

Portland
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Opinion

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Another look at juvenile (in) justice

BY STEPHANIE GOLDEN
NATIONAL SECRETARY TO REV. JESSE JACKSON

Forty-six years after desegregation of our nation's public schools, stating data shows that African American students have suffered disproportionately from suspension, expulsions and corral punishment in U.S. classrooms.

Writes Dr. Leroy Purnell, dean of law at Northern Illinois University: "While the disciplinary process in a public school is not a criminal trail, it is one in which the possible sanctions justifies a significant level of due process protection." In other words: Black kids are being introduced early to a criminal process as jail intervention, rather than education intervention, becomes the norm in American's school discipline process. It is no leap of imagination to surmise that students who are pushed out of schools without an education safety net are more likely to indulge in antisocial behavior, which can lead to arrests and more unwanted pregnancies which can lead to fewer life options.

Because of draconian drug sentencing laws and the nasty residue of the U.S. "war on drug users," 13

percent of black men, compared to just 2 percent of white men, are disenfranchised from the right to vote thanks to a tag of "convicted felon." Even more disturbing is that nearly one in three African American males in age group 20-29 is under criminal justice supervision on any given day, including being in prisoner jail, on probation or parole. The stats for female inmates, most of whom are also first time, non-violent offenders are equally disturbing.

Today, the 1965 Voting Rights Act cannot protect our youth from losing voting privileges because of felony convictions, not like skin color that disenfranchised their grandfathers two generations before them. Who needs a poll tax, when you've got rap sheets? A new Columbia University study, "The Color of justice," now reveals that African American youths are more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to be transferred out of a juvenile justice system and tried as adults. Said the co-author, "the imbalances this study reveals are stark, vast and deeply disturbing," commented Dan Macallair, the associate director of Columbia's Center for Violence Research and prevention."... There is a double

standard: throw kids of color behind bars, but rehabilitate white kids who commit comparable crimes."

It should be noted that in Downer's Grove, IL just last week, Caucasian students twice took a bomb to school and still avoided jail. The judge said he was "troubled... but posed no threat to other students." In Decatur, six boys were expelled for two years, without the option of alternative schooling, because of 16-second fist fight. They will be prosecuted this year for their alleged participation. Before of Rev. Jesse Jackson

intervened, these boys were kicked into the streets to sink or swim while they served their: sentence.

In California, Proposition 21 is another example of draconian juvenile policy attempting to become law. If approved by voters this March, the measure would allow prosecutors, instead of judges, to decide whether a juvenile be tried as an adult for a violent crime. Said Jackson, "It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the U.S. system of punishment isn't about crime or justice, but rather is about social control... The human costs are

incalculable. Young people arrested for drugs are brutalized once in jail. Prison becomes their university. Its lessons are not uplifting."

This nation touts itself as being leader among all industrialized counties. It will now lead the world in incarcerations when by Valentine's Day, an estimated two million American will be locked behind bars, 500,000 more than in China. This number of majority black and brown people, join an estimated five million other U.S. citizens who are now on probation.

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On the separation of Church and State

BY JOE KLOCK, SR.
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Supreme Court, seat of all American wisdom, recently knocked down a Texas law which had allowed public prayer, after an affirmative vote by the student body, at football games. They ruled that such a practice would promote the religious beliefs of some students over others.

The Supreme Court reached this decision in compliance (as they saw it) with the First Amendment to the Constitution, which provides, in part, that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

In the earliest Civics classes I can recall, it was made clear to me, and remains just as clear to this day, that the intent of our forefathers (and, presumably, our foremothers as well) was to prevent the establishment of an official state religion. This was one of the conditions that prompted them to declare independence from the British Crown, where if you were not an Anglican, you were both politically and spiritually incorrect.

But clearly, there was no intended separation of GOD and state. The suggestion that this Amendment was directed against God is belied by both the very first two sentences and the very last one of the Declaration of Independence itself. This revered document preceded the Constitution by eleven years and the first ten amendments (our Bill of Rights) by fully fifteen.

The first sentence refers to the "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," and is followed by what is, perhaps, its most familiar language: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights."

The Declaration closes with "a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence," leaving no room for doubt about the fact that its authors wanted God, but not any particular religious persuasion, to be very much a part of life in these United States.

Add to this the fact that our coinage and currency, including those funny-looking new bills, proclaim that "IN GOD WE TRUST." Consider, too, the opening prayers that are intoned in just about all legislative bodies and judicial proceedings at every level of government. And how about those invocations directed to the Almighty at banquets and other public gatherings?

What of the reference in the second verse of our National Anthem to "our heaven-rescued land" and the almost ritual "and God bless America" following presidential speeches...even those of W. J. Clinton, hardly a poster boy for godliness (or moral cleanliness, for that matter).

One wonders why it's okay to sing "God Bless America" and pledge allegiance to the flag of "one nation under God" at the same ball games in Texas where direct petitioning is now verboten.

And what do you think those young jocks are up to in that pre-game huddle, right in front of a crowd that might include a number of Atheists? Truth to tell, kiddies, God is on the American scene to stay, albeit there is disagreement among us on the Almighty's location, intention, discipline, vindictiveness and even gender. Almost all of us feel that there is a Higher Authority, over us AND the non-believers.

Sure, it might be awkward for a few anti-God folks when prayer becomes public. Admittedly, it may make it necessary that they think of godless things for a few seconds, but it should be no more difficult for them to divert than it is for those of us whose skin crawls when rock stars shred the "Star Spangled Banner" with their bizarre vocal tricks and shrill deviations. I figure it's part of the price I pay for living in a democracy.

Mind you, I'm appalled when, at a non-sectarian function of any kind, the speaker invokes divine assistance "through Christ, Our Lord," or "in The Master's name," either of which is almost as couthless an affront to non-Christians as saying "you Jews and Muslims are on your own!" Anyway, while most of the righteous leftists of the Fourth Estate exult over this latest Supreme Court assault on common sense and majority sentiment, I find it difficult to discern any groundswell (or even minor tremor) of resentment in the public arena over asking God, whoever and wherever He, She or It may be in the minds and hearts of those in attendance, to look with favor on the proceedings, the participants and the observers.

Including, of course, those who - despite holding that He, or Her, or It even exists - find God to be a threat to their constitutional rights. To them, this message: Cut us a little slack, guys and gals. On the remote chance that we might be right about this God thing, would it hurt you to make a few points with the purported Deity.

Like, just in case?

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