



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

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The Black Family: Through Whose Eyes

Remember the story about the 3 blind men who felt different parts of the same elephant. Each man's description seemed to relate to a different animal. Such is the case with last year's CBS documentary, "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America." The program, produced by Bill Moyers, was vehemently criticized by a number of African Americans for its unbalanced view of the African American family. Now this TV special has received one of the most prestigious awards in broadcast journalism — the Alfred duPont-Columbia University Gold Baton Award. "The Vanishing Black Family" was thus "judged to have made the greatest contribution to the public's understanding of important issues or news events." It was suggested the program (QUOTE) "may very well be the most important documentary in recent memory." (UNQUOTE)

Just what part of the elephant did the judges feel? What I and many others saw in this program was a myopic, black-the-victim, interpretation of those Black families who had been overwhelmed by relentless poverty. Nowhere did we get an explanation of the role which the government plays in forcing fathers to become invisible if their families are to continue receiving financial aid; or the role the government plays in annihilating job training programs; or in chopping drug abuse funds; or in making affordable, low-income housing an impossibility for most young families. The blame was placed almost entirely on the back of the already-burdened, poor Black family.

Although it is not fair to kill the messenger, it is also not fair to bring in false message. Certainly the deep poverty which has been laying siege to a number of Black communities over the past few years has taken its toll on many Black families. But to title the program "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America" and then to focus on families in which the fathers have a cavalier attitude about work and about their families and then focus on families which are primarily dependent upon the welfare system is to imply that a majority of Black families are in the throes of dissolution. This is simply not true.

Everywhere I go I see strong Black families, be they rich or poor, northern or southern. I see mothers and fathers in this nation's inner cities who, against great odds, are working to insure that their children get a good education. I see Black fathers who are willing to work at any job just to keep the family intact. And I see extended families functioning in a way which many non-Black families would envy (if this were ever shown to them).

Last September the National Black Leadership Roundtable, an umbrella organization of over 300 national Black organizations, headed by Cong. Walter Fauntroy (D-Wash., D.C.), sent a letter to CBS. The letter raised very reasonable objections to the Moyers program and requested a meeting to discuss the program. CBS refused to meet and responded with a letter which was both arrogant and insulting. The network suggested that the Roundtable members had not seen the program for, (QUOTE) "if you saw the broadcast, and if you analyzed it, you know that for the greatest part of the film the people we interviewed spoke for themselves." Does CBS really think that we are so naive as to believe that the shapers of the program were those who were questioned, rather than those who asked the questions? Or that we don't understand that a documentary's content is formed as much by whom the producers choose to interview and the editing process as by what the interviewees reveal?

Some might wonder why we are discussing a program which aired, after all, last year. First, given its new honor, it will probably be repeated many more times in the future. Second, it is currently being shown in a number of schools across the country. And third, it is one more incidence of how totally much of the media distorts the African American community, making of it a monster unrecognizable to its own. If we seek to understand the racist fear now in evidence in many white communities, we have only to look to such TV programs as this to find some of our answers.

This is Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. of the United Church of Christ for Civil Rights Journal.

Letters to the Editor

Judge Ellis Unfair???

To the Editor:

With the cry of not enough jail space from all our city officials, it behooves me to speak out when judges like Judge Ellis put misdemeanor charges like driving while suspended before murder, burglary, rape, dealing drugs and other criminal offenses that are more of a menace to society.

Calvin Harper, a black defendant, was sentenced Monday, April 6th by Judge Ellis to serve five years in the State Penitentiary. Mr. Harper has never killed anyone nor was he driving drunk, but because of previous records and unpaid tickets, Judge Ellis replied when handing down the sentence that he was a menace to society.

For the past six months, Mr. Harper has changed his attitude and life style, married and has been employed working at the shipyard and currently is working for Zarcos Corp. trying to be a productive citizen paying into the community instead of taking away from it. It is quite obvious, when decisions like these are made by our judges, there is a bit of racism involved and more than a little prejudice.

I have criticized the Police Department and the District Attorneys Office but never the judges. Now I criticize them, because of their insensitivity when handing

down a sentence to our black males. This has been a practice of many of our judges for a long time: giving stiffer sentences for small crimes; which places many of our black men in correctional institutions when they are very young. Once a criminal record has been manifested against a person, it is hard for them to find employment, no matter how small the crime.

I do not condone criminal activities, but it angers me when a mother who had a baby who was ill with a temperature of 103 took a bottle of baby Tylenol because she had no money and was sentenced to ninety days in jail. Where is the value of that lesson? The punishment was too harsh for the crime. This has always been the practice in Oregon.

How can the city officials keep asking tax payers for more money to build more jails when judges like Ellis will continue to fill the jails with petty criminals while the real law breakers walk the streets. Judges should be able to look at the crime involved instead of the color of a person's skin when handing down sentences.

This goes to show that there should be changes made in our Judicial System.

Vesia Loving

MONEY

MANAGEMENT

A weekly column on personal finance distributed by the Oregon Society of Certified Public Accountants

Do You Know Where Your Social Security Benefits Are?

Picture this . . . The time has finally come. You're almost 65. After 40 years of hard work, you're ready to retire. You head for your local Social Security office to apply for benefits. But when you learn of the amount of your monthly benefit check, the amount is much less than you anticipated. What happened?

It could have been any number of things. Perhaps you didn't give your employer your correct Social Security number. Or maybe your employer made a mistake when he reported your income. Then again, maybe it was the Social Security Administration who credited your earnings to someone else's Social Security record.

Sheer numbers tell the story. The Social Security has well over 100 million Social Security contributors on file and each year receives some 200 million reports from employers and self-employed persons.

But not to worry. The Oregon Society of CPAs advises that there are a number of simple, preventative steps you may take to protect the benefits you are entitled to.

First, always exercise care when reporting your Social Security number to an employer. Keep your Social Security card handy and refer to it when supplying your number to an employer. If you lose your card, contact your Social Security office for a replacement.

Another good check is to verify the correctness of the W-2 you receive from your employer. Be sure your name, address and Social Security number appear correctly. The box marked "FICA Wages" should show the total earnings from which your employer withheld Social Security taxes. This is the amount of earnings that are entered on your Social Security record.

If any of the information on your W-2 is not correct, you must immediately notify your employer, who would issue a corrected W-2. It's a good idea to keep all pay slips, check stubs and W-2 forms as proof of your contributions.

As a further precaution, you should periodically request a check of your Social Security record, a measure the Social Security Administration itself recommends you do at least every three years. Just call, visit or write your local Social Security office and ask for form SSA-7004PC, "Request for Statement of Earnings." The form is simple - you fill in your name, address, Social Security number, date of birth, signature and, if appli-

cable, any other name or number you may have used.

As an added feature, you may also request an estimate of the monthly benefit you will be entitled to when you reach 65 by writing on the card, "Please furnish benefit estimate." Of course, this estimate will only be based on the amount of earnings you currently have credited. So if your retirement is a long way off, this information isn't going to be very meaningful.

In six to eight weeks after mailing your card to the Social Security Administration, you'll receive a computerized statement showing all the earnings that have been credited up to the date stated. There is generally a one-to-two year lag in posting entries. The amounts credited for the three or four most recent years will be shown as separate yearly totals, while the amounts earned in previous years are shown as a lump sum. All earnings are added and shown as a grand total.

Compare the earnings shown for the most recent years with the amount reported on your W-2's or self-employment records. If you suspect an error, contact your Social Security office immediately. In most cases, the official time limit for correcting mistakes on your earnings record is three years, three months and fifteen days after the year in which the wages were paid or self-employed income earned. Although there are exceptions to these time limits, it is in your best interest to check your record on a periodic basis and promptly notify the Social Security Administration of any errors.

It will be up to you to provide the records necessary to substantiate your claim of an error. The Social Security Administration will need your employment records, including names of employers, dates of employment and wages received. You'll be asked to show those W-2 forms you've been saving.

By following these simple measures you can ensure that, when the time comes, you will get the benefits you are entitled to.

Ninety-seven percent of all American workers are said to have earnings covered by Social Security. In recognition of National Consumers Week, April 19-25, the American Institute of CPAs, in cooperation with the United States Office of Consumer Affairs, has prepared a pamphlet which answers many common questions about Social Security. Write or call the Oregon Society of CPAs for a free copy. 10206 S.W. Laurel, Beaverton, OR 97005-3209. Phone (503) 641-7200.

EDITORIAL/OPINION

The Chicago Experience: A Lesson in Black and Brown

Blacks and Hispanics throughout America should take note of the political transformation that is currently underway in Chicago. Hopefully, by doing so they can become more knowledgeable as to how unity among these two ethnic groups can produce a powerful political machine.

Harold Washington recently won a second four-year term as Mayor of Chicago, becoming the first to do so since Richard Daley. In 1983, Washington became the first African American to be elected Mayor to this nation's third largest city.

His first term in office was met with resistance, hostility and racism, forcing him to resort to heroics to gain control of City Hall.

Refusing to buckle under the pressure tactics of a City Council imbedded in bigotry, Washington wisely sought and received the support of Chicago's Hispanic community which, along with his vast Black and white liberal support, reached deep into key voting

precincts giving the Mayor a broader power base. The federal courts solidified that newfound power with a ruling that called for the reapportionment of the city's aldermanic districts, both last year and in resulting elections. The ruling enabled Washington to gain a 25-25 split on the 50 seat Chicago City Council giving him the power to break a tie vote.

Victory in Chicago was made possible by a 95% Black vote, a 60% Hispanic vote, and a 15% white vote (there is no data available as to how the Asians voted).

Mayor Washington has shown Chicagoans that not only is he administratively competent, but politically astute as well, and provides a valuable lesson for those aspiring to public office.

He opened a dialogue with other ethnic groups, presented an agenda for political action, and stood tall during the battles. For his efforts he was re-elected with respect . . . with pride . . . convincingly.

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