

Point of View

To Be Equal

Celebrating The Bicentennial

By John E. Jacob

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall has performed a great service to the nation by bringing some badly needed perspective to the mindless hype surrounding the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the framing of the Constitution.

Justice Marshall eloquently pointed out that the famous first three words of the Constitution, "We The People," did not include women, who were denied the right to vote, or blacks, who were enslaved. They also excluded poor whites, who could not meet the property test qualifications for voting.

He also pointed out that

the document itself was seriously flawed — caught in the contradiction between guaranteeing liberty and justice to all and denying both to blacks. It took a century of struggle before



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slavery was ended and before the Constitution was amended to guarantee rights to all and to assure the equal protection of the laws.

Justice Marshall's message needed to be said — and it needed to be said now.

For too many Americans are ignorant of their past, and too many are lulled by the giant propaganda machine of the bicentennial celebration to have a

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realistic, honest view of our history and the men who framed the document.

This is not to belittle their accomplishment. In the world in which they lived and worked, slavery was an accepted commonplace, women had few legal rights, and the poor were disenfranchised and abused.

It was a world of kings and aristocrats exploiting everyone else, and to frame so forward-looking a document in the midst of such a world signifies that they were indeed extraordinary men.

But still, they were only

men, subject to the ideas and prejudices of their times and limited by their compromise of moral principles to achieve material gains. The anti-slavery New Englanders caved in to the South's insistence on preserving slavery — an ugly compromise that led to much oppression and bloodshed throughout our history.

So why should we not now say that their work was flawed; that it exhibited human failings that caused much misery, just as other aspects of their work were well-done and caused much human happiness?

Rather than enshrine the framers in a tomb of myth and fictions, we should acknowledge their mistakes, and focus on how true believers in equality and democracy used their Constitution as a springboard to create the world's first democracy.

And Justice Marshall's statement is needed now as never before since the Attorney General and a group of newly-appointed federal judges seem to think that constitutional issues can

best be resolved by going back to determine the intent of the framers.

By calling the nation's attention to the fact that the intent of the framers included preserving slavery for blacks and second-class status for women, Justice Marshall helps us see that the "original intent" school of argument is not to be taken seriously.

Our freedoms today don't derive from the document the men in Philadelphia wrote two hundred years ago but from the Bill of Rights that was added to their document in 1791, and by the post-Civil War Amendments that guaranteed rights and votes for all.

So Justice Marshall is right on target and his critics are way off base.

On Black Higher Education, President's Rhetoric And Reality Don't Match

By U.S. Representative William H. Gray, III

At a time when the ability of the United States to compete successfully in the world economy depends on our capacity to "work smarter," the nation is in danger of

losing forever the potential contributions of an increasing number of black Americans.

Since 1980, black college enrollment has been declining steadily. This fact is directly related to changes in federal policy instigated by the current administration — changes that

reduced the amount of aid available to needy students. Between 1980 and 1984 (the most recent year for which comprehensive figures are available), black college enrollment dropped by 3.3 percent, despite increases in the number of college-age blacks and the percentage who finished high school. From 1978 to 1985, the number of bachelor degrees awarded to black Americans fell by 6 percent. The figures are even worse at the graduate level, where 35 percent fewer blacks received masters degrees.

U.S. Representative William H. Gray, III (D-Pa.) chairs the House Budget Committee.

Through his budget requests and other policy initiatives, President Reagan has sought to cut student aid ever since he took office. When adjusted for inflation, student aid from all federal sources fell by almost 10 percent between 1980 and 1986. In the past three years, since I became chairman of the

House Budget Committee, we have rejected the President's priorities and provided enough money to make up for inflation. Even so, funding has



Cong. William H. Gray, III

not kept up with costs or the number of needy students.

For example, since 1980, congressional appropriations for Pell grants, which are targeted to the needy, have risen by 80 percent. However, the maximum grant increased by only 20 percent, from \$1,750 to \$2,100. Over this

same period, inflation was 35 percent, and average college tuition rose by more than 80 percent.

The President's assault on low-income students culminated this January when he sent us his fiscal 1988 budget proposal. In it he asked us to reduce education funding by \$5.5 billion — fully 30 percent of the \$18.7 billion he sought to cut from domestic

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Words of Marcus Garvey

By Kofi Tyus

"Point me to a weak nation and I will show you a people oppressed, abused, and taken advantage of by others."

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