

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

To Be Equal Who is An American?

By HUGH B. PRICE
NATION URBAN LEAGUE

A story in the December 14th New York Times declared that a joint Times/CBS news poll had found, as the headline put it, "Americans Reject Means But Not Ends of Racial Diversity."

The report, which included graphs and a discussion of the possible meaning of some of the statistics, said that "Americans today endorse the goal of racial diversity in schools and office, but reject some of the main methods used so far to achieve it."

Yet, in my view, this poll was not quite what it seemed--even to the Times/CBS News pollsters; and therefore its finding must be regarded in a different, more complex way.

For one thing, the headline is wrong. Americans do not "reject" the means to achieve diversity: White Americans oppose those means, generally speaking, by significant margins. Black Americans support them, generally speaking, by even more significant margins.

For example, 57 percent of whites said that affirmative action programs weren't needed to ensure that businesses have diverse work forces; 80 percent of blacks said they were. Only 35 percent of whites agreed that affirmative action programs should be continued "for the foreseeable future;" but 80 percent of blacks said they should.

Even when blacks and whites agreed on a survey question, the gaps were striking: 82 to 95 percent of blacks supported special educational and job-training programs for minorities, and laws to protect them against discrimination in hiring and promotion. The percentage of whites who agreed ranged from 59 to 65 percent.

But, despite those gaps, that agreement does exist suggests that Americans have a more complex view of the means to achieve diversity than

that headline acknowledges. That may be because the poll is skewed by a serious flaw: it focuses only on blacks and whites.

Yet the statistics of employment and college- and graduate school-admission show that white women, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans have also benefited significantly from affirmative action. The views of and about those groups--significant actors in our diverse society--are absent from this survey.

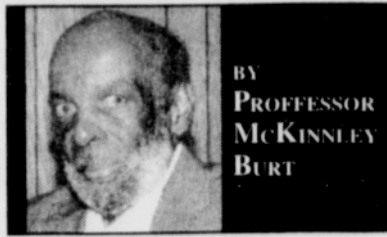
Nonetheless, the survey is valuable.

What can be said is that, on the one hand, 61 percent of whites feel affirmative action programs should be either ended now, or phased out in the next few years, while, on the other, nearly 66 percent agree that there should be special preparatory educational and job-programs (which many conservatives would likely classify as affirmative action) to help minorities.

This seeming contradiction does reflect what the two major referenda to this date on affirmative action--the California electorate's approval of a ban on affirmative action in 1996; the Houston electorate's choosing last month to continue that city's affirmative action program--have shown: How affirmative action programs are operated, and how affirmative action is explained is crucial to whether a majority of whites will support it.

The gap between white support for racial diversity and their objection to the means to achieve it has existed since the founding of the nation. Indeed, a Gallup poll, taken just before the 1963 march on Washington, found that 63 percent of those surveyed disapproved of it, and that 38 percent felt that the civil rights movement was being too assertive in pushing for bedrock civil rights for blacks in the South.

p e r s p e c t i v e s



BY PROFESSOR
McKINLEY
BURT

American Philosophy of Land And Space: Concluded

Over the years, I have heard many African Americans ask the fateful question; "Is life really a song, an inspiring refrain that, for some, can break" through the dissonant cacophonies of hard realities?

And they ask from that urban tableau - from that frequently traumatic stage we call the inner city - "can we really feel that bold musical declaration 'your land and my land'." Or as one reader queried of last week's quote from 'America, The Beautiful, "Purple mountain majesties, above the fruited plain."

"It sounds good McKinley - just as it did in my high school - years ago, but how do blacks get all that emotionally involved with the system's ideologies and philosophy, when they need all their wits about them, facing the new forms of gentrification, redlining and urban renewal/removal? With the Gorge, National Parks?"

Another reader said that I had chosen and excellent vehicle for pointing out a most aggravating element arising from America's much publicized clash of cultures. But he also made the case for "blacks preserving soul and sanity, balancing internal beauty against those 'slings-and-arrows of an 'outrageous fate'."

Say, I really liked this Georgia truck driver and asked him to stop by any other time he has a layover here. We both recalled the 1930's poem of Langston Hughes, "Lenox Avenue Mural"

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore
and then run?
...or does it explode?

Several black females engaged in either the theatre or graphic arts had some interesting, even noble, com-

mentary. One lady at the coffee shop spoke extensively on 'areal life "stage management" being absolutely necessary to "black survival." She quoted Henry Dumas, "One of the greatest roles ever created by Western man has been the role of 'Negro'."

Someone else said that the movie "Amistad" may arouse too great a hope that Hollywood or media in general is about to raise that 'cotton curtain'; the regressive veil that for so many citizens of ebony hue has obscured the view of and participation in that great "American Land and Space." "Gone with the Wind" lives on, this person added.

Others pointed to television as a force "gradually adjusting the viewpoints and attitudes of the majority to an extent that might permit a frictionless enjoyment of urban space." An expected reply was, "dream on kid, things don't change, they just go un-

derground." An actor insisted that the American scene is better understood from theatrical parameters than from all the ethnic, social and urban considerations applied. He quoted Katherine Dunham, famed black dancer and anthropologist. "In the book, 'The Negro Caravan', the influential playwright, Charles Frohman (1860-1915), said 'never give a nigger (sic) a line'."

Not a 'line' nor a meaningful 'role' in the scheme of things was the consensus, here. An artist pointed out that the scenes in Norman Rockwell's illustrations of "Americana" was "the reality of America - yet not quite real. Three black children out of a thousand pictures."

Our artist might have inquired was this that early "spiritual concept" of American land as "a paradise given - Eden?"

Breaking The Chains Of X-Mas

The rush of X-Mas is once again upon us. In the weeks from Thanksgiving to the New Year consumers crazed by capitalist induced consumerism will spend hundreds of billions of dollars thereby bolstering the bottom line of giant retail establishments. In large measure the real meaning of Christmas as the birthday of one who came to liberate humanity from suffering and bondage has been buried by an almost obsessive commercialism. Christmas has become a prisoner of X-Mas. Unfortunately, African Americans, an oppressed people still plagued by racism and economic exploitation, are also caught up in this counter productive charade.

An oppressed people must be de-

liberate and purposeful about plotting their liberation. It should be clear, therefore, that Africans in America cannot afford to participate in and support X-Mas. El Hajj Malik Shabazz, Malcolm X called upon Black people to achieve liberation by "any means necessary." One of the most important weapons at our disposal as an oppressed people in this capitalist, greed driven nation is our hard earned, precious dollars --- green power! By some estimates Black consumers now spend 400 billion dollars each year much of which goes to feed huge businesses/corporations which are the pillars of U.S. capitalism --- the backbone of this oppressive system.

Beyond a few jobs, these corporations contribute nothing to the social and economic uplift of Black communities. Indeed, it is in their best interest to keep us in chains, slaves to a mindless consumerism that drains desperately needed resources from our communities to fill their corporate coffers. X-Mas is an integral part of this scheme. I would venture to say that Black consumer dollars constitute the critical margin of profit for most retail establishments during the X-Mas season. In fact proportionately Black consumers spend more than any other group during X-Mas. And, since X-Mas is the make or break season for retail concerns,

the Black dollar in effect is the major factor ensuring the profitability of these giant companies on an annual basis.

We must break the chains of X-Mas if we are serious about our liberation. If the black Nation can mobilize millions of men and women for the Million Man March (MMM) and Million Woman March (MWM) then we should be able to educate, mobilize and organize millions of captives of X-Mas to escape the plantation of self-destructive consumerism striking telling blows with a awesome weapon which we have in our own hands --- Black dollars.

Bringing Democracy To The United States

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) "Handbook of Electoral System Design" teaches us that:

"Political institutions shape the rules of the game under which democracy is practiced, and it is often argued that the easiest political institution to be manipulated, for good or bad, is the electoral system, because in translating the votes cast in a general election into seats in the legislature, the choice of election into seats in the legislature, the choice of electoral system can effectively determine who is elected and which party gains power."

In an attempt to reshape the rules of the game, Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney of Georgia last month introduced House Bill 3068. A bill which would allow states to use proportional representation. The

bill is co-sponsored by Jesse Jackson (IL), Chaka Fattah (PA), Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX), James Clyburn (SC), and Eva Clayton (NC). All six sponsors are Democrats, and all are African Americans. Once again, the descendants of slaves are taking the lead in guiding America towards a real democracy, a true government of, by, and for the people.

H.B. 3068 is a response to recent Supreme Court decisions which have undermined the spirit of the voting Rights Act, by severely limiting majority-minority districts. Since the Reagan/Bush Court has decided that the Congresses of the 1990s--those diversified by the Voting Rights Act, the most representative Congresses in the history of this country--must be nullified, Rep. McKinney has been searching for another way to insure

fair and equal representation for women and minorities.

Her conclusion--change the way we vote, and the way we decide the winners of elections. The current big money, gerry-mandered, uncompetitive, winner-take-all election systems we have now are injuring our democracy, depressing voter turnout, and alienating the citizenry.

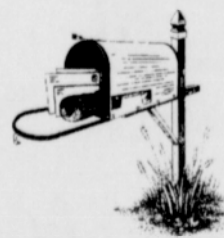
Her solution--give PR a chance. Let's experiment with alternative voting systems, which are more inclusive and would involve all Americans in our democracy. Let's join the rest of the world, by putting a proportional representation system in place to elect our political leaders.

Her bill does not force any state to change its voting system, but it does allow states the right to experiment. Right now, all states must use single-

member districts, not due to any Constitutional imperative, but because a law requiring single-member districting was passed in 1967 as a response to attempts to subvert "one person, one vote" and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Now that the Supreme Court is gutting the Voting Rights Act, however, it's time to move beyond single-member districts, and winner-take-all elections. It's time for the U.S. to develop election systems that limit the role of money, and maximize the inclusion of all points of view.

Winning reforms such as instant runoff, proportional representation, and cumulative voting will not be quick or easy. That's why we need to get started. We applaud Rep. McKinney and the Center for Voting & Democracy (CVD) for taking on this fight.



Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

To The Editor:

This year we're moving toward our goal of raising more than \$19.6 million. With the assistance of donors and volunteers, I believe we can reach this goal.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Portland Observer for all of your extra efforts in getting United Way's message out into the community. You've helped your readers make informed decisions on where and how they want to

To the Editor:

I know that I am a little late in writing this, but I would like to thank you sincerely for your editorial in the Nov. 19th issue of THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. It was well written and sounded better than the words that I wrote that you quoted from.

Sadly, my conciliatory praise evoked not only words of praise but also some hate mail. The "hate

mail" that I received revealed misplaced anger which I wish that I could deal with or respond to. Anyway, I am sure that you get your share of critical letters also and it just reminds us that there are many hurting people out there and we become the lightning rod for their feelings.

Ballot Measure 51 has caused me a lot of sadness, but also has impressed upon me the needs of many Oregonians that we need to address-

donate their money to improve their community. When everyone gives through United Way, more individuals and families can be helped. The dollars raised will support 160 programs, including those at the Albina Ministerial Alliance, which distributes United Way scholarship funds to help parents apply for child care in center-based or family day-care settings; Boy Scouts of America, Cascade Pacific Council, which supplies weekly In-School Scouting programs

for third-through fifth-graders, teaching communication skills, community awareness and first aid; Delaunay Family of Services, which seeks to alleviate emotional problems brought on by traumatic events, including family violence and the use of alcohol and drugs; and many, many more.

Thank you for your support and for all you have done and will do to help change people's lives. Also a big thanks goes to all of the donors who continue to make a difference in

health care in our dehumanized society, the loneliness of so many elderly and dying people, the unchurched nature of our state, etc. But rather than lament our "defeat", I feel that we must press forward with all we are doing to care for those in need, as I mentioned in the article, through our existing programs and organizations, but also by being creative and forming "parish-based hospice programs" and "care groups for the elderly", etc.

people's lives. One of United Way's commitments to the community is to do its very best to make sure every dollar goes where it's needed most. It's a promise United Way keeps every day because every dollar counts.

Sincerely,
Robert G. Miller
1997 United Way Campaign Chairman
CEO and President
Fred Meyer, Inc.

I do want to thank you for your beautiful editorial and for all you are doing through your newspaper to minister to the people of our area, especially the poor, the minorities, the victims of prejudice and hatred in our society.

Thanks again and may god bless your efforts.
Sincerely,
Bishop Kenneth Steiner
Administrator