

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Urban League: State of Black America

**VALUING DIVERSITY:
THE MYTH AND
THE CHALLENGE**
DR. PRICE M. COBBS
PRESIDENT, PACIFIC
MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

My examination of The State of Black America 1989 finds many unfinished and complex issues. These issues remain unfinished because our national leaders have placed a low priority on understanding and resolving them. They remain complex because this country has not yet come to grips with deeply embedded attitudes, assumptions, and behavior regarding racial and cultural differences.

As a psychiatrist, my first task in conducting this examination is to determine how people are developing, growing, and faring in their inner lives. Next, the task is to understand how people interact with others, especially observing relationships involving individuals most alike and most unlike. A third and equally critical task I assume is an analysis of the society in which people live. What dynamics are operative now and how do they compare to previous periods?

In my work throughout the nation, impinging on the above issues, are several overarching themes I find intellectually challenging and emotionally seductive. These themes are incorporated in words like diversity, pluralism, and inclusion. What do they mean and why are they appearing now and so frequently? Are they describing cosmetic and superficial shifts in the complexion of the country or do they speak to a series of issues Black people should be aware of in preparation for the year 2000?

Until quite recently such words and themes might be only discussed in obscure academic journals or an arcane doctoral dissertation. Quite suddenly, they are becoming staples of newspaper articles, magazines, TV shows and business journals. Practically everyday one reads accounts or hears analyses of the changing demographics of the United States and the implication of these changes on everything from the workforce to marriage rates.

Thus, to write about the themes of diversity and differences is to focus on a major tributary of contemporary thought an discussion. Moreover, in exploring the implication of these themes, I sense possibilities of a powerful shift occurring in how many Americans view themselves and define their individual identity and therefore how they want to be viewed by others. Further, if my notions about these possibilities are correct, America could be at the dawn of a major transformation in how it defines itself and will be defined by the world in the twenty first century.

With few exceptions we have seen in this myth only serve to remind us that they were just that, exceptions.

Accompanying these visible changes the country is deluged with words like workforce diversity, cultural pluralism, and valuing differences. In many organizations people are challenged to prepare for the year 2000 when the words will be the order of the day and the ideas implied will be standard operating procedure.

In grappling with these ideas, what ought to be the posture of Black America—to embrace and co-opt these themes or to stand aside and risk again the possibility our issues and concerns will be made secondary? At bottom, what is the individual and group self-interest of those Americans who are at once the most like and most unlike the idealized image of an American?

Even today, all but the most racially healthy Americans at some point in their lives have an assumption African-Americans are somehow tainted or otherwise inferior. Even after many years of experience, I remain fascinated as I watch new immigrants in the process of Americanization adopt negative assumption and prejudices against Black people.

However, even more important is for Black people themselves to understand these dynamics. Throughout my lifetime I have observed individuals struggling to resolve the historical quality of being Black and American. The perception that to be different from white America is to be inferior is no recently arrived at formulation heraking a worsening state of race relations. It has been there in good times and bad, through periods of civil rights advances and conservative revolutions. For Black people, it is a central and constant dynamic to be understood and mastered. In my view, a most powerful tool in combatting the fear of success is a deeper understanding and acceptance of one's individual and group cultural differences.

Analyzing and embracing the themes inherent in workforce diversity and valuing differences also helps individuals shed the deficit model view frequently accompanying affirmative action programs. In this view Black people and sometimes other non-whites are regarded as incomplete white people and therefore deficient in ways usually unvoiced or unspecified.

As we approach the year 2000, African-Americans must take leadership in further developing and refining the language and imagery which describes differences. We must actively challenge the notion that there is something called colorblindness. At present, most visible symbols and most the language describing success or power relates to white people. Such descriptions must be changed as Black people define themselves and their successes beyond a comparison with whites.

The Black experience in this country has been a complex one. While it has involved the differences of race and skin color, it has also involved cultural differences. Honoring and valuing these differences remains an unfinished task for leaders in government, industry, academia and all other walks of life. How they champion the ideas of workforce diversity and cultural pluralism will define the society of the next century.

**TO MAKE WRONG RIGHT:
THE NECESSARY AND PROPER
ASPIRATIONS OF
FAIR HOUSING**
DR. JOHN O. CALMORE
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
LOYOLA LAW SCHOOL

Becoming law one week after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 declared that it was national policy "... to provide, within constitutional limits, for fair housing throughout the United States." The fair housing commitment of antidiscrimination and desegregation complemented the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which provides that Blacks, as citizens of the United States, possess the same right "as is enjoyed by white citizens ... to inherit, purchase, lease, sell hold and convey real and personal property." Additionally, Title VIII refined the commitment Congress made in the Housing Act of 1949, that "every American family" be provided "a decent home and a suitable living environment ... as soon as feasible." These three fair housing "commitments," singularly and combined, however, have come to represent more hope than help as Black America's cumulative, circular, and synergistic harms associated with housing deprivation, racial discrimination, and segregative disadvantage persist in placing us uniquely outside the American Dream.

Housing has been described as "the last major frontier in civil rights." Housing is "the area in which progress is slowest and the possibility of genuine change is most remote." The 1980s will be recorded as the decade of radical fair housing retreat. The 1990s will likely present the last chance for making "fair housing."

In 1982, President Reagan's Commission on Housing assured the nation that "Americans today are the best housed people in history." Presidential commissions notwithstanding, the United States approaches the 1990s mired in a deep, long-term crisis that will likely cause a qualitatively different housing future for Americans, Black and white. The crisis is reflected in terms of unaffordability, unavailability, overcrowding, poor quality, forced displacement, and inequality.

Since 1981, the federal administration has virtually declared war not on poverty, but on poor people, and federal housing programs have been the principal target. On February 5, 1988, the President signed the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987. This represents the first free-standing federal housing bill in seven years. While it is a welcome end to the drought, it is too little, too late for many.

There are three separate and independent means of enforcing title VIII: (1) a private civil action brought

directly without a prior administrative complaint or resolution; (2) a civil action brought by the Justice Department in "pattern or practice" and "general public importance" cases; and (3) an administrative complaint filed with HUD.

On September 13, 1988, President Reagan signed new legislation, the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, effective 180 days from that date (i.e. March 12, 1989). These statutory changes substantially strengthen HUD's enforcement powers and extend the Act's coverage to prohibit discrimination on the basis of handicap and on the basis of familial status. Moreover, HUD is required to report on the progress made nationally in eliminating, discriminatory housing practices, including recommendations for further legislative or executive action.

Efforts to improve life for poor Blacks must now be redirected to create spatial equality in the sense that, even under conditions of segregation, the setting where Blacks live should be improved so that Blacks are not unjustly disadvantaged because of where they live.

The conditions of segregation were projected in 1968 in the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The report recognized that the national was rapidly moving toward two separate Americas and that within two decades, "this division could be so deep that it would be almost impossible to unite." The societies described were Blacks concentrated within large central cities and whites located in the suburbs, smaller cities, and on the periphery of large central cities. While today's division seems to be that of three separate societies, as some suburban middle-class, Black entry has occurred, but still within segregation, we nonetheless have had two decades pass and we really have moved very near to a point of division that is beyond uniting. White America will not make wrong right until it provides for spatial equality. Black America has a right to receive it. White America has a duty to provide it.

It is virtually impossible in today's environment to "prove" that race is the motivating factor in one's vote, but survey data are useful (if limited) sources to consult. In a real sense we cannot expect significant political empowerment of Blacks if the attitudes of whites and Blacks on a range of important issues are not shared. Black-Americans are a distinct minority, thus, what white Americans believe—and how they proceed to behave based on those beliefs—is very important.

**SUMMARY
BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION:
CRISIS AND PROMISE**
DR. REGINALD WILSON
SENIOR SCHOLAR
AMERICAN COUNCIL
ON EDUCATION

The circumstance of Blacks in higher education in America represents both crisis and promise. The crisis is detailed in statistics in this report. The base outline of the crisis can be succinctly summarized: high dropout rates from high school; declining college enrollments; low participation in science and mathematics; low participation in teacher education; overrepresentation in the armed forces; overrepresentation in proprietary schools; and high unemployment for under educated teenagers. In short, the circumstance of Blacks reveals a national crisis that affects the social and economic viability of the Black community; the economic viability of the nation, and diminishes the national competitiveness of America in world society.

Between 1976 and 1986 "the percentage of young people completing high school in the 18-to-24-year-old age cohort has improved more for Blacks than for any other racial or ethnic group. The high school completion rate increased from 67.5 percent in 1976 to 76.4 percent in 1986. Black females completed high school at a higher rate than Black males throughout this period. However, Black males experienced a larger gain. The gap between Black completion rates and those of whites narrowed during this decade (whites remained relatively stable at 82.4 percent in 1976 and 83.1 percent in 1986). Nevertheless, nearly one-fourth of all Blacks continue to leave school without a diploma, and the dropout rate in inner-city schools is even higher.

The number of Blacks enrolled increased slightly from 1984 to 1986 by about 5000 students. However, this increase did not make up for the loss of over 30,000 Black students from the peak of 1980. Moreover, this increase was almost entirely at graduate level. Blacks in undergraduate school showed no appreciable increase between 1984 and 1986. The Black enrollment decline is compounded by the particular loss of Blacks

in four-year colleges, while every other minority group showed increases in these key institutions to baccalaureate degree attainment and the pathway to graduate and professional school. Between 1984 and 1986, Black four-year enrollment declined by 2000 students.

Black graduate enrollment increased by 5000 students in 1986, which brought those enrollments back up to the 1976 peak of 72,000 students. Despite this improvement, and including the 1976 peak, Blacks have always been underrepresented in graduate schools, and they constitute only 5 percent of the total students. Creating the faculty of the future will require substantial increases in Black enrollment, particularly in Ph.D. programs.

This crisis is related to the decline in leadership by the Executive branch of the Federal government in matters

affecting civil rights and equal opportunity programs to overcome past discrimination. Indeed, the decline in leadership has not been a passive phenomenon, but has been characterized by an active assault on education funding, affirmative action, and social welfare programs. The clarity of this negative leadership has not been lost on the general populace which has responded with overt acts of bigotry and a retreat from a commitment to social justice that had not been experienced in this country for over fifteen years.

We now need a Marshall Plan for America to save itself or one-third of our nation, trapped at the bottom will drain all of our ability to prosper. It is in the self-interest of all Americans to see that does not occur. The question is do we have the will as a society to regain the sense of commitment to social justice and equal opportunity that sparked our national momentum in the 1960s and, through our higher education institutions, develop the Black leadership and professionals that will truly make us the egalitarian society our Constitution promised.

Increasing Racism And a Widening Gap Between Economic Classes

America is headed for serious problems if current trends of increasing racism and a widening gap between economic classes continue. Our economic success in the future depends on our ability to halt and reverse the growing percentage of minorities slipping into poverty, drugs and crime. Since many of these problems have their roots in the soil of racism, we must focus our energies on training a new generation to rejoice in racial and ethnic differences rather than fearing them. People who know and appreciate their own heritage and the heritage of the diverse population in America will be empowered to make the best of their own lives and to work harmoniously with others in tackling the issues facing America.

"Empowering Ourselves: Multicultural Education for All." This is the theme of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Oregon Multicultural Education Association. The conference is open to the public and will be held at the Chumaree Hotel in Salem on Thursday and Friday, February 16 and 17, 1989.

Conference registration begins at noon on Thursday. The conference itself begins at 1:00 p.m. with Dr. John Erickson, Superintendent of Lincoln County (Oregon) Schools, speaking on "Changing Schools in Changing Times." Thursday's Banquet begins at 7:00 p.m. Kathleen D. Saadat, Oregon Affirmative Action

Officer, will speak on "Looking to the Future: Multiculturalism for Oregon."

On Friday morning, February 17, Dr. Homer Kearns, Superintendent of Salem Schools, will present the welcome address. Keynote speaker Byron Kunisawa, Director of Operations, San Francisco Multicultural Training Resource Center, will speak on "Multiculturalism for Oregon."

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The luncheon address on Friday will be made by Dr. Jake Nice, Science Education Professor at Oregon State University. Dr. Nice will talk on "Whole Brain Children in a Half Brain World." Twenty workshops on the theory and practice of multicultural education will be offered beginning Thursday afternoon through Friday afternoon.

For further information about the conference or to obtain registration materials, call Dapo Sobomehin, 230-2378.

Contact: Dapo Sobomehin, President, Oregon Multicultural Education Association, P.O. Box 40749, Portland, Oregon 97240.



**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF NEGRO WOMEN, INC.**

Tri-County Section
P.O. Box 12130, Portland, Oregon 97212

PRESENTS...

A Walk for Peace

DATE: Saturday, February 25, 1989
TIME: 8:00 AM
PLACE: Starting from Harriet B. Tubman Middle School and ending at Martin Luther King Grade School.

A CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
WILL BE SERVED

Come Walk With Us!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
ERMINE GATES — 253-9577
OR
DEBRA ROACHE — 286-0874

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