

OPINION

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America Isn't Post-Racial Yet

Journey for equality grows, despite setback

BY SARAH VAN GELDER

If anyone thought the inauguration of Barack Obama as president, heralded the end of racism in America, they should look no further than the racial slogans and the mocking signs of tea party rallies. Perhaps even more troubling are the economic indicators that show how far the recession is setting back the fragile fortunes of people of color.

On the other hand, extraordinary possibilities open up for us as a nation if we succeed in coming together to embrace the strengths of the country's growing diversity.

Before the Great Recession hit, the average family of color had a net worth of less than \$30,000; the average white

family's net worth was \$170,000. With the economic downturn, things got worse for almost everyone, but especially for people of color.

White unemployment rose to 9 percent, but unemployment among blacks is at a whopping 16 percent, and among Latinos it's nearly 13 percent. The economic crisis hits blacks and

Latinos in other ways, too. They were far more likely to be saddled with high-rate, subprime loans than their white counterparts with similar qualifications, and they are more likely to be facing the loss of their main asset—their home.

In spite of all this, a real post-racial society is still possible. The U.S. Census Bureau says that by mid-century, people of color will be the majority in the United States, and the political clout of these communities is bound to grow.

The movements that joined hands to elect Obama continue to unite people across race lines for economic justice and livable communities. Multiethnic music, art and culture are popular—especially among young people—and people of all ages are getting increasingly comfortable being part of mixed-race

happiness. But an unequal society is profoundly unhealthy.

According to researcher and author Richard Wilkinson, even those at the top of an unequal society have a lower life expectancy and lower quality of life compared to those living in more egalitarian circumstances. So the privileged as well as the ex-

cluded stand to gain from a more just and inclusive society.

regardless of language, religion, culture or ancestry. If we learn to work together, we may find that the shouting and vitriol of talk shows make way for respect. As the tone of our national dialogue improves, we have a much better chance of coming together behind real answers to our national crises.

The election of Barack Obama built on centuries of struggle against injustice. It's a milestone in the healing of a nation torn apart by contradictions—the thirst for freedom and the desire for fresh opportunities, but also the massacres of native peoples and the enslavement of African families.

The promise of a more perfect union can only be realized if we walk toward a future committed to liberty and justice—this time—for all.

Sarah van Gelder is executive editor of YES! Magazine.



No matter what our race, we will all benefit from the historic journey to a fairer society. Our community life can be much richer and more authentic when every member can rely on being respected -- regardless of language, religion, culture or ancestry.

families and workplaces.

White people may feel they're giving up long-held privileges by acknowledging our nation as a multiracial society, one in which all its inhabitants are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of

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Letter to the Editor

Roy Jay Raises the Bar

I had the good fortune to attend last month's Portland Development Commission's North/Northeast Economic Development Committee meeting at Billy Webb's Elks Lodge. My husband had encourage me to attend since he had heard Mr. Roy Jay speak at a PDC stakeholders meeting the previous evening as there was continued discussion about the Memorial Coliseum and Rose Quarter expansion and the effects of the urban renewal areas.

Although I do not know Mr. Jay, I was highly impressed with his presentation of community, which calls for accountability and revenue sharing for over 40 different local nonprofit, community based organizations including people of all races, genders and geographical locations throughout the north and northeast communities. Why didn't someone come up with this marvelous idea earlier?

The redevelopment of the Coliseum/Rose Quarter properties will hopefully generate millions of dollars in new revenue if it is operated properly and profitably. Mr. Jay's concept of one percent of the gross revenue coming back to the impacted communities is a stroke of genius which appears to have been supported by nearly everyone in the room.

He also recommended a community subsidy of \$1.99 on all tickets for sports, entertainment and other venues in the proposed redevelopment area earmarked to those agencies and individuals that are in dire need, including our seniors and long time residents of St. Johns, Kenton, Overlook and other parts of north and northeast Portland.

Will the recommendations hold water? I am not sure,

but this gentleman has now raised the bar and was not afraid to lay it out on the table. It seems like in the past, minority and small contractors as well as the community has received little if anything from some of these urban development deals. It took guts and a well thought out plan to bring these recommendations to the table.

I am truly a Portland Trailblazer fan and supporter. My husband, I and our family can afford the price of tickets, but I am fully aware of the fact that many other people are struggling to keep their electricity on or pay for tuition, rent or other basic necessities.

It is not unreasonable that one percent of gross be the benchmark of negotiations? If the figures are anywhere near accurate, 1 percent of \$300 million annually is \$3 million a year to be dedicated to various north and northeast Portland programs, services that need funds to keep doors open and provide services.

When you combine that along with Mr. Jay's recommendation of guaranteeing at least 33 percent of the construction, project management, development and professional services go to the businesses in the affected area first, that would make the Trailblazers motto of "Rise with Us" become a reality.

Mr. Jay is correct, an enforceable community benefits agreement needs to be in place, signed sealed and delivered before PDC, City Council or anyone else makes a final decision as to who gets the brass ring.

This has to be enforceable. I urge people to support this. Simply settling for a few temporary jobs and meeting some quotas is an insult to not only the African American community, but the entire north and northeast communities that have impatiently sat back waiting for their opportunity for growth and prosperity.

Virginia Cohen