

Point of View

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Alternatives to the High Drop Out Rate

With the recent published statistics from the office of William J. Bennett, Nevada ranks 42nd in the nation with a 36.10 high school drop out rate. The increase in the drop out rate is cause for concern. We, as educators, use our academic wisdom to further complicate and aggravate this situation by erecting academic barriers. Potential drop out students are historically not college bound, and fiercely independent. These students need positive alternatives or options in their educational experience.

The Clark County School District has in place a valid option. The program is Cooperative Occupational Education. A student is enrolled in a related class that is complimentary to their work experience. A student can earn up to 4 credits toward graduation. There was a time when 2500 students were enrolled in this program with an equitable distribution of disadvantaged and/or minority students. As usual, educators, in their infinite wisdom, destroyed an exemplary high school

experience. With the increasing graduation requirements, these options have been nearly eliminated. Now the academic process is back to Square One on how we can encourage young people to stay in school.

My question is this: Why, when we have programs that are working and giving service to students, do we have to frustrate and continually change and go backwards??? This is a cause for bewilderment because this valuable program has been almost eliminated and total elimination has been strongly endorsed by the State Director of Occupational Education, Mr. William Trabert.

The State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Eugene Paslov, is in the process of forming a committee at the state level to study ways of encouraging students to stay in school. To my knowledge, no one from Occupational Education is involved with this committee. Is this an indication that our educational priorities are confused?

Dewain Steadman

To Be Equal

Affirmative Action Under the Gun

by John E. Jacob

The Administration's underground war against affirmative action surfaced again last month, thanks to the resignation of an important Labor Department official who could no longer stomach the high-level sabotage.

Joseph Cooper, a life-long black Republican, and former Commerce Department official, resigned as director of the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance, charging that top Administration officials just give "lip-service" to enforcing antidiscrimination laws. He said those officials believe "that affirmative action has done too much, gone too far, become too powerful."

Not so, say Administration spokesman. They say they're for affirmative action. They just don't like quotas.

Well, neither does Cooper.

In fact, no one advocates racial quotas, except as a temporary means of redressing proven discrimination.

What the Administration calls "quotas" are actually the numerical goals and timetables any business



John E. Jacob

reasonably adopts to measure performance in any of its endeavors -- whether sales goals, production goals, or hiring goals.

So when Administration spokesmen claim to be for affirmative action without such measuring rods, the

only adequate response is disbelief.

That's especially appropriate given the way they've soft-pedaled enforcement of civil rights laws, fought legislation to close loopholes in those laws, and generally sent the message to the nation that civil rights issues are not important.

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And the two men cited by Mr. Cooper as prime opponents of affirmative action, Attorney General Ed Meese and Assistant Attorney General Brad Reynolds, are spearheading the fight to get the President to rescind executive orders that require federal contractors to implement affirmative action programs.

The federal mandate for such programs make a real difference. There are more than 20,000 federal

contractors employing 23 million workers at 70,000 plant and office sites.

A Labor Department study never formally released to the public but leaked a few years ago, indicated that those contractors -- who include some of America's largest companies -- have far better records in hiring and promoting minorities and

women than other companies who don't have federal contracts and therefore are not covered by the executive order.

Mr. Cooper's division of the Labor Department has responsibility for monitoring contractors' compliance with federal affirmative action mandates. It faces continued budget cuts -- another fifty staff jobs are scheduled to be cut in the next fiscal year, further reducing its ability to do its job.

And if the Meese effort to rescind the executive order succeeds, there won't be much in the way of federal affirmative action regulations to monitor. But that's what the anti-affirmative action cabal wants -- to kill a proven, effective federal program.

They express their opposition in high-sounding speeches about the danger of quotas or the danger of over-regulating the private sector. But the implication of their message is that government shouldn't stand in the way of employment discrimination.

The courts have consistently upheld affirmative action programs -- and are in the process of defining their limits. Many leading Republicans, including Labor Secretary Bill Brock, support affirmative action programs. So do corporate leaders, the AFL-CIO, and most people of goodwill who understand their important role in assuring equal employment opportunity.

Racism's Ugly Reprise: Its Roots and Our Responses

by Norman Hill

Black History Month is a most fitting time to examine the causes and consequences of the recent spate of racist incidents around the country. The well-publicized outcrops of racial bigotry -- the killing in Howard Beach, the terrorizing of a black cadet by Klan-garbed students at the Citadel, an attack on black students at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), the assault on an interracial march in Forsyth County, Georgia -- should disturb all Americans.

But what are the underlying factors of these outbreaks? And what should be the response of the black community and others concerned about these repugnant events?

There are those who maintain that the new manifestations of racial animosity are caused by long-simmering prejudices boiling to the surface. But

while knee-jerk discrimination and racial bias will likely remain a stubborn reality in any multi-cultural society, there are profound differences between the nature of today's racism and the racism that existed in America before the elimination of segregation laws in the mid-1960s. Consequently, new approaches to understanding and dealing with the problem are essential.

The "old" form of racism was based on prejudging all blacks as somehow inherently underserving our unworthy of equal treatment. Color was the sole consideration not, as Dr. King noted, "content of character." This perception was codified in laws that barred blacks from full participation in American society in such areas as public accommodation, transportation, education and voting.

What makes the new form

more insidious is not its outward manifestations. We are all familiar with hooded Klansmen and howling mobs. The difference is its basis in the misuse and misreading of observed sociological data. It is rooted in the perception that the social pathology of the black underclass --

unemployment, crime, welfare dependency, family dissolution, the breakdown of social values -- is attributable to race, not poverty. Even more disturbing, society misinterprets statistics dealing with comparative rates of black crime, prison population, teenage pregnancy, single-parent households, etc., as indicating racial inferiority. It is not only that the poor are being blamed for their poverty, but by misreading the plight of the underclass as an issue of color not poverty, society is projecting social pathology on all

blacks, and singling blacks out as objects of dread and bigotry. This is a truly dangerous development. Today, a young casually dressed black man (or a Hispanic, for that matter) -- be he a lawyer, doctor or minister -- might not be buzzed into an exclusive boutique in New York not because of his color, per se, (as in the past) but because in the current social atmosphere color has become automatically associated with criminal or anti-social behavior.

Paradoxically, these misguided and odious perceptions have emerged at a time when profound economic changes have hurt a growing segment of Americans of all races. Under the circumstances, racial conflict is all the more

tragic since the victimizers have more in common with their victims. The unemployed white teenager in Queens and the unemployed black youth in Harlem should be class allies, not enemies. Neither the dispossessed farmer, nor the laid off white factory worker in Detroit, nor the idle black steelworker in

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