

EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily Reflect Or Represent The Views Of The Portland Observer

Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., spoke recently before the Communications Workers of America about the rising inequality in our country.

In his presentation, former JaxFax editor Jackson quoted from two excellent sources, Holly Sklar's recent book, *Chaos or Community?*, and a remarkable speech given by Congressman David Obey of Wisconsin, to the Center for National Policy. We found the comments of Jackson, Obey, and Sklar very enlightening, and worth reproducing here. Emphasis added.

Cong. Jackson: The American Dream--always an impossible dream for many--is both dying a slow death and, after [the] vote on the assault weapons, is being shot to death in cold blood by a reactionary Republican-controlled Congress...Our nation is growing increasingly divided along lines of race, class, and gender. The ruinous social and economic trends that we have been warned about in the past--by Dr. King, the Kerner Commission, and others--have intensified.

As Holly Sklar points out in her outstanding book, *Chaos or Community?*: "Wealth is not trickling down. It is flooding up. Real wages for workers have plummeted--despite rising productivity. Many corporate executives make more in a week than their workers make in a year. Unemployment is high whether the economy is in recession or 'recovery.' The 'War on Poverty' has given way to the escalating war on the poor. Our urban areas are in decline.

"Economic inequality is now so extreme that the richest 1% of American families have nearly as much wealth as the entire bottom 95%. More than a fifth of all children--[and half of all African American children]--are living in poverty, in this, the world's richest nation. That's according to the government, which

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Economic Inequality: The Greedy, Not The Needy

undercounts both poverty and unemployment.

"The angry, shrinking middle class is misled into thinking that those lower on the economic ladder are pulling them down, when in reality those on top are rising at the expense of those below. People who should be working together to transform the economic policies that are hurting everyone are, instead, turning hatefully on each other....

"Instead of full employment, the United States has full prisons. It imprisons Black men at a much higher rate than South Africa did under apartheid. The military budget continues consuming resources at Cold War levels, while programs to prevent violence and invest in people, infrastructure, and the environment are sacrificed on the altar of deficit reduction.

"To realize community over chaos we must revitalize democracy with plain talk about who really benefits and who loses from government policy. We need vigorous debate over how to reshape policy in the public interest--not the pseudo debate of false campaign promises, negative political ads, and talk radio hate-mongering...."

Cong. Jackson then referred to the speech that Rep. David Obey gave before the Center for National Policy recently. In that speech, Obey points out that "increased profits result in

even greater increases in stock prices. In the last 10 years, the Dow Industrial Average has jumped 200%. The total value of U.S. stocks has jumped by \$4.2 trillion during that period--\$2 trillion in just the last 3 years.

"To give you some perspective on how much \$4.2 trillion is, if you distributed that amount on a per capita basis, it would amount to about \$65,000 for each family of four in the U.S. That would more than triple the financial assets now held by a typical middle-class American family....

"Federal Reserve data shows that in 1983, two-thirds of all the individual wealth in this country was held by the richest 10%. If you exclude non-financial assets, such as housing and cars, the richest 10% held four-fifths of the financial assets of the country, leaving 20% to be shared with the bottom 90% of the population.

"And the wealth of that top 10% was incredibly concentrated in the hands of the richest 1%. Over half of the financial assets of the richest 10% are owned by the richest 1%. And nearly 80% of the assets of the top 1% are owned by the richest one-half of 1%, about 500,000 families.

"By 1989, the richest one-half of 1% increased their share of the nation's wealth from 24% in 1983 to 29% in 1989. And that is before the doubling of stock market values since 1989, which would take it to a con-

siderably higher percentage today.

"The holdings of those 500,000 families was worth \$2.5 trillion in 1983. By 1989, it had risen to \$5 trillion. To put that into perspective, the holdings of these families grew by almost three times as much as the national debt grew during that same period. You want to talk about reducing the deficits and debt, those 500,000 families could have paid off the entire national debt, not just its growth, and still have owned 10% more wealth than they did in 1983. And remember, that does not include the increase in their wealth due to the doubling of the stock markets since then!

"During that period, 61% of the growth in financial assets, such as cash, stocks, bonds, and insurance policies, went to the wealthiest one-half of 1%. 28% went to the next richest 9.5%. The remaining 90% of the population got 11% of that increase--table scraps.

You do not find that pattern in other countries. Wages for workers in every other major industrial country have grown at the same time they have declined here....

The portion of wealth held by the top 1% in the U.S. has exploded from 22% in 1979 [right before the start of the Reagan/Bush Era] to about 42% today. We used to think of Great Britain, with its castles and peerages, as being the epitome of a class-based society. Today, we far surpass Britain in the disparity of income. That is economically disastrous and morally wrong."

Cong. Jackson then pointed out the resulting political trick: to divert attention away from this massive inequality--the greatest disparity in wealth of any industrialized nation in the world--they tell you that the problem is the poor, people of color, the immigrants, and affirmative action. [JaxFax note: this is also, of course, the economic context in which Dole & Gingrich continue to oppose a living minimum wage--to their shame.]

Civil Rights Journal

Educating Our Children: The Failure Of Integration

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

As I travel around the country people often ask how they can get involved and do something about racial and economic injustice. Often my response is to get involved with their public schools because public schools are often the intersection point between these interconnected and troubling issues which threaten to tear this nation apart.

For African Americans education has a historical importance. Slaves were forbidden to learn to read or write and even after slavery, education was denied to many African Americans. Some states, such as Missouri, denied African Americans the right to public education long after slavery ended; others chose to provide only inferior education, spending much less per pupil, paying black teachers much lower wages and providing only used textbooks and dilapidated buildings.

In spite of this (or because of this), my African American ancestors cherished education. Indeed, education

and entertainment and sports were the only way out of the ghetto for most African Americans.

Thus, it is not surprising that for black Americans in the 1950's integrating education was a top priority. It was not that the lawyers, educators and psychologists who led the battle in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision believed that sitting next to a white child would make a black child smarter as Clarence Thomas has been known to say. Rather, they believed that if black children had access to the same educational settings as whites and were able to attend integrated schools that they would develop relationships with white children which might open new doors for both sets of children.

But the hopes and dreams of those who fought for integrated schools have not really been realized for the vast majority of children of color in this country. Indeed, a recent article in Time magazine pointed out that after two decades of progress toward school integration, often by using bussing, the separation of black children is fast approaching the per-bus-

sing levels of the 1960's. According to that article, one-third of black public school students in this nation attend schools where the enrollment is 90-100% black, Hispanic, Native American or Asian American. In the nation's Northeast half of all black students attend such schools.

Clearly, just attending an all-black school is not all bad. Some cities have begun Afrocentric schools designed to instill pride and self-esteem for African American children and many of these schools are succeeding. But the question of how African American and other children of color learn to interact with European American children in our diverse nation cannot be easily addressed in an all-black school.

For many school systems there is another question as well. In many cities middle class white families have moved out of cities in order to avoid having their children attend school with children of color. Unfortunately, the same is true of black middle class families, some of which are moving to the suburbs. The families left behind in the cities are poor, most

often families of color many of whom face a dizzying array of social problems from unemployment to health problems, from lack of parenting skills to homelessness. With lower tax dollars available, city school systems suffer crumbling buildings, broken bathrooms, fewer books and materials and little assistance in dealing with the overwhelming problems their students bring to school every day.

There are no easy solutions to the problems of education. Perhaps bussing has not always worked. Perhaps court-ordered desegregation plans have been unworkable. Perhaps integration has led to lower expectations for students of color by insensitive or even hostile school systems.

But one thing is for sure. All children in this nation, including millions of children of color, have a right to a good education. They have a right to expect that when they graduate they will be prepared for higher education or for work. Until every child in American reaches his or her potential, we all suffer and our nation's future is jeopardized.

Playing Politics With The Death Penalty

In 1988, with an epidemic of crime and violence exploding across the nation, George Walker Bush used the case of a Black convict, Willie Horton, who committed a violent crime after having been released on parole, to evoke images of Black men in particular and people of color in general as a menace to society.

It has become commonplace in American politics for those seeking public office to use scapegoating and demagoguery as expedients to win and retain positions of power. In recent years, as the crime wave has persisted, the death penalty, long banned in the United States as cruel and unusual punishment has been resurrected in virtually every state in the union. It is now politically fashionable to play politics with the death penalty. One might recall that William Jefferson Clinton, during his

1992 run for the White House, made a point of returning to Arkansas to sign the death warrant of a mentally deficient African American prisoner to demonstrate that he was tough on crime and for the death penalty.

In the 1995 race for Governor of New York, George Pataki defeated Mario Cuomo in large measure because of his pledge to restore the death penalty in that state. Intimidated by the growing clamor to bring back the death penalty, Cuomo, who had consistently vetoed death penalty legislation during his tenure, attempted to modify his position to suggest that the will of the people should prevail. Apparently, the shift in Cuomo's position was not enough to salvage his sagging fortunes, as he went down to defeat. Once in the Executive Mansion, Pataki promptly kept his pledge by signing into law a Bill re-instituting the death pen-

alty.

With his popularity slipping due to the impact of some of the most draconian budget cuts in the history of the State of New York, Pataki recently engaged in one of the ugliest displays of demagoguery in memory by once again playing politics with the death penalty. On the heels of the killing of a police officer in the Bronx, Pataki demanded that the Bronx District Attorney, Robert Johnson, who happens to be African American, seek the death penalty against the man charged with the murder.

However, the New York State statute as drawn provides that a District Attorney has up to 120 days to decide whether or not to seek the death penalty. Therefore, the imposition of the death penalty is at the discretion of the District Attorney.

When the death penalty statute was passed, District Attorney Johnson expressed his philosophical opposition to the death penalty on the grounds that it is discriminatory;

that Black people of color are disproportionately on death row in American society because of racism in the criminal justice system. Under pressure from Pataki, however, Johnson indicated that his opposition to the death penalty was not absolute and that he would make a decision on this case within the time limits allowed by the statute.

Not satisfied with Johnson's answer, Pataki, playing to the public, arrogantly demanded that Johnson declare that he would seek the death penalty in this case by one o'clock on a given date or face removal from the case by Executive Order. When the deadline passed and Johnson refused to buckle, Pataki removed Robert Johnson, the democratically elected District Attorney from the Bronx, from the case.

No doubt Pataki was elated with the outcome of a drama that was played out across the State of New York and in the national news media for days.

perspectives

Just What Is History, Anyway?

Webster's Ninth New College Edition says that, among other things, "history is a chronological record of significant events (as affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes."

It is that last little phrase about "causes" that opens the door for so much mischief, and we are never so forcefully



By Professor Mackinley Burt

reminded of this as when we scan the media headlines for the month of April: "New National Standards For Teaching History Win Praise"; Educators Get One Right: Revisionist History Standards"; "Don't Know Much History? Then Drop It From Curriculum."

And those are just the reports and opinions of media pundits from the syndicated columns and editorial pages. The heated discourses and contentious disputes that have seared the pages of the education press and journals are something else again. Those brave and stalwart warriors who man the barricades guarding the citadels of western civilization (ostensibly white) have been enveloped in waves of joyous paroxysms--ever since getting the news that there now is a new and more 'acceptable' "National Standard For Teaching American And World History."

Now, wait a minute before you get on my case about using valuable space to note the most recent intellectual ferment engaging the erudite education clans: The Princeton-based National Association of Scholars, UCLA's National Center for History in the Schools and the Diane Ravitch-influenced education wing of New York University, etc.

I know very well that you thought the most compelling education issues around the nation had to do with school funding, teacher standards and a technological curriculum that anticipates the next century.

Well, that too. But what we urgently need to be aware of is that when certain people start to rub

their hands in glee, when they shout, "we won one", then that is the time for all your alarm bells to go off. Like in the old chant "the South shall rise again", the racists in education who so vehemently oppose "multiculturalism"--or any other approach which suggests that Africans and African Americans had an important role in world history--sense an opportunity to return the 'story of civilization' to its old

purely Anglo Saxon or Nordic format. The Nazis got off to a good start in that direction and, here in America, many of that ilk seek to "rise again", hiding behind a "standards" curtain. We are all too familiar with the flawed logic and manipulated statistics of "The Bell Curve" (Herrnstein & Murray) and that vicious text treasured by the sociobiologists and the extreme right wing, "Alien Nation". Waiting in the wings, we find all too many rabid racists eager to succeed messrs Jensen and Shockey on the "Low-Black-IQ" vaudeville circuit.

Never mind that famed biologist and anthropologist, Stephen Jay Gould, slew the 'Race-and-IQ' dragon with his important book, "The Mismeasure of Man"; never mind that honest historians like Martin Bernal (Black Athena) and Ali A. Mazrui (The Africans; Annenberg/CPB project) have thoroughly and competently proven the Greeks and later historians to have been quite right about the magnitude of the African contribution to would culture (later to be ignored).

It is tragic that many well-meaning educationists are allowing themselves to be led down a primrose path of racism by those who hide behind the "standards" curtain in an effort to black and obfuscate the true nature of multiculturalism--that reveals the true history of the darker races which was deliberately rewritten and distorted by the 'real revisionists' in the latter half of the 19th century to justify slavery and colonialism. History as a weapon!

Continued next week.

Letter To The Editor

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