

# OPINION

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## A Different View of Patriotism on Independence Day

Images often doesn't match the real picture

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

As we approach Independence Day, I've been remembering Frederick Douglass' famous speech asking what the Fourth of July could mean to slaves. Douglass, an abolitionist orator and himself a run-away slave, pointed out the irony of a slaveholding nation celebrating

Independence Day.

It has made me think about how the image we see often does not match up to the real picture. Take President Ronald Reagan.

I really do sympathize with Mrs. Reagan, who has lost a life partner and has had to deal with an illness which is devastating millions of American families, most of whom do not have the wealth or governmental resources that she has had to help her cope with this dreadful disease. I really do sympathize with



Bernice Powell Jackson

the Reagan family members and friends who have lost a husband, father, brother and friend.

But, for a whole week, I found it difficult to turn on the television or read newspapers which uncritically praised President Reagan over and over again. It began to be a bit much for me.

Yes, he did stand at the Berlin Wall and gave a riveting speech. Yes, he did force Communism to change.

But had he done something to tear down our own wall against those who were dying with HIV/AIDS or force us to look at our own fears and our own system of denial and finger-pointing, we might have saved millions of American lives. He didn't face down the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia and ask them to tear down their walls of apartheid that denied the right to vote and basic human rights.

He illegally supported the dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala which were responsible for the deaths and disappearance of thousands of their own citizens. For the poor and Americans of color, he scapegoated and stereotyped single mothers on public assistance, calling them "welfare queens" and accused them of driving Cadillacs while receiving food stamps.

He tried to have ketchup declared a vegetable in the school lunch program for poor children in America. He refused to re-

fute his past opposition to the federal Civil Right Act or to California fair housing laws, in which he accused blacks of just wanting to make trouble, while having no intentions of moving into white neighborhoods.

He began his campaign for the presidency in the town of Philadelphia, Miss., which African Americans were well

eight years of his administration. He slashed the budget of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as women were entering the work force in unprecedented numbers.

He did not hear the pleas of millions of American women to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment when he erased that from

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aware, was the site of the murder of three civil rights workers during the 1964 Freedom Summer. He chose the words "states' rights" in that Mississippi speech which was the code word term used by ardent segregationists during the civil rights struggle.

He was not moved by the plight of poor working Americans when he refused to raise the minimum wage during the

the Republican Party platform in 1980.

The images we hold as Americans often just don't match up with the realities. On this Independence Day, perhaps we should really try looking around us. That would truly be patriotism.

Bernice Powell Jackson is the executive minister for justice and witness ministries for the United Church of Christ.

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## Why We Don't Feel the Economic Recovery?

Because of less buying power, wages and jobs

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

As the Bush administration continues to tell the country that the economic good times are back again, millions of Americans, particularly African-Americans, fail to feel the impact of the economic recovery. We are told that over 1 million people have been hired since January, yet unemployment and economic despair continues to plague African-Americans disproportionately.

The fact is, even with over 1 million new jobs, still over 1 million less people are working than were working when Bush took office. The unemployment rate for blacks is currently 10 percent, nearly twice the rate of whites. The unemployment rate for black teenagers is over 30 percent nationally and, in New



York City, half of all black men are unemployed.

Clearly we have not felt the impact of this so-called surge in hiring that is allegedly occurring throughout the country. Additionally, many of the newly employed are making lower wages, all the while paying higher prices for consumer goods and services.

According to a report by the Economic Policy Institute, jobs that once paid enough to sustain a family now places that same family in poverty. The EPI reports that wages today are 24 percent lower in value than they were in 1979. Meaning that workers have less buying power than they did in past years.

While wages have been stag-

nant, prices for food, gas, college tuition, and healthcare have skyrocketed. Certainly the increase in the cost of life's essentials is another reason we can't feel the so-called economic recovery. Any real economic recovery will have to be accompanied by efforts to keep gas prices down, increase wages, and get healthcare costs under control.

Lastly, we must write our state and federal elected officials and demand a massive training and employment program that will address the disproportionate rate of unemployment facing black youths and black men. Until we see real jobs paying real wages we won't feel any real economic recovery.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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