

Point of View

The views on these editorial pages are those of the artists and authors indicated. Only the one depicted as the Sentinel-Voice editorial represents this publication

TO BE EQUAL

The Lost American Hero

By Hugh B. Price, President
National Urban League

The genius of the American economic and political system has been our collective determination to make it work for average Americans, not only for the elites.

That's what has set us apart from other industrialized nations. Following World War II, when the economy was booming, most Americans were on the "up" economic escalator.

The working man was the American hero. Not an American hero, mind you, but the hero.

We designed our tax system and labor policies to make sure America worked for them.

When Jim Crow was defeated, we African Americans figured it was our chance at long last to jump on that escalator.

But things soon turned sour for those of us who were destined to work in factories. For these blue collar workers of all complexions, the city-based manufacturing economy started moving to the suburbs and eventually overseas.

Amazingly enough, politicians haven't seemed terribly concerned about what has happened to working people. According to Peter Drucker, the noted management guru, no class of people in history has ever risen faster than the American blue collar worker.

Nor has any class ever fallen faster.

The result is that, much to our disgrace, America has the widest income and wealth gap between haves and have-nots in the entire Western world.

What's even worse, according to economist Peter Gottschalk of Boston College, your chances of escaping the bottom have gotten no better, while conditions at the bottom have gotten no better, while



HUGH B. PRICE

conditions at the bottom have gotten much worse.

Now, I'm not into conspiracy theory. But the June issue of Harpers contains an article by Michael Lind that provides unsettling food for thought.

It's entitled "To Have and Have Not." Lind argues that those who make society's economic rules—he calls them the overclass—have steadily stacked the deck against everyone else, including even the middle class.

According to Lind: "Not only do the comfortable members of the overclass single out the weakest and least influential of their citizens as the cause of all their sorrows but they routinely, and preposterously, treat the genuine pathologies of the ghetto-high levels of violence and illegitimacy-as the major problems facing a country with

uncontrollable trade and fiscal deficits, a low savings rate, an obsolete military strategy, and anachronistic and corrupt electoral system, the worst system of primary education in the First World, and the bulk of its population facing long-term economic decline.

This widening economic gulf and scapegoating isn't socially healthy or politically sustainable.

The growing alienation of inner-city youngsters, angry and anxious white males and those weekend militia warriors—are by-products of the economic marginalization of working people, who believe "the system" has abandoned them.

But the American economic and political system can work for the average American—not just the elites.

America doesn't need any more lost heroes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor,

In the last few weeks I have seen the Review Journal and Las Vegas Sun making a federal case (so to speak) about the incident where three police officers have, allegedly, beaten a white homeless man at the Fremont Hotel and Casino. This is the first time our so-called newspapers stand up on behalf of any citizen of Clark County, when during past years they have forgotten the many people beaten and murdered by police officers.

With great interest I noticed that everyone wants those officers fired, and for the first time in the last 15 years, a police officer is being indicted for wrongdoing, but no one ever speaks up on behalf of the many blacks, Hispanics and women beaten by veteran police officers.

Are some police officers better than others? Are the rest of the population of Clark County considered worse if they are not white?

Perry L. Viasmensky

★★★★★

To The Editor:

This is in response to the letter to the editor from James A. Geffert that appeared in the Review Journal on Sunday, August 27, 1995. I wonder how long Mr. Geffert has been living in Las Vegas or where was he in the last 15 years.

"Cops have to be the good guys. They have to wear the white hats." This is the way it's supposed to be, but it is very far from the truth. Brutality is a pattern with Metro Police.

Every one, including Mr. Geffert, is making a big production of the incident in which allegedly, Sgt. James Campbell and two other officers beat up a man in the Fremont Hotel. What's the specialty about this incident?

Because the man allegedly beaten is a white American man? Because Sgt. Campbell is a supervising officer that failed to

intervene?

I know of the brutal beating of a woman 5'2," 110 pounds by two "white knights," 6' 3," 300 pounds, leaving the woman totally destroyed for life. Oh! But this woman was a Hispanic woman...that makes a big difference, Mr. Geffert doesn't it?

According to Mr. Geffert's letter, Sgt. James Campbell and officers Robert Phelan and Brian Nicholson, indicted for wrongdoing, must go, because there is no place in law enforcement for them—in this country at least. For Mr. Geffert's information, the other officers happen to be in the same country, same state, same county and same city. It shouldn't be any place for them either, and still, they were not even reprimanded. Do we need to consider this a racial issue?

Rolando Larraz

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

JUSTICE DELAYED

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Justice can be delayed, but it can never be denied. It may take more than a lifetime, but justice can not be denied. Take the case of Johnson Chestnut Whittaker was appointed to West Point in 1876, near the end of the Reconstruction era, when blacks had grabbed hold of political power in the South. Whittaker was one of the first black cadets at West Point and found himself ostracized by his white classmates, who seldom even spoke to him. He received threatening letters.

Late one night during his senior year, Whittaker was awakened by three cadets who burst into his room and attacked him. The masked men tied his legs to the bed and slashed his face, ear and hands saying they were doing him like they do hogs in the South.

The smashed a mirror over his head and burned pages from his Bible, which had been his sole companion and solace

during his months of harassment. They left him unconscious and bleeding.

Whittaker accused three of his classmates of the attack but West Point administrators said that he had made up the story of the attack and had injured himself in order to win sympathy because he was expected to fail a philosophy examination and thus be expelled from West Point. The doctor who examined him testified that he was faking, that he had cut himself and a handwriting expert said he wrote the threatening letters himself. As a result, Whittaker was court-martialed and expelled from school.

the next year President Chester Arthur overturned the court-martial, citing faulty evidence. But the same day Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln reinstated the expulsion, says that Whittaker had failed his oral philosophy examination. Despite having finished nearly four years of courses, Whittaker

never received his commission.

Despite all this, Johnson Whittaker went on with his life and taught, practiced law and served as high school principle in Oklahoma City. He later taught psychology at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, where his son later became President. It is there that Whittaker's Bible, which was seized as evidence at his court-martial and kept all these years at the National Archives, will be deposited by his family.

Three generations of the family of Johnson C. Whittaker were present last month at the White House, when President Clinton returned the Bible and gave the gold-plated bars of a second lieutenant to them. After 115 years a grievous wrong had been righted. Three generations of a family who might have become embittered and hate filled, but who instead became educators and who served in World War I and with the all-black Tuskegee Airmen in World



Bernice Powell Jackson

War II. "We cannot undo history," said the President, "but today, finally, we can pay tribute to a great American and we can acknowledge a great injustice."

President Clinton also quoted the words written by Johnson Whittaker in the front of his Bible during his second year at West Point. They read, "Try never to injure another by word, by act, or by look, even. Forgive as soon as you are injured, and forget as soon as you forgive."

Justice can be delayed, but justice can never be denied. Even if it takes 115 years. Rest in peace, Johnson Whittaker. Rest in Peace, Lieutenant Whittaker.

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LAS VEGAS SENTINEL-VOICE
1201 EASTERN AVE • LAS VEGAS, NV 89101
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NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice
BROWN PUBLISHING COMPANY'S AWARD WINNING NEWSPAPER

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Brown Publishing Co., Inc.
1201 South Eastern Avenue • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 383-4030 • Fax (702) 383-3114

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National Newspaper Publishers Assoc.
West Coast Black Publishers Assoc.
This newspaper is audited by:
Community Papers Verification Service,
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(608) 238-7550

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