

# Point of View

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## TO BE EQUAL

# AFFIRMING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

By Hugh B. Price

America must affirm affirmative action.

Think back to what the nation looked like in 1954, the year of the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education decision, which outlawed school segregation.

Blacks in big corporations back then seldom rose above secretary or messenger.

Think, even, of the complexion of local police and fire departments back then.

While many small employers remain resistant, our advances overall are abundantly clear.

As the Wall Street Journal observed in an editorial:

"Affirmative action began as a way to give minorities and women an opportunity to compete. A walk through any campus or workplace will show it has worked. This is the important legacy of affirmative action."

These gains in higher education and white collar employment



HUGH B. PRICE

account for the welcome growth of the black middle class.

There's no question in that individual motivation and improved education, coupled with the advent of anti-bias laws, help explain this progress.

But it's also a fact that institutions with choices about whom to select have been inclusive in their admissions or employment practices.

It may be impossible to prove cause and effect. But the phenomena of affirmative action and the growing African-American middle class clearly have coincided.

That's correlation enough in my book.

To judge by all the strident talk radio shows and hysterical magazine covers, affirmative action explains all that ails America's suddenly insecure white males.

It's the cause of college rejections, shrinking wages and vanishing jobs. Yes, the economic prospects of white males are dimmer now than those of their parents 30 years ago.

And the economic prognosis for their children is further source of worry.

The very same is true of all American workers, be they African

American, another minority group, or women.

Why, besides their purported political clout, should white males' claim be accorded greater urgency or credibility than that of those other apprehensive Americans?

All that solicitude toward anxious white males suggests that African American have somehow gained over whites?

As American University economic professor Barbara Bergmann notes, the truth of the matter is that: "Blacks are such a small fraction of the population that the lost opportunities to white men are really minuscule."

It isn't as though African Americans have achieved parity in, much less more than our proportionate share of, the opportunity structure.

For myriad reasons, from faulty schooling at the front end to persistent discrimination, African Americans still trail whites on every barometer that matters.

African Americans still earn only 69 percent of what white males earn to perform the same job. The task of making our multi-ethnic society genuinely inclusive is hardly done.

This is why we must affirm affirmative action.

## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

# REGENERATING RACISM

By Bernice Powell Jackson

I remember when I was young and we believed that once those old-timers, steeped in Jim Crowism and die-hard segregation, died off, racism would go away. Were we ever naive; were we ever wrong.

In the past few days two stories have proven that and shown that the struggle against racism is a never-ending process and one that we as a nation must take very seriously for every

generation. Those who believe that racism is an issue of the past are sadly mistaken.

Both stories involve high school seniors—the future leaders of their communities. One is the story of the seniors in Greenwich, CT who put a coded message in their yearbook which read "Kill all the niggers" and then bragged about it. Five young men, most of them scheduled to go on to college in the fall, who were proud they were able to fool

school administrators and make a racist threat. Five young men, part of a supposedly liberal community, who used their yearbook to spew racial hatred.

When interviewed on television, some Greenwich residents said they believed it was only a prank. But the students could have chosen to write a coded message which poked fun at something if they were just interested in a school prank. Others said that they

believed this was an isolated event. But how do they know?

A similar event occurred in New York City when four high school seniors placed an anti-Semitic note under their Jewish teacher's classroom door with a swastika, the word "Hitler" and a vulgar personal insult on it. It seems they were angry because she had canceled a class trip because of lack of student response. Just as racism is still alive and well in the next

generation of leaders, so, too it seems, is anti-Semitism.

In the Greenwich case, the administration took immediate action. The students were not allowed to take their final exams, nor allowed to participate in their graduation ceremony. Indeed, law enforcement officials are investigating whether this should be considered a hate crime and, thus, whether to prosecute the young men. The young men have also agreed to attend a special class on racism led by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which will include having them get to know some black people.

In the New York City case, the students were suspended, barred from the school prom,



Bernice Powell Jackson

the yearbook party and the senior class trip and graduation. Each student was required to perform 15 hours of community service. In addition, one student, who was a member of the student government, was removed from her post and another was removed from the varsity baseball team. Likewise, after a police department investigation, the four students responsible (See Civil Rights, Page 4)

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

# DEATH PENALTY CAN'T STOP VIOLENT CRIME: THE AMERICAN PEOPLE CAN

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Recently, New York State Governor George Pataki signed a death penalty bill, restoring capital punishment after nearly 20 years. This was Governor Pataki's big campaign promise—to make New York tougher on crime by making the most heinous murders punishable by death.

It's certainly true that more and more people—white and Black—have come to believe that the death penalty is in no way a deterrent, it has become more popular as a "solution." Why? In my view, it is because most people feel powerless in

the face of rising crime and violence and the death penalty seems like something to do that might make a difference. It isn't. But the politicians have deftly capitalized on the public's fear and anger at being so important. Many believe support for the death penalty was a key to Pataki's victory over Mario Cuomo in New York. And on a national level, the Democratic-sponsored Clinton Crime Bill, which passed last year with Republican support, identified 60 new crimes for which Americans could be executed. Both crime and violence or for changing the conditions which produce them.

While I am completely sympathetic to the lack of trust in liberal solutions (prison rehabilitation has been one of the most monumental social policy failures of this century), I do not believe that capital punishment is the answer. I have always opposed the death penalty and still do. Study after study proves conclusively that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent to murder or any other violent crime. But the death penalty does have a huge impact on the Black community. Thanks to the racist nature of the American judicial system, no white person has ever been



DR. LENORA FULANI

executed for killing a Black person. Moreover, a disproportionately high number of those on Death Row are men of color. In many ways the African American community (See Black Empowerment, Pg 4)

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