

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

THE SCROOGES WHO STOLE CHRISTMAS: What Does It Mean To Be An American?

By Bernice Powell Jackson Republicans' bills will have on I've written a lot about the so-called welfare reform and the impact that the poor women and children. I've followed closely the various drafts of the bills which

threatened to take away infant formula and food and income from poor children and which threatened foster care and adoption services for those children abandoned or abused by their parents. So I thought I had seen it all, that I understood the depths to which this Congress could sink as it seeks to take food from the mouths of poor children in order to finance a tax cut for the rich and give the Pentagon \$7 billion that they didn't even ask for.

But then I opened the *New York Times* to find that the House-Senate conference committee had put in a little-noticed change which would end health coverage for our nation's poor. Just as many of us took a little sigh after we had successfully gotten the Women and Infant Children (WIC) feeding program to continue assisting pregnant women, infants and children at risk and seemed to have gotten school lunches back for poor children, then the grinch who stole Christmas take away health care for poor children.

The new bill says that states are not required to provide medical care to any individual receiving aid or assistance in the form of Aid to Families With Dependent Children, foster care payments or adoption assistance. The Children's Defense Fund estimates that 4.6 million parents and 1.6 million children over 12 would lose their health benefits. In addition, state programs which would extend health care coverage to working poor families, like those in Tennessee or Oregon which are designed to encourage families to get off welfare, would not be allowed under the new bill.

All of this means poor children will be sicker next year. It means that children with special needs or disabilities who are in foster care or eligible for adoption will no longer be eligible for health care, and thus less likely to be adopted or placed with foster parents who have the love but not the money. It means poor children will be sicker while we get tax cuts that many of us don't want and none of us need. It means poor children will be sicker while the Pentagon tries to figure out how to spend dollars it did not request.

In a talk to the nation's



Bernice Powell Jackson

religious leaders recently Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, asked the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" She asked that question in light of the \$250 billion in proposed budget cuts which will finance the \$245 billion in tax cuts. She asked the question in light of proposed cuts in child welfare services, food and nutrition programs, health and income programs for our nation's poorest and most vulnerable. She asked that question while pointing out how 26,000 families together earned less than one entertainment executive in 1993.

"Babies are sacred gifts of a loving God," said Edelman, "but we would deny them food, immunization, health care and education. This is not reform, but a trojan horse for Republican ideology." Edelman added that Republicans have made "entitlement" a dirty word, when it really means a fundamental moral principle that our nation had agreed upon — that our federal government should be the protector of last resort for the most vulnerable of our society — poor women and children — that when husbands and families and states fail them, poor women and children can count on the rest of us for help.

What does it mean to be an American? Does it mean that the rich and the middle class care only for their own and the rest must go for themselves? Does it mean poor children will be sicker and hungrier while the rest of us prosper? Does it mean that those who are disabled and abandoned will have no chance of living in a family? Does it mean that we as a nation have lost our soul?

(If you care, write President Clinton, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC 20500 or call (202) 456-1414 and ask him to stand strong and veto any bill which denies health care to poor children.)

TO BE EQUAL

The Development of African-Americans

By Hugh B. Price, President, National Urban League

Economic development is so important to African Americans.

We must grow and support our businesses, whether they operate in the mainstream economy or serve our own markets. We must use the economic muscle we possess to advance our interests

with those who covet our purchasing power. That is why we of the National Urban League pulled our 1996 conference from Los Angeles.

We refused to support the economy of a state whose governor was so determined to dismantle affirmative action and inclusion. I'm extremely proud that the League was the first black organization to boycott California and that other groups, like Blacks in Government (BIG), took similar action.

It's worth noting that the anti-affirmative action campaign has stalled. But we must not declare victory and become complacent. Promoting economic development means that all of our children must understand and become comfortable with entrepreneurship.

Too many of them have an unrealistic sense of the way things work or just don't know what their responsibilities are. We must help them understand that they can earn a decent and honorable living through operating very small businesses. For example, I recently paid someone to sand our floors. He had been to more Caribbean Islands than I'll ever see.

At the other extreme, our youngsters need to know that they too can create empires like John Johnson's publishing conglomerate and the late Reg Lewis' Beatrice Foods.

Let's create national economic institutions — our own convenience store chain instead of single grocery stores. It pains me to see some fast growing food service chains marketing our cuisine. We should be in that competition for those customers.

A business executive who runs a department store chain told me recently that he thinks they should re-enter urban neighborhoods. Why shouldn't our own chain get there first?

Many cities are experiencing economic revivals. They are doing so by emphasizing what I call "quality of life" industries. They are building stadiums, museums and aquariums downtown. They are restoring downtown restaurants, entertainment and residential districts. Some are even building unsubsidized single-family housing within walking distance of downtown.

Our entrepreneurs should be in the middle of all that action. We need investment banks to assure access to capital for these enterprises. That is why the idea of an investment trust that the Leadership Summit is developing is intriguing.

Promoting our development means exploiting our political potential. This is self-evident, so I won't dwell on it. Let me simply say that the weakest position to be in politically is to vote automatically for one major party and never for the other. That way we are taken for granted by everyone.

At 12 percent or so of the population, we potentially control the electoral margin between competing parties and candidates. If we fail to flex our political muscle, then we'll be marginalized politically.

Above all, we must be obsessed with developing our children, who are our destiny. As parents and as a people, we must make certain that our children have the academic and social skills to compete.

This column is one of a series of excerpts taken from the Keynote Address to the National African-American Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.



HUGH B. PRICE

Point of View

WHERE WE STAND

From the ghetto to the suburbs

By Craig Stevens

"You can take a person out of the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of the person," is a common African American expression. Of course anyone that knows the saying knows that some of the words have been changed because they are offensive, however the message is still the same.

Typically, the ghetto is the means by which we measure this troubled society. According to many people, the "ghetto" is considered the worst place to raise a family. To me, the ghetto is also known as the "hood" or home, a place where people have to negotiate adversity, develop strength of character, be strong and careful not to meddle in other folks business.

For others, the inner city is a memory of the past, because they have pursued their dreams and moved to the suburbs where they have found that the suburbs have problems of their own.

African American families moving out of the inner city into middle class suburban neighborhoods are discovering that the nice streets, parks, and schools are home to many of the things they were trying to avoid by leaving the city. Yes, the cost of relocating has gone up and many parents find that the suburbs turn out to be the other side of the same coin. They discover that they have moved from the high crime and drugs of the noisy inner city to the high crime and drugs of the quieter suburbs.

Many struggling parents

trade-off time at home for extra hours at work to afford their new home because they have intentions of providing better resources and an overall better quality of living for their children. At risk in most cases are these very same children who are sold on the prospect of better schools and recreation facilities.

Part of the transition is a change of schools for the children who may be trading less education for less identification. Often they are unprepared for the change in the school environment which they may have a hard time adapting to. During the adjustment they may find that they are behind in their school work because of the difficulties that many of the inner city schools have. As students, this may make it difficult for the children to identify with the other students.

Many parents have suffered through a reversal of fortune and for some the dream has become a nightmare. Making it as a successful African American entails many different things besides a promotion and good credit. One of the most successful things that we can do is relay messages to our children that we care and want the best for them.

Once this is known we must make the extra effort to show it in the "hood" or in the suburbs because there is no substitute for good parenting to insure the promise of improved quality of life and worthwhile future opportunities.

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Ed & Betty Brown, Founders
Ramon Savoy, Publisher
Lee Brown, Editor
Nichole Davis, Staff Writer
Willis Brown, Production Manager
Don Snook, Graphics

Contributing Writers:
Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams
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