

OPINION

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A Clash Between Poverty and Values

Don't blame the victim

BY RHONDA SOTO

African Americans have broken two new barriers, according to the Pew Charitable Trust Economic Mobility Project's new report.

Almost half the children of middle-class blacks have fallen into the lowest income bracket in the last 30 years, the first generation in a century to lose so much ground. And for the first time, a majority of African Americans polled say that blacks are responsible for their own economic situations, and that the values of poor and middle-class blacks have become more different over the last generation.

Yeah, right, it's the values. Those middle-class African Americans whose children are now in poverty - rotten parents, every one of them. While going out to work every day, they were obviously telling their children not to do the same. The black unemployment rate in October was double the white unemployment, 8.5 percent versus 4.2 percent. Employers of all races, with their superior values, no doubt rejected those black pavement-pounders because they could see the poor work ethic a mile away. The quarter million drop in the number of U.S. jobs in October, and

all the offshore outsourcing of the last decade must be "a poor black values thing."

It was poor black values that led neighborhoods of color to be targeted by predatory lenders. It wasn't the secondary mortgage industry that started the current tsunami of foreclosures now evicting people, disproportionately black and Latino people - it was the homeowners' bad values. Higher interest rates charged to borrowers of color with identical credit rating are obviously payback for their poor behavior. And the mostly white executives who made millions off discriminatory sub-prime lending, they deserved that reward for their exemplary moral character.

The drop in unionization from 20 percent to 12 percent in the last 25 years wouldn't have happened, and the American labor force would not have lost 265,000 black union workers, if those workers' values had been better. The professional union-busting consulting firms, who advised companies how to illegally fire pro-union workers - they're role models of the American work ethic.

Similarly, the mostly white Congress members increased their own paychecks over \$50,000 with multiple raises since 1990 while blocking an increase in the minimum wage for a record-breaking

decade. And the mostly all-white billionaires on the Forbes 400 list of richest Americans who are \$290 billion richer than last year - they must have finest values of all.

Prison sentences are longer for blacks and Latinos than whites convicted of the same crime because judges can just see the difference in moral fiber between defendants of different races. And of course employers and health insurance companies are not insuring 7.2 million black people - nearly 20 percent - because their moral failings have made them too sickly.

The re-segregation of schools and the widening gap in class sizes and per-pupil spending between mostly white and mostly black schools? The rollback of affirmative action in higher education? All due to the character flaws of African American students.

Are values really the explanation for the racial income gap? Or do we too often assume that the American dream of equal opportunity is a reality? Do we overlook growing structural obstacles that block the path of some more than others among us?

Employed African Americans on average work



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more hours per week than employed white people. Blacks are slightly less likely than whites to use illegal drugs. They are more likely to be affiliated with a religious congregation. Poll after poll shows no difference between races in attitudes towards education, paid work, or expectations for children's advancement.

As a former teacher I know that some young people have self-destructive attitudes and behaviors - some black and Latino youth, some white youth, and some youth of 30 years ago. Far more young people have talent, ambition, and a work ethic that go underutilized, especially working-class youth of color in this 'have and have-nots' economy.

We as people of color are used to noticing racism and putting it into words. We're less accustomed to naming classism - but it's rampant among middle-class people of color.

Is this what racial progress has come to: More middle-class blacks taking up the previously white sport of blaming the victim?

Rhonda Soto is bi-racial activist who grew up in Harlem.

CASCADE CONNECTIONS

Higher Education and Your Future

BY ALGIE GATEWOOD

One of the best things about being a community college campus president is the opportunity to participate in the larger dialogue about the future of education in our state. For some time now, I have had the good fortune to serve on the Oregon Board of Higher Education's Student Participation and Completion subcommittee, a group led by the very able Dr. Dalton Miller-Jones of Portland State University.

Right now, the subcommittee is in the midst of the largest, most comprehensive study ever undertaken of the barriers that can prevent members of traditionally underrepresented communities from seeking a college degree.

Perhaps more importantly, the group is formulating a comprehensive set of strategies to help young students of color overcome these barriers and embark on a life of study and achievement.

In conducting its research, the subcommittee discovered that, in addition to the barriers that one might expect to find between a young student of color and higher education - lower expectations from teachers and administrators, the cycle of generational poverty - there is a pervasive "lack of preparation for college-level coursework," as well as a "lack of understanding by students and families around college costs, financial aid, borrowing, applying for college and aid, and the entire process of selecting and getting into college."

One of the subcommittee's

strategies for addressing these issues involves the creation of additional and more effective mentoring and early college entry programs in order to better acclimatize young students to the world of higher education, especially when those



students might be the first in their families to attend college. The idea

level courses - for free - while still enrolled in high school.

Students in the program are helped through the college application, admission, and registration processes, and receive hands-on academic guidance throughout their participation.

The result of programs like the Middle College is that young students of color learn that higher education can be part of their future plans. Once that realization is made, once a future of possibility is grasped, the entire course of a

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behind this is that if students are exposed early and often to a college environment, it will seem less mysterious, they will be better prepared for more rigorous coursework and they will be instilled with the realization that higher education is, in fact, within reach.

Fortunately, just such a program already exists for students at Jefferson and Roosevelt High Schools. The Middle College Partnership between Portland Community College's Cascade Campus and the two high schools offers young students the chance to take col-

young person's life can change in an instant. This is something that, in my opinion, is beyond price.

If you are a student or a parent from Jefferson or Roosevelt, and you haven't yet become involved in the Middle College program, I urge you to find out more about it. Damon Hickok, the Middle College coordinator, can be reached by e-mail at dhickok@pcc.edu. It's a choice that can make the difference of a lifetime.

Algie C. Gatewood, Ed.D., is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.

A Wrong Turn for Oregon

New I.D. policy brings undue hardships

BY PEDRO SOSA AND ALICE PERRY

The American Friends Service Committee joins other faith-based organizations in expressing its disagreement with Gov. Kulongoski's recently signed Executive Order 07-22.

The order instructs the state's Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division to tighten rules for the identity verification requirements for driver's licenses and identity cards.

The Governor's order is counter-productive and a setback for Oregon. This doesn't make our highways any safer. Instead, this will complicate the daily life of immigrants who drive to work, shop for groceries, or drive with their family members to church or other places.

The order adds hardships for the state's 120,000-plus undocumented workers and immigrants already saddled with economic insecurity due to increased

worksite raids, expedited deportations and increased public hostility and scapegoating.

Immigrant communities need a path to legal residency and citizenship, not added burdens.

This new action is certain to increase the fear in Oregon's undocumented immigrant community and there is a likelihood of racial

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profiling. Prohibiting immigrants from taking driver education from obtaining a license and therefore, from becoming an insured driver increases the danger on the state's highways. Unlicensed and uninsured drivers lose the ability to protect themselves or others should an accident occur.

In addition, the order not only affects licenses and ID cards; undocumented immigrants may become increasingly reluctant to work with local public-safety agencies and unwilling to contact the police in situations where they or others

have faced abuse or violence.

We are losing sight of the American values of respect for each individual and the human dignity of every person.

AFSC will work with faith and community partners to protect the civil and human rights of the state's immigrants. Indeed, this state decision is another indication that the

U.S. Congress must act on humane immigration legislation.

AFSC calls on Gov. Kulongoski to rescind the executive order. Instead, the Governor should work with Oregon's Congressional delegation to exert pressure that will lead to constructive national immigration legislation.

Pedro Sosa and Alice Perry work with the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service.

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