

Point of View

OUR HERITAGE

The Sweat of Their Brows

Years of historical novels and Hollywood movies have cast a rosy glow over America's colonial past. The popular image is of men with powdered wigs and ruffled shirts and women with petticoats and oriental fans dancing around brightly lighted ballrooms.

In truth, very few colonials ever saw the inside of an aristocratic ballroom. If we could be transported back to the 18th Century, the obvious differences in everyday lives would, of course, be apparent—no electricity, few paved roads, travel by horse or ox cart, etc. But another fact would also be apparent—the early settlers of America worked incredibly long hours each day.

George Washington was a prominent planter raising tobacco, wheat and corn long before he became our first president. His view of labor was simple. "Lost labor is never to be regained. The presumption is, that every laborer does as much in twenty-four hours as his strength, without endangering his health or constitution, will allow."

Some of the colonies passed laws to protect workers. Georgia in 1755 "limited" the workday to a maximum of 16 hours. South Carolina's law set a work limit of 15 hours per day from spring to early autumn and 14 hours per day for the rest of the year.

Many Europeans came to America as indentured servants to tradesmen or plantation owners. Some entered into this agreement voluntarily, willing to work five years or more for a master in order to pay for their voyage to America. Others were sentenced by courts to servitude in America as a result of debts or lawbreaking. While white indentured servants often worked alongside slaves from Africa and suffered some of the same deprivations, they did have some recourse to the courts in cases of gross abuse. They also had the hope of eventual freedom. Slaves had no such protection and freedom lay generations in the future.

In addition to the indentured servants and the slaves, there were thousands of small farmers scratching out a meager living from small plots of land. On the edge of the frontier there were hunters and trappers, who lived an even more precarious life.

Looking back in history for the founders of America, the search should not end in the mansions of the aristocrats. It is outside those ballrooms and parlors that we find the workers who cleared the land, constructed the roads, raised the crops and built their homes. They were less interested in philosophical debates over improving mankind as they were in personal freedom and control of their own lives. These were the pioneers who carved a nation out of the wilderness. **il**

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To Be Equal

SUPREME COURT CHALLENGES CIVIL RIGHTS

by John E. Jacob

The full impact of President Reagan's policy of stacking the federal courts with right-wing hardliners has made itself felt in the Supreme Court's puzzling — and dangerous — decision to reconsider the validity of a key civil rights decision it made back in 1976.

At that time, the Court upheld an 1866 civil rights law that requires all citizens to be able to make and enforce contracts in the same way white citizens can.

That landmark decision opened a line of civil rights

protections for minorities in employment, housing, and education. It effectively placed private transactions



John E. Jacob

under the same nondiscriminatory mandates that ap-

plied to government actions.

The 1976 case in question involved a suit by two black children barred from a private school in Virginia. Ruling that the law protects against discrimination by private parties, the 1976 Court struck a powerful blow for civil rights.

Now, the Supreme Court, by a slim 5-4 majority, has decided to reopen the 1976 decision.

A black accounting clerk laid off from her job sued her former employer for racial harassment under the 1866

THE INVISIBLE PEOPLE: EVEN IN DISASTER

BY
ROOSEVELT FITZGERALD

Among the many residents of Henderson, Nevada, I count acquaintances, colleagues and friends. I have been there many, many times. During the early 1970s I participated in a coalition composed of different races of people in working toward the election of the town's first and only Hispanic mayor. Over the years I have delivered many talks at schools, churches and with other organizations. I have visited friends there and I have spent considerable time there researching and interviewing people concerning the beginning of Basic Magnesium Corporation in 1940/41. While I am not certain of the percentages, I do know that a good number of the population there are Hispanic, black, Asian American and Native American. I know this to be true because I've seen them with my own eyes as recently as April of this year.

The disaster which took place at the Pacific Engineering Plant on May 4, 1988, received extensive coverage by both local and national media. We were shown the

site of the destruction even as it occurred. We saw the explosions and heard the resounding report it made time and time again. We saw the plume of smoke which some of us were certain was toxic, blow away from the valley and off toward the northeast and we were relieved. We re-



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mained relieved even as we discovered that it was heading towards Goodsprings, Moapa, Overton and on into Utah — after all, what do we care of those places and the people who live there.

Shortly thereafter, we learned what had happened. First there was a fire and it spread and it got out of control before an employee of the

plant could extinguish it. He ran for his life. An alarm was given and a mass evacuation of the plant took place. Some attempted to drive their cars but left them and ran into the desert. A first explosion, a second and a third — measuring 3.5 on the Richter Scale — each followed by

shock wave which leveled some buildings, knocked out windows, blew doors off hinges, cracked some walls and ceilings and caved in others, buffeted people around in their homes and in the schools, overturned cars, snapped telephone poles like toothpicks and, in short, made a real mess of the town and lives.

Part of this I watched in the smoking room in the Student Union while five people — hopefully not students — three males and two females ranging in age from about 20 to about 40 — reacted as though they were watching the "Tom and Jerry Cartoon Hour." Their behavior was far more disturbing than the comment made by some unseen person near the All American Auto Wrecking place in Henderson. We were told by a reporter with Channel 8, following the third explosion, of the comment when he said: "Dead people over there and people are saying they should've brought a six-pak. Makes you wonder." Fortunately this is not intended to be a conscience piece.

The purpose of this is to illustrate an absence of presence of certain groups in that which was indeed reported. Nothing is sacred. Even in disasters, minority people are overlooked or, worse, they were not at any of those places or with any of those groups. There was one black man in the back of a

See FITZGERALD, Page 16

Did Racism Trigger Mrs. Ferraro's Statement?

by Chester A. Higgins, Sr.
NNPA News Editor

Mrs. Geraldine Ferraro's charge that Jesse Jackson is too radical and would not be in the race for the presidential Democratic nomination were he not Black, is both gratuitous and troubling. Why did Mrs. Ferraro, who as the first lady Democratic vice presidential nominee received strong support from so many Blacks, make such a statement. The thrust of which she must have known would only stir already troubled, racist waters in the tension-filled New York primaries? What on earth did she hope to gain? Was she speaking her own mind, venting a personal

pique? Was she simply happy over being back in the political limelight and thus, careless in her enthusiasm? Was her inattentiveness simply a matter of stress over prolonged family problems? Or were not so hidden feelings of racism the triggering mechanism?

Mrs. Ferraro is a seasoned and intelligent politician, therefore it is difficult to believe that she spoke without carefully weighing the consequences of her statement, an ad hominem pandering to those holding views that it's okay for Blacks to give un-

stinting and loyal year-in-year-out support to the Democratic Party, but how dare they seek to represent this party in its higher offices or challenge white men for its choicest plums?

Forgive us if we misread her, but is she echoing Mayor Edward Koch's ethnocentric cry: "a Jew would be crazy to vote for Jesse Jackson," with a white Catholic version extending to all but the most liberal whites and, of course, the Blacks who, in any case, have no where else to go? Does she really be-

See FARARRO, Page 7

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