

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Racism In U.S. Health Care

We have in the past applauded Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, for his courage and forthrightness in speaking the truth about the state of health in the United States. At a recent meeting in Minneapolis of health care professionals, ethicists and physicians, a review of the tragic Tuskegee Project was undertaken to ascertain whether or not the health care system in America is a racially just system.

To the chagrin of some and the support of others, Dr. Sullivan confirmed, "There is clear, demonstrable, undeniable evidence of discrimination and racism in our health care system. Each year since 1984, while the health status to the general population has increased, black health status has actually declined. The decline is not in one or two health categories; it is across the board."

Over fifty years ago, hundreds of African American men were deliberately subjected to a federal study on the long term effects of untreated syphilis in Alabama which was called the Tuskegee Project. The subjects of the study were not told that they had syphilis by

the medical researchers. In other words, the federal government sponsored experimentation on human beings which ultimately caused death and great suffering.

One would think that this type of travesty in racial justice and human dignity would not be possible today in the 1990's in the United States. Yet, given the current trend of increased institutionalized racism in the social fabric of the nation, some medical authorities warn that, possibly, projects like the Tuskegee Project could be repeated and justified in an effort to secure needed medical research.

According to Isabel Wilkerson of the NEW YORK TIMES, "Now, as AIDS looms as a far deadlier threat than syphilis to impoverished minority groups, and with no cure in sight, scientists are struggling with the ethical questions raised by the Tuskegee experiment and the weaknesses of current efforts, like informed consent and peer review, to protect patients from exploitation." Wilkerson also stressed that the medical establishment in some quarters view this matter with urgency. Some doctors are now advocating segregating by race organ transplants

and blood transfusions. In other words, race is emerging once again as a major factor in ethical as well as medical decision-making.

Given the fact of the high infant mortality rate, low birth weight, lack of prenatal care, and decreasing life expectancy of African Americans, in addition to the current cutting of medical and health care outreach programs to the African American community, the situation is indeed critical. Fortunately, Dr. Sullivan and others who are committed to addressing these problems are not remaining silent.

The delivery of health care in this nation should not be determined by race or socio-economic factors. We must say no to all researchers who would try to justify the immorality of racist human experimentation. The health care system must be made more inclusive and more just in the provision of medical treatment as well as preventive medical programs. A nation that discriminates and limits the standard of health of its own citizens because of race or any other factor is a nation whose national life is doomed.

The Sad Ironies At a Summer's Beginning

One of the things that one learns from years of activism is that history has a way of using current affairs to validate and guide the conduct of those of us in the human race. Therefore, despite the irony of the matter, it was those guideposts of history that I recognized immediately as I headed to the premiere of *Jungle Fever*, just hours after being called by the Reverend William Cooper and Mrs. Ernestine Ewell, who informed me that a 17-year-old young man named Alfred Ewell, a high school football player and honor student, had attended a party on the first Saturday in June in the Atlantic Beach section of Queens, New York. While there, he began socializing with a young white female.

Mr. Ewell, who is Black, was immediately confronted by a young white male who loudly protested the fact that he was socializing outside of his race. They argued for a while, and the matter was reportedly resolved. Hours later Ewell left the party, and was sitting on the board walk on Atlantic beach when he was attacked by a white mob with bats, who beat him into a coma. He lies now at the point of death, even after receiving extensive brain surgery.

It seemed ironic as I sat and watched Spike Lee's film--which also centered around an interracial affair that isolated a Black man and a white woman from their families and community--that what is being dealt with cinematically by Lee is realistically being paid for by Ewell. The matter of interracial relations or marriage is not the debate that I want to enter at this point. The

matter of justice is still unanswered, and until one can deal with the basic premise of equal protection under the law and justice for all, any academic debate on interracial relations is fruitless and really leads to nowhere.

Whether one agrees with Ewell socializing outside of his race or not, no one has the right, based on skin color, to pulverize and brutally beat this young man to the point of death.

And it doesn't explain why the police department would wait two days before they told the family that the word "nigger" was used at the party during the initial argument and at the subsequent beating, and that they knew all along who the main assailant was, which gave him several days to get a lawyer before he on his own surrendered. Why didn't the police do what they do in our communities--go in and kick the doors down and arrest him?

This blatant double standard took place in the contest of another strange irony--after agreeing to work with Reverend Cooper and others towards justice for the Ewells, I sat in the studios of CNN, debating the Civil Rights Bill with two people from different parts of the country as I waited to leave to go visit young Ewell in the hospital.

They are debating civil rights by claiming the issue is no longer racism but quotas, while yet another young man lies in yet another hospital bed in yet another pool of blood from yet another racial whipping with yet another police precinct acting like they are paralyzed in trying to seek his assailants. It seems that history has a way of using our children to nudge us to-

ward reality, because if we needed any validation that there is some *Jungle Fever* out here, or any reminder that there is an absence of civil rights for some, then nature has used Alfred Ewell to bring that point home loud and clear.

I stood over his bed with his weeping mother, looking at pictures of him when he was healthy on his hospital bed wall, as he lay there with tubes plunged in all parts of his body--coma-tose, unable to move, unable to open his eyes and look at the mother who brought him into this world. I had not been in a hospital since my own hospitalization from a stabbing from another racist, and it was a strange mixture of rage and helplessness that encompassed my own spirit as I looked down on Alfred Ewell.

And the questions repeatedly came to mind: How long? How many more hospitals must I visit? How many more mothers must I comfort? To how many more children must I try and explain why they are the victims of our lack of guts in forcing the nation to deal with the issue that DuBois raised at the beginning of this century, and that is the issue of race, the subject of color.

We cannot go into the 21st century without it being resolved once and for all. Either white Europeans and Americans must be civilized on the race question, or we must make those alterations necessary within the global village to isolate people of color from people of barbaric natures and have nations unto ourselves. But it can no longer continue on this collision course, where our children become the casualties of a misfit society, an unjust judicial process and a failing societal arrangement.

Alfred Ewell is yet another chapter in a sick book. Enough is enough. Too often we have said "this is it." But we really don't mean that, because if we did, we would have stopped it a long time ago. There are those who operate only out of 10-90-day anger. There are others that lock themselves into academic and philosophical cop-outs. And there are others who stay on the battlefield trying to fight the good fight, until racism dies an ugly death.

As for me, despite the controversy, despite the editorials and TV commentaries, despite being threatened and abused and misused, even by a judicial system which now even its own judicial panel has admitted is racist, I've decided to stay on the battlefield because the Alfred Ewell's are real to me, so real that I look at a six-inch scar every morning when I brush my teeth to remind me that we still have not solved the problem and history still has no conclusion to the question of race.

Omission

We deeply regret the omission of credit for the article responding to Canadian Health Care System in our last issue. That credit goes to Sharon Gary-Smith.

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Perspectives

By Professor McKinley Burt

Parents Have To Think (And Act) Positive

Well, we got past that little introspective excursion of mine, so let's get back to the ranch this week. We can still head them off at the pass. When I was listing those many support mechanisms that parents could use in developing interest in science, I omitted an important source. "Edmund Scientific Co., 1991 Annual Reference Catalog for Optics, Science and Education," 101 E. Gloucester Pike, Barrington, NJ 08007-1380.

This FREE, 188-page publication lists hundreds of science instruments and supplies for experiments and learning by the older student (High School), or any who have demonstrated a definite motivation and aptitude. Now, these instruments or kits are more expensive than the starter or introductory materials you would obtain at OMSI, but this is the next best step for the committed student (and parent). We are talking about a lot of OPTICS: microscopes, lenses, prisms, collimators, mirrors, cameras, telescopes and supporting components, as well as bio-medical equipment, chemical kits, scales, magnets, and weather and solar monitors.

Right in line with this escalation of the game should be a request for FREE catalog NO. 59047-X from "Dover Publications Inc.," 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, NY 11501. This smaller, general publication lists quality paperbacks from \$1.00 to \$9.95. While there is only a small SCIENCE SECTION, there is a provision for obtaining FREE with your first order, the giant "Complete Dover Catalog of Books in ALL FIELDS" (You must list your requests

for this time, 'No. 59069-0' on your order form). I've been ordering from this firm for thirty years, and find them the cheapest source of good books in the country--science, technology, language, novels, music, mystery, ethnic history, travel, etc.

While these two sources are definitely 'class acts', please don't neglect your public library (I'm talking about 'you' as well as the child). I and a lot of my peer group practically 'lived there' when we were kids--and we were the ones who organized the neighborhood science clubs and 'garage laboratories'--who made soap, perfumes, radios, soap-box derby carts, chemical gardens, telescopes (and stink bombs). And even with the terrible discrimination and racism, when you checked out the same peer group at the class reunions years later, you found the chemists, doctors, biologists, engineers and technicians (the humanities as well).

I know that it's tough out there, but are you ready for this? "It's been tougher!" It is just that now our expectations are higher as well they should be. However, our 'stage designer' has become the all powerful, all knowing MEDIA, and 24 hours a day we are saturated with a defeatist litany from the prophets of ethnic gloom and doom. The successful African American parents and their high-achieving children are usually ignored as yet a new 'sociology-of-the-disadvantaged' is developed to support the financial aspirations of

hungry grantsmen and previously-failed educators. The many notable achievements and methodologies of successful black and white educators and "Schools of Excellence" in the innercities get little play amid the 'shock' headlines and gory scenes of ghetto trauma.

This means, of course, that the sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and other behavioral scientists are determined to get their share of the financial pie when the federal government - as surely as it must - finally addresses the problem. Just last month one group announced that it was "developing structured paradigms" around their pet euphemism or catch phrase, "BEHAVIORAL POVERTY."

This ploy, of course, ensures that those blacks beyond the perimeter of dollar-defined poverty, may, nevertheless, be psychologically defined as probably morally deficient and, therefore, just as dysfunctional. We see that there will remain only a small sector of the pie for effective education.

I say all of that to say this. It is going to take all of the energy, commitment and tutoring that parents and our community organizations can muster if our children are to make it in this technological (and treacherous) world. This is why so many of my articles this year have been about 'supplemental' activities and resources the parent (or surrogate) can bring to bear on the educational process. And in the schools themselves, the children should be directed and motivated to those special programs that have been proven to enhance their academic achievement: "MESA, TAG" and the like. Don't flag in your efforts.

News From Bob Packwood

Republican Senator Bob Packwood received notification from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that two species of salmon would be proposed to be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The fall chinook salmon and the spring and summer chinook salmon of the Snake River are those being listed. The spring and summer chinook are being considered as one unit, rather than two separate species.

These species of salmon exist in the Columbia River drainage. The coho salmon which lives in the lower Columbia River was not proposed to be listed.

Public hearings on the listing proposals have been scheduled in order to NMFS to receive broad public input to ensure that the administrative and scientific record is accurate. The final decision on whether or not to propose a list under the endangered Species Act must be made within 12 months.

In light of this, Senator Packwood stressed, "It is vital that the different users--the aluminum workers, farmers, sport fishermen, barge operators, dam operators--of the Columbia River keep working on a consensus for multiple uses of the river while striving for a long range plan to restore the salmon runs."

Senator Packwood is a member of the Commerce Committee which has jurisdiction over fisheries issues.

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Reinvestments in the Community

Its' Time To "Heal Our Land:" African Americans Must Build for a New Tomorrow

Jonathan Bulter, the popular South African guitarist and vocalist, in prescribing a cure for the pain and agony of the apartheid system, sings the compelling lines, "we must heal our land." Since Africans arrived in America we have faced the challenge of building community out of diverse peoples uprooted from our original cultures by slavery. The ever present reality of racism and brutal economic exploitation has always complicated the vital task of forging a common peopleness and community as Africans in America. We have never quite been welcome here, but somehow, Africans in America have taken the basic strengths that we brought with us from our ancestral homeland and struggled to survive and sustain ourselves as a people.

Whether it was the Black church and the mutual aid and benevolent societies which grew out of the black church; the "African Free Schools" which we evolved to educate our own children when white society refused to do so; the organizations of resistance which we created to fight against slavery, segregation and discrimination; or the Black press as an independent voice to articulate our own interest and needs; the magic of our music; or their enormous strength of the African family, African Americans have engaged in a perpetual

struggle to survive and build/sustain community. Obviously the struggle to build community has been ongoing given the nature of the United States as a racist and exploitive society.

The horrendous depth and magnitude of the crisis we now face makes it imperative that African Americans consciously focus on the need to continue the vital process of community building. African Americans are still largely unwanted, unwelcome and increasingly not needed in this country. Witness the recent increase in immigration quotas which will allow 400,000 skilled (mostly white) and wealthy people to come into the United States.

The U.S. still prefers to bring in people from foreign lands instead of investing the resources required to upgrade the "skills" and "wealth" of Africans in America. With the exception of a small number of acceptable or symbolic Blacks who are included so that the masses can be excluded (inclusion for exclusion), this is still inconceivable to be tolerated. Only our exercise of POWER prevents our total obliteration in this country. We are still or own best hope for the survival and development of African Americans.

So we too must heal our land, our people, our community. African Americans must counter the abuse and neglect

of the racist exploitive state in the U.S. with a passionate commitment to have concern, compassion and tender, love and care for our people. We cannot leave the children unattended, uneducated and detached from family. We must overcome the recklessness and callousness of a wilding generation of young people by demonstrating with deeds of care and kindness that we are absolutely wild about them. They are our future.

We cannot leave the flower of our manhood and womanhood to waste away in American's prison warehouses. They are the victims of the violence that begets violence, the crimes that beget crime. They are our brothers and sisters, our family and we must fight for their release and prepare a HOME for them when they return.

Finally, we must heal our land, our community because we must prepare to fight. America must be put on notice that we will not fall prey to her schemes of neglect and genocide. We will not die or go away. It is a decadent America which must die and out of its demise must rise a new nation. And it is we, who have suffered most, who must lead the resurrection of a new and humane society. Africans in America must heal our land, our community so that we might live to build a new tomorrow.

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