

OPINION

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Hate Crimes Are Not Going Away

Studies and stories underscore more work to be done

BY MARC H. MORIAL

You may recall that 2004 and 2005 mark the 40th anniversary of two of the greatest monuments to American ideals of democracy, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Yet, in recent weeks several policy studies and news stories have underscored how far from the promised land of equal opportunity American society remains.

For example, statistics compiled by the FBI indicate that racial bigotry was the cause of more than half of the nearly 7,500 hate crimes reported to the agency in 2003, and that the 2,500 acts of bigotry against African Americans were far greater than the number against any other racial group.

The year's totals, which were slightly above 2002 figures, are largely comprised

of acts of intimidation, vandalism and destruction of property. But they also include a total of 14 murders, more than 2,700 assaults and 400 robberies, burglaries and thefts, and 34 incidents of arson.

The federal documents shows that crimes categorized as anti-Islamic remained at about the same level as in 2002 - 149, although some question whether these crimes are significantly under-reported. By far, most of the hate crimes motivated by religious bias were against Jews - the 927 incidents were about the same as in 2002.

Spokesmen for civil rights groups said the figures show a need for stronger federal laws against hate crimes as well as increased Justice Department assistance to local law enforcement agencies to prosecute such crimes.

Such legislation passed both houses of Congress last year but was tabled when

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differences in the House and Senate versions couldn't be reconciled.

That need takes on greater urgency when one considers that the Southern Poverty Law Center, a respected monitor of acts of bigotry and extremist groups and individuals, contends the federal statistics substantially under-report the reality.

Noting that that because several states have weak hate-crime laws (some don't recognize bias against sexual orientation as a basis for a hate crime) and the reporting done to the FBI by local police depart-

ments is entirely voluntary (less than 20 percent of the nation's 11,900 departments do so), the Center estimates the real annual number of hate crimes is about 50,000-nearly 7 times the federal estimate.

Thus, it's even more alarming to read that a recent by Syracuse University concluded from its review of Justice Department data that federal court actions against violations of civil rights laws have fallen significantly since 1999-to less than 2,000-even as the total number of complaints has held steady at about 12,000 a year.

But it's not only government inaction that causes concern: Some seem to feel that issues of race and a commitment to tolerance and inclusion now can be pushed lower on the public agenda.

Certainly, the most bizarre example of this was the astonishing vote in November of a majority of Alabama's white electorate to keep language in the state's

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constitution mandating segregated schools "for white and colored children" along with language referring to the poll taxes that in the era of segregation were used to disenfranchise blacks.

This mean-spirited and pathetic clinging to the now-unused remnants of the anti-democratic regime of the Old South-some of which still litter several other southern state constitutions, too - contrasts even more sharply to the vision for America that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s advocated: one in which the meaning of such words and phrases as freedom and justice and the pursuit of happiness are not limited to one class of Americans but are a living reality that applies to all.

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African Unity Can Start Here in U.S.

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Since the days of the Honorable Marcus Garvey many Black activists have looked for opportunities to unite all people of African descent under one banner. In recent decades, a large number of African-born Blacks from a variety of countries have moved to the United States. This movement has created a unique opportunity to further the cause of Pan Africanism, a cause also championed by W.E.B. Dubois, which strives for international unity among all people of African ancestry. The belief is that if we unite throughout the world we will have the purpose and power to pursue an agenda that will uplift the entire race of Black people wherever they may be.

With a constant migration of Blacks from the Caribbean ... the opportunity to get to know and love all our brothers and sisters from around the world is better than ever.

New hope for Pan Africanism to catch hold in America can be found in the historic migration from Africa to the United States since the 1990's. According to the 2000 census report, the number of African-born Blacks in America has doubled since 1990. With a constant migration of Blacks from the Caribbean, along with an additional 50,000 or more from Africa each year, the opportunity to get to know and love all our brothers and sisters from around the world is better than ever.

paying jobs than American-born Blacks. They are coming voluntarily from the West African countries our ancestors were captured from during the slave trade, in what some may regard as an ironic twist on history. Indeed most of the African immigrants are from Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia. All countries that were primary targets for slave traders during our slave holocaust. In fact, the voluntarily migration from Africa to the United States is said to now surpass the forced arrival through slavery. Although that does not account for the hundreds of millions who died in the Atlantic Ocean, or in the holes of slave ships before their arrival. They also share their American prosperity by sending more than \$1 billion a year back to Africa for families and friends, according to a report in the New York Times.

Many question whether such unity is possible considering our history of division and ethnic tribal disputes. They would remind me that the ideology of white supremacy was specifically designed to make sure we remain divided by skin tone, age, gender, and geography. I would remind them however that no race of people in the history of mankind have overcome as many barriers and obstacles as people of African descent. Disunity is nothing but another wall preventing our progress that will soon fall.

The migration is coming from several countries throughout the continent of Africa and the Caribbean. Those arriving are generally more educated and have higher

Imagine what it could be like if we were to unite here in America, all of the African-born, Caribbean and American-born Blacks on a common agenda. A political and economic agenda that would allow us to influence American foreign policy toward Africa and people of African descent throughout the world. An agenda that would perhaps allow us to begin in America, reclaiming the wealth that was stolen from Africa and African-American slaves.

Judge Mathis is Chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a National Board Member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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PepperBird Books is pleased to finally release "AKEE TREE, A Descendant's Search for his Ancestors on the Eskridge Plantations," by Portland writer Stephen Hanks.

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Stephen Hanks reads from his book and signs copies, 3 p.m., Sunday March 6, Genealogical Forum of Oregon, 1505 SE Gideon St., Portland (North of Powell Blvd and SE 13th Place) 503-963-1932.

Social Security Does Matter

Excuse of shorter life expectancy bogus

BY U.S. REP. CHARLES RANGEL

President Bush is now seeking to privatize Social Security. As a part of his campaign, he and his allies have been claiming that Social Security is a bad deal for African Americans, since African Americans tend to have a shorter life expectancy. This is really an outrageous argument.



If the President really was concerned about shorter life expectancies for African Americans he should try to do something about it. Instead, he wants to assume that African Americans will always die younger than whites. Talk about soft bigotry of low expectations. But, the President doesn't even have his facts right. Much of the life expectancy gap results from higher infant mortality.

benefits as well. African Americans only represent 12 percent of the U.S. population, but 18 percent of all persons receiving disability benefits are African American and 22 percent of all children who receive survivor benefits are African American.

The way Social Security benefits are calculated is also beneficial to lower income families, who, disproportionately tend to be, yes, African American. As Americans we pay into the Social Security system and we all benefit. It gives us the confidence that we will have the resources to be independent and proud of whatever happens.

What matters for Social Security is life expectancy at retirement. And the older we get, the lower the gap. By age 65, the difference is about a year-and-a-half. There is indeed a gap at retirement age, but not nearly as large as the President and his supporters claim.

Private accounts only add to the challenges of Social Security that we already face. They lead to a vast benefit cut that undermines the independence that Social Security gives to all Americans. I want to work with the President to have an honest debate about Social Security's future. And, I want to work with him to improve health care for African American communities. The life expectancy gap has been shrinking for years. With his help, maybe we can eliminate it rather than use it to sell a Social Security program that will harm America and is important to our community.

Let me tell you why Social Security is a good deal for African Americans: It not only provides retirement benefits, but also disability and survivor ben-

Congressman Charles Rangel is the senior Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives.

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