

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

Racial Inclusion A Critical National

By Hugh B. Price

The increasingly heated national debate over affirmative action should focus on the fundamental, core issues, and not, as it has thus far, on peripheral issues and anecdotal instances of abuses.

Those fundamental issues are: is affirmative action necessary to secure a racially inclusive society; and is such a racially inclusive society in the national interest.

It seems to me self evident that the answer to both questions is a resounding "yes."

Affirmative action has been instrumental in creating a critical mass of African Americans whose newly found access to education and employment has enabled them to become economically self-sufficient, productive contributors to our society.

That's especially important at a time of rapid economic changes that deprive so many blue-collar workers of job opportunities. It's no accident that the formation of a solid black middle class coincides with the spread of affirmative action programs.

Imperfect as such programs are, and despite sometimes faulty implementation, they have become a critical vehicle for racial inclusion. Affirmative action mandates have led employers to hire and promote women and minorities to positions from which they had been largely excluded in the past.

They may occasionally chafe at the regulatory oversight that ensures compliance, but most corporations have come to see



HUGH B. PRICE

affirmative action mandates as necessary prods to desegregate their workforce. Some early opponents of affirmative action are now enthusiastic supporters because they have found that operating in a diverse society requires a diverse employee base.

It should be evident too, that a diverse society cannot flourish if large segments of the population are stigmatized and relegated to inferior status.

It's become commonplace to talk about the dangers of ethnic Balkenization, but the search for social cohesion in a diverse society will be an exercise in futility unless all Americans have equal opportunities to enter the mainstream.

Affirmative action is often stigmatized as divisive. But if it ended today, the economic anxiety among whites which is fueling the backlash against it would not be alleviated. Their anxiety stems from global economic changes, not from programs that attempt to extend opportunities to all Americans.

Race remains America's unresolved dilemma and affirmative action can help us resolve it. That's become a necessary national

objective, because the combination of changing demographics and global economic competition mean that America must make the maximum use of the potential of all its citizens.

America is the world's preeminent multi-ethnic society, and its diversity can be a source of competitive advantage if its opportunity structure mirrors its demographics.

As Senator Bill Bradley has astutely observed:

"By the year 2000, only 57% of the people entering the workforce will be native-born whites. That means the economic future of the children of white Americans will increasingly depend on the talents of nonwhite Americans. If we allow them to fail...America will become a second-rate power. If they succeed, America and all Americans will be enriched."

It would be extremely short-sighted to abandon a valuable tool that aids racial inclusion and develops the wider talent base indispensable to maintaining America's standard of living.

Affirmative action can help us become a racially inclusive society that can flourish into the next century.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Death Row Countdown

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Imagine a steam engine moving steadily down its track. Once it gets rolling, it's nearly

impossible to stop that train. The machinery of death row is like that steam engine and that machinery is rolling down the

track the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. the question is whether Governor Thomas Ridge and the state of Pennsylvania will stop the train of death.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a respected African American journalist and an advocate for racial and economic justice. He describes himself as a journalist, husband, father and grandfather who lives in the fastest growing public housing tract in America. he is a man living on death row and scheduled to be executed on August 17 for a crime he probably did not commit-the murder of a Philadelphia police officer.

yet the death penalty machine rolls on, impervious to the many irregularities of Abu-Jamal's trial, to the probable misconduct of the Philadelphia police and prosecutors in his case. Irregularities such as of the 125 eyewitnesses who gave



Bernice Powell Jackson

statements to the police at the scene of the crime, the prosecution used only two of them, both of whom had previous convictions and pending charges against them and both of whom identified Abu-Jamal as the shooter. Irregularities such as the reports by at least four witnesses that they had seen the shooter run away, while Abu-Jamal, who was also wounded and unable to run, was found sitting on the curb at the crime. Irregularities such as the fact that the police department did

(See Civil Rights, Page 4)

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

Full Employment And Affirmative Action

By Dr. Manning Marable

What has escalated white America's opposition to affirmative action, race and gender-based programs which attempt to redress past and present-day patterns of discrimination? More than any other single factor, I would say that the politics of discrimination is set into motion by white male fear.

The recent affirmative action debate has occurred in the context where white working class and middle income people have been steadily losing ground economically. Although gains in disposable personal income, adjusted for inflation and taxes, increased at an annual rate of over 3 percent in 1994 and the beginning of this year, that increase is only due to the fact that millions of two career couples are now in the labor force. Real wages for the average household over the past decade have been either stagnant or have fallen sharply. According to economist Stephen S. Roach, in the first fifty months of the current economic recovery, about 7.8 million jobs were created. By comparison, that was almost 40 percent less than the average rate of job growth in the two previous

expansions. Globalized capitalism increasingly pits workers against each other internationally, forcing down wages and fringe benefits, and creating non-union workplaces.

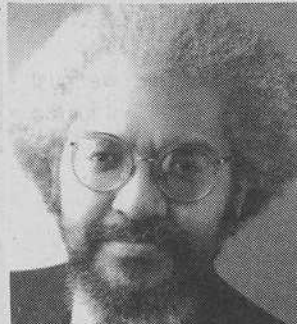
A major reason why white males are as a group, by all opinion polls, most strongly opposed to affirmative action is that they perceive themselves to be particularly vulnerable in the new world (and domestic) economic order. Since the mid-1970s, the real median income for U.S. males has remained flat or has declined, while women's incomes actually rose 18 percent above the rate of inflation. Males are far less willing than women to reeducate themselves to seek new employment opportunities. According to the Census Bureau, over one million women over age 40 are currently enrolled in college, twice the number of men in post-secondary institutions. White, native-born males now represent less than one-third of the U.S. labor force. As women and minorities compete successfully for traditionally "white male jobs," white men are inclined to blame the erosion of their opportunities on affirmative action policies.

What's really at work here is the structural transformation of

the U.S. economy over the past quarter century. According to economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, between 1969 and 1976, 22.3 million jobs disappeared due to factory, office and store closings across the U.S., and through the relocation of businesses from state-to-state and outside the country. The total number of jobs destroyed represented more than one-third of all jobs which had existed in 1969. In the mid-1960s, there were 2.5 unemployed persons for every vacant job; by the late 1970s, the ratio had grown to 5.0 unemployed persons for every vacant job.

In a city like New York today, for example, there are roughly seven jobless people for every available jobvacancy. In Harlem, about 40 percent of the population is below the poverty line, and nearly half of all people above age 18 are unemployed, underemployed and/or involuntarily outside the formal labor market. Competition is fierce even for low wage service employment. In Harlem's fast food industry, the ratio of job applicants to hires is about 14 to one.

Today, there are about 7.5 million Americans who are "officially" unemployed, based



DR. MANNING MARABLE on Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, there are nearly five million part-time workers who want full-time work, but cannot find it. There are also another seven million "discouraged workers," who the Bureau of Labor Statistics clarifies as outside the active job market. When twenty million people who desire full-time employment aren't able to get it, an environment of political scapegoating and social hostility is created. Blacks, Latinos, women and others are blamed for declining real incomes, unemployment and the loss of job advancement. Yet, overturning the affirmative action programs and policies will do little to reverse these economic trends for white male workers.

This is why the advocates of Affirmative action must carefully link their struggle for social justice (See Along Color Line, Pg 4)

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