogged

over white staff workers who had been editing his copy to become their boss.

Another case involved a white male editor in his mid-forties with 10 years at a California paper who spent a year acting as state editor while lobbying for the position to become permanent. Instead, a Hispanic woman from another newspaper was named to the job of state editor with no editing experience.

LA Times Washington bureau chief Jack Nelson was quoted as saying, "We don't want to bring any more white males into the bureau." In the interest of more "diversity," he says he must hire in this manner.

The biggest problems with these stories and others similar to it is that the relationship between races is not helped, but strained.

It doesn't make co-workers happy if they're leapfrogged for a job simply because they aren't African-American. It causes resentment.

White students who get the same score on their SAT's as Hispanics but don't get into a highly-rated college will be resentful as well.

These building feelings of resentment will only roll back the progress we've made in race relations.

As Bernie Richter, a California state legislator said, "When you deny someone who has earned it and give to someone else who has not earned it... you create anger and resentment."

Another fruit of this affirmative action tree is the suspicion white males will have toward women and minorities.

In the back of their mind is the nagging question of, "Did that person get that job because they were really that good, or was it because the person filled

a quota?"

This also punishes those minorities who don't need affirmative action to get ahead in the job or college markets. Their talents and skills might be belittled because now they're put into the same boat of those who needed a quota to get ahead.

Sometimes affirmative action can cause the absurd — minorities are actually punished.

It makes us wonder why we instituted affirmative action.

The reason was, as Dole said, to "right" past wrongs.

There were clearly times in the nation when racism kept many minorities from having a good chance at getting the job they actually wanted. It exists, of course, to a lesser extent today, too.

Yet we must remember all cases of minorities not being hired are not necessarily cases of racism; in some cases, they are simply not qualified.

With the black middle class growing substantially over the last two decades, one has to ask if punishing present generations for past wrongs is really prudent.

The logical end of affirmative action should be when racism is no longer a problem in America. But affirmative action will never bring us closer to that day, but farther from it because it is grounded in racism.

Color should not be the litmus test in hiring or for college acceptance.

Martin Luther King Jr. made the best argument for this when he said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream...."

Brian Womack is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

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