

POINT OF VIEW

TO BE EQUAL

Men of honor from WWII

By Hugh B. Price
President
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"History has been made whole today, and our nation is bestowing honor on those who have long deserved it." So President Clinton declared last week in setting right a shameful fifty-year wrong. At a poignant White House ceremony January 13 the President awarded the nation's highest medal for bravery, the Congressional Medal of Honor, to seven African-American servicemen. Until now, their bravery on the battlefields and at sea during World War II had

gone unlisted on the nation's greatest honor roll just because they were black. These intrepid souls, among the 1.2 million black men and women who enlisted in the armed services during the war, were men who braved withering enemy fire to scout German positions or cover battlefield maneuvers of their own units; or who, despite serious wounds, killed and captured German soldiers; or who, ignoring the danger to themselves as their ship sunk beneath them in the Pacific, helped others swim to safety. These were men whose actions had clearly met the



HUGH B. PRICE

requirement for the Medal of Honor. They had distinguished themselves "conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of (their lives) above and beyond the call of duty" with acts "so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades."

To its discredit, however, the American military command of the war years — and for some years after — was so infected with the virus of racism that it chose to ignore these heroic acts.

Fortunately, some, as a matter of honor, would not let the matter rest. The families of these men, black veterans' groups, and, in some instances, the white officers who commanded their segregated black units waged a long campaign to get the military and the federal government to acknowledge that black servicemen as well as white ones had performed extraordinary acts of bravery.

One of those white officers was David J. Williams, captain of the 761st Tank Battalion. Identifying himself at last week's ceremonies as "ex-captain, the black panther battalion," Williams remarked, "This was the toughest battle I ever had. The German — I knew my enemy. But this time, racism, it's tougher to defeat."

The efforts succeeded in 1993 when scholars from Shaw University, a historically black university, began investigating the military's archives at the behest of the Army. In 1995, they recommended ten black servicemen for the Medal of Honor. An Army board, examining the files with all references to race deleted, chose these seven.

Only one of the heroes, former Army Lieutenant Joseph Vernon Baker, 77, of St. Maries, Idaho, lived to accept the award at the White House.

Four of the others — First Lieutenant John Robert Fox, of the 92nd Infantry Division; Private First Class Willy F. James, of the 104th Infantry Division; Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers, of the 761st Tank Battalion; and Private George

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Carl Rowan's Commentary

I tip my cap to Peter I. Bijur, the chairman of Texaco, Inc., for the straight forward way in which he is extricating that company from what could have become a social-legal disaster.



CARL ROWAN

Texaco has been the symbol of racial bigotry in corporate America ever since it was revealed last fall that some of its executives sat in corporate offices denigrating blacks and other minorities, and plotting as to how to destroy company documents that might enable black employees to win a lawsuit in which they accused Texaco of egregious discrimination.

Bijur has just dismissed one senior executive, suspended another and cut off retirement benefits for two former employees — all deemed guilty of racist behavior that was in violation of company policy.

This bold action came in the wake of a Bijur agreement to settle the race discrimination lawsuit for a record \$176.1 million, with a stipulation that an outside task force will oversee personnel operations at Texaco for five years.

I know that Bijur may be operating more out of a desire to cut Texaco's losses than out of any new commitment to fair employment, diversity of staff and racial justice. But I also know that he could have resisted a settlement of the lawsuit, hoping that the current anti-affirmative action passions would protect Texaco. Bijur knows that the same employment and promotion bigotry exposed at Texaco is practiced rampantly in most corporations in America, so he could have hoped that other business leaders would pressure politicians and the courts on Texaco's behalf. A corporation that hopes to sell gasoline, newspapers, shirts or automobiles to all the people cannot meet its sales potential if it is not fair to all the people. A lot of Fortune 500 and lesser companies have not yet figured that out, but Bijur saw the folly of trying to fight off the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, the NAACP, a boycott inspired by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the bad publicity in newspapers and magazines which to some degree practice the same racism that was exposed at Texaco.

The uninformed will say, "How can you praise Bijur when one of the people he is punishing is Richard Lundwall, the former Texaco official who made the tape recordings of the racist statements that threw Texaco into crisis, but helped the black plaintiffs to win an extraordinary settlement?" But the record may show that Lundwall was going along with the scheme to cover up racism at Texaco by destroying documents — until Texaco wiped out his job in a downsizing. The courts will provide an answer.

I think the furor over Bijur and Texaco may have blasted out of deep denial those executives who have blinked at bigotry, and who have even joined the hypercritical cry that no meaningful racism now exists in the United States. Surely, we must hope that that is the case.



RACIAL IDENTITY DIVIDING AMERICA?

Why the "melting pot" is suddenly boiling

By Sidney E. Morse
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As though it were happening with the blink of an eye, with only slight notice or fanfare, events over the last several weeks have once again brought to the forefront, America's seeming inability to correctly identify the source of its racial animus and to come to grips with this potentially destructive problem.

In Pittsburgh, two white police officers, accused of wrongful death in the beating of Jonny Gammage, cousin of a well-known football player for the Pittsburgh Steelers, were acquitted by an all white jury. Within just a few days, a policeman accused of acting irresponsibly when he shot an African-American motorist in St. Petersburg, Florida, a charge that touched off severe rioting in that city, saw it dropped by a grand jury.

Damaging tapes of conversations by Texaco Oil Co. executives making racially offensive remarks were widely reported. Exposure of the tapes causes Texaco to settle a two-year-old class-action discrimination lawsuit for \$170 million, the largest settlement in history. Meanwhile, Jesse Jackson called for a nationwide boycott and the NAACP threatened stock divestiture efforts if more is not done. The conservative Christian Coalition calls the settlement "extortion."

Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative the measure that would ban all government affirmative action programs in California, passes by a substantial margin only to have the ACLU successfully petition the court for an injunction to prevent its immediate enforcement.

The Central Intelligence Agency is accused of engaging in acts of genocide by distributing "crack" cocaine in South Central Los Angeles and other urban centers across the country.

And, America continues to

be consumed by the O. J. Simpson civil trial. There is clearly an undercurrent of race tinged throughout the proceedings, ever present but frequently denied. Having nothing to do with his guilt or innocence, African-Americans seem to take solace in seeing O.J. triumph over a judicial system that has been largely viewed to be discriminatory at best. Whites are angry because they believe that he might have gotten away with something because he is black, causing one to wonder: "Would race relations be different today if he had been convicted in the criminal proceedings?"

On a recent "Larry King Live" show, a national network analyst said that she thought "the civil trial ought to be videotaped, even if it is not shown until after the decision is rendered. The country has too much at stake in this trial." Were it not for the racial significance of these proceedings, why would the country have anything at stake? After all, and unfortunately, people are murdered across the country everyday. Why should so much be put on this event?

The pitch of racial disharmony has reached a point where there is more shouting at one another than talking and many are now saying that America had better "wake up" before it is too late.

On a recent CNN program,

"Both Sides With Jesse Jackson," writer Dinesh D'Souza stated, as he has in his book, *The End Of Racism*, that racial identity is contributing to the further "balkanization" of America.

Former Supreme Court nominee, Judge Robert Bork, in his new book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, argues that multiculturalism, as exemplified in the musical genre "Gangsta Rap", is causing a breakdown in the moral fiber of our country and thus in our society as a whole.

I have heard some whites say they would prefer for African-Americans to not be "so black" or "expressive" in their culture. Rather, they would be much more comfortable if they would just "fit in" or assimilate.

As the racial context of America has matured, the dynamics of race relations have also changed. What was once a national mood to treat discrimination as a morals in, is now transformed into a theology of protection from social, cultural and economic degradation. So now, instead of suffering the pain of being "shut out" yet again, a new generation of African-Americans, frequently well educated and financially affluent, have chosen to embrace their "Afro-centricity" as a celebration of its membership in the American quilt.

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