

Apologies Across The Board

Slavery officially ended with the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. During the ensuing twelve year period black people in America underwent a tremendous metamorphosis. The great majority had been slaves but there had also been sizeable numbers of free blacks throughout the United States dating back to the early seventeenth century.

The changes, however, during that twelve year period, not only brought about freedom to those who had been slaves but, with the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, extended citizenship to both groups and provided for their participation in the ballot.

At the mid-way mark of the nineteenth century, gold was discovered in California. From all around the world, those hopeful of immense wealth flocked to the gold fields of that place. Among them were several thousands of people from China. The latter's chances of acquiring wealth was hindered by restrictions placed on them by white miners and prospectors in the many boom camps that sprang up throughout the west. They were only allowed, along with blacks, Mexicans and Indians, to mine in those places that had already been gone over by whites. The Chinese fared little better in their involvement in the construction of the Trans Continental Railroad which was finally completed in 1868. By 1882, with the Chinese Exclusion Act, they were no longer allowed to even enter the United States. Those who were continued to be discriminated against in pretty much the same manner as were blacks, Mexicans and Indians.

All received little or no protection of whatever few rights they might have had. On the west coast, Chinese were murdered as brutally as were blacks in the south and other places, Mexicans in the southwest and other places and Indians wherever they could be found. The status of all these groups relied on the will of their white neighbors. In places where those neighbors were friendly, and friendliness depended on the numbers of each group present in each individual community, they were fairly secure. In typical, bigoted communities they were always a risk.

Subsequent "outsider" groups were treated pretty much the same way. Among

those were Japanese, Korean, Filipino and other Asiatic groups, southern Europeans with "Swarthy" complexions, Jews, Catholics and, essentially, any and everyone who did not fit the American mold of "americaness"--northern European, protestant and eventually nativistic.

As the century turned, throughout the United States, there could be found, from region to region, those who were at the mercy of an oppressor group. We are not totally unfamiliar with this part of our history in spite of it being generally omitted from the history books. We've seen it in films on the subject of oppression, which were often advertised as adventure stories, dating back to the early part of this century.

The silent movies, "Intolerance" and "The Mark of Zorro" are great examples from the 1920s. "Robin Hood" shows us Saxons being oppressed by Normans. In "The Grapes of Wrath" we see "oakies" being oppressed. "Wagonmaster" has Mormons being oppressed. In "Shane," sodbusters are oppressed by cattlemen. "My Man Godfrey" has the poor being oppressed by the rich and even in "On The Waterfront" longshoremen are oppressed by the "mob." Foreigners are the targets in "Black Legion," Jews in "Storm Warning," blacks in "They Won't Forget" and school kids in "My Bodyguard."

In short, this has long been a problem -- this business of oppression and/or antilocutions, ethnophaulisms and such taking place. It has been a problem that few, in positions of authority, have chosen to do anything about. To compound the problem, there have been those who were once victimized themselves who now victimize others in the same way that they once were. How soon we forget. It is almost as though they feel compelled to get revenge on somebody and the somebody selected are those groups who continue to occupy the status they themselves once occupied. They seem to seek their revenge on such groups because the latter is a constant reminder to them that they too were once part of the great downtrodden.

On Wednesday, July 7, 1988 the Review Journal reported a story headlined NAACP, black firefighters demand apology for LV fire

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald



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chief's remark." The remark had to do with Chief Roy Parrish saying of Mormon firefighters: "You can rely on them to come to work. They are not sick, drunk or on drugs." Rev. Jesse Scott, president of the local chapter of the NAACP is reported to have said of the remark: "By implication, the remark insulted other groups." A day later, the Review Journal ran an editorial criticizing the demanded apology. By its own admission the RJ interpreted Rev. Scott's comment on "groups" to mean black firefighters. How such a presumption could be made in light of the small number of black firefighters employed by the Fire Department is obviously a result of a lack of understanding of the NAACP. The further admission that there are thousands of blacks in the Mormon Church is simply a smoke screen tactic that we are well accustomed to seeking. Additionally, the comment itself is false if there is a single Mormon who has ever been sick, drunk or on drugs. Seems that there were a couple in town a few months before the editorial, who murdered one person and wounded another. Finally, in editorial of July 8 states: "It is difficult to understand how Parrish's comment praising the work ethic of one group can be interpreted as a slur on other groups." Note, it says groups and not group. However, the editorial seems to insist that Rev. Scott is concerned with only one group -- blacks.

The word "groups," being plural, means more than one group. Yet, by implication, the article and the editorial seems to suggest that Rev. Scott is speaking only in behalf of black people. Impossible. He is speaking in behalf of every group, every person -- which is not Mormon who is connected with the fire department.

He is speaking in behalf of white Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, Mexican Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, Chinese Americans, Native Americans, atheists and any and everyone else missed by the chief's narrow brush.

The NAACP came into existence in 1910 and grew of the Niagara Movement.

Its founders included people of many races and religions. It was founded to help put an end to the era of terrorism which reigned in the country since before the

turn of the century. Many different groups of people were harmed by the activities of hooded nightriders who demeaned, slurred and physically brutalized many different groups of people whom they did not particularly like and whom our nation seemed disinterested in protecting.

The idea that the NAACP is a black organization is a misnomer. It has ended up being that way because so many of the groups who were rescued from the throes of oppression by it have gathered up their recently -- in this century -- who rights and protections and gone off to join the great mass of oppressors by either being active oppressors themselves or passive oppressors by comporting themselves as though the problems of the oppressed are not their -- how soon they forget.

I joined the many other conscious Las Vegans in congratulating Rev. Scott of not allowing anyone, by inference, to minimize the remark by the Chief to only include black people and thereby give cause to those of small minds to have reason to say, yet again, that

blacks are "too sensitive," that they are "always complaining," that "they can't take a joke" or that "every time they turn around blacks are beefing again." Rev. Scott was helping those unconscious people realize that they too were being insulted and were apparently too busy watching "Lifestyles Of The Rich And Famous" to realize that they indeed were.

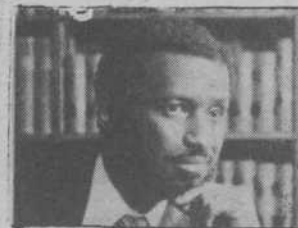
I'll tell you what the problem is: when some flu virus goes around and a few black firemen are laid up with it, there is only a handful of blacks left on the job. Because the RJ and the chief apparently choose to believe that only black firefighters feel that they have been insulted, why don't they put as many blacks as there are Mormons at all job levels and let's start keeping score -- 200 Mormon firefighters and 200 black firefighters. The RJ editorial stated that "The NAACP must have more burning issues than this to deal with." Burning. Ha. Sure it does and it needs the RJ's help. The fire department needs to hire more black firefighters. Let us see if they'll run an editorial on that.

Accidents hurt financially, too.



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