

DIVERSITY

Affirmative Action: Good For America

FROM THE RAINBOW COALITION

In an impassioned speech reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson's famous 1965 affirmative action address at Howard University, President Clinton sought to link us with history, take us forward by hope, and disconnect us from the hysteria aimed at taking us backwards through fear.

Following a prolonged, if not profound study, the President issued a strong moral, legal and practical case for racial and gender equality which culminated in the unapologetic statement, "Let me be clear, affirmative action has been good for America."

Affirmative action, as permitted by the courts, will continue under a Bill Clinton administration.

In his review, President Clinton chose renewal and enforcement over moral abandonment and retreat. He concluded that affirmative action is working and is in our national interest. While the speech moved in the right direction, the real test of this administration's commitment to affirmative action lies in the future.

If the test of affirmative action programs, guided by the judicial branch of government, is "strict scrutiny," then "strict enforcement" is the test we must apply to the executive branch. "Strict enforcement" will necessitate more money and more personnel. In a debate over 1996 budget priorities, the President will have to propose and fight for this, and Congress must grant approval.

Furthermore, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance at Labor

(OFCC) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) must be more visible and active in the future. The government must take the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission more seriously. Only time will tell if this will happen. In the meantime, we will watch and pray!

Continued action and prayer are especially needed in light of the hard facts which reveal persistent race and sex discrimination: the unemployment rate for blacks remains about twice that of whites; women still make only 72 percent as much as men; and the average income for a Latina woman with a college degree is less than that of a White male with only a high school diploma. The Glass Ceiling Report found that women in the nation's largest companies hold less than 5 percent of senior management posts, and the number is even lower for blacks, Latinos and Asians, who hold less than 1 percent of these positions. Hate crimes and violence are still ugly realities in many American lives, and in 1994 the federal government received more than 90,000 complaints of employment discrimination based on race, ethnicity and gender.

When Newt Gingrich, Bob Dole, Phil Gramm, Pete Wilson and others try to eliminate affirmative action as a remedy for such discrimination, they often take Dr. King's quote about "judging people by the content of their character, not the color of their skin" out of context. Dr. King actually said that, "He looked forward to the day" when that would be the case.

The President's review, and the conclusions he reached, indicate that such a day has not yet arrived. Therefore, the President must continue

beyond his speech and educate Americans on the issue. A step in that direction would be to call a "White House Conference on an Even Playing Field" this fall which would focus on racial justice and gender equality, and ways to implement and enforce the law. Such a conference would include corporate America, university presidents, military leaders, publishers, bankers, labor leaders, government contractors and judges.

The President's immediate responsibility will be to continue to provide strong, unapologetic leadership for affirmative action in the face of such opponents as presidential wannabe, Sen. Bob Dole and black conservative, Rep. Gary Franks.

In the Senate, Dole is planning to introduce legislation which would virtually eliminate all affirmative action programs; and, in the House, Franks is threatening to add amendments to appropriations bills which would make set-aside programs illegal. The President must firmly commit to use his veto power against such measures.

With his speech on affirmative action, President Clinton stuck his finger in the dike, but the floodwaters are rising.

From California to Illinois, from coast to coast, efforts to eliminate or weaken affirmative action (i.e., raise the walls at predominately white schools) and cut funds to historically black schools, while building more jails for a system that now houses over 600,000 African Americans, is the trend.

Some politicians are cynically choosing to exploit insecure voters instead of educating them with the truth and giving them hope for the future. President Clinton did not go along with this trend, and for that all Americans should be grateful.

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The Encore, Part II:

There Are Ways To Deal With Things Before Its Too Late

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

That was a rather mild response to that "y'all come" appendage to last week's article of this series, but a number of us are betting that this will change as the community seeks to assess or even comprehend that volatile article in last week's "Oregonian Newspaper" (See my Perspectives" column, page 2A).

Several of us who consider ourselves to have a better than average understanding of how the Portland infrastructure works (and "has" worked over several generations) see a pressing need to build and launch new, innovative systems that are based on such reality and experience. The imitation and replication of economic programs designed decades ago in the hey day of President Johnson's "Great Society" leave you "behind the curve".

Above all, "there is an additional need," I tell in my peer group and many others with whom we come in contact at initial information meetings: Share the knowledge! Lets get away from the cliques and blocking, the envies and jealousies that have so crippled the minority community for so long. Early this century, blacks had a saying, "Slaves don't have secrets."

When we inspect and analyze the paperwork and processes subtending many current social and "economic" programs, I am taken back to my early 1970s experience as administrator/accountant for a large U.S. Department of Labor training program designed by Washington, D.C. planners to "escalate the quality of life for the inner-city disadvantaged." The "maze" is still "amazing."

Some of my industry acquaintances on the far west side, accustomed for the most part to the smooth-working systems and forms for production, processing and quality control, shake their heads in disbelief. They have already learned in their plants, for instance, that no computer in the world can do a decent job of accounting if the system designer wasn't an experienced accountant.

And, of course, industry still has the complaint that I articulated here several years ago: If,

in an alleged effort to save money, an economic program is heavily loaded with recent graduates armed only with the jargon, idioms, vernacular and slang of the game (and good intentions), then the game may be lost quite early on. The economic successes will be the office supply houses, van-leasing companies and the coin machine operators. The targeted clientele will be just beginning a long-term merry-go-round ride, as happened during "Model City" days: from program to program.

It is important, we feel, that a community should learn from its experiences and should develop its own systems and paradigms for dealing with an exploitive world. Just as it was with "Urban Renewal/Model Cities," the "planners" know exactly what they are doing, and as much of the process is designed to fail, as to succeed. They have always worked hand-in-hand with the commercial interests. If not, they would never have had their programs funded. That is the "American Way."

Of course my personal forte has been in the science/math mode and I have had time to update those early designs that won the National Science Award. There seems to be a good start on evading the past roadblock of a less-than-innovate Portland School System (despite protestations to the contrary). Several education publishers and game manufacturers have been out to monitor some demonstrations in outlying districts - with industry backing. You can do it too!

Especially liked is the innovative "Science Club" mode I started in The Dalles, Oregon several years ago, but had been brushed off by two former Portland school superintendents. Others in the community have started doing their thing, moving around the "blockers" with our encouragement. More and more minorities with inventions are calling me for directions (mostly female). Two of the west side plants with guest facilities are putting up out of town visitors for us this summer and providing a shuttle bus (educators, publishers and a major foundation.)

Next week, "Real Estate."

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