

America's courts seen as unfair by most minorities

WASHINGTON (AP)— Too many Americans believe the nation's courts do not provide equal justice for racial minorities, the American Bar Association's president said, as the group released a poll showing nearly half of Americans feel that way.

"This is a very serious problem ... we cannot afford to ignore," Little Rock, Ark., lawyer Philip Anderson said last week. "We are concerned that the current perception of bias will eventually erode confidence in our system of justice."

Of 1,000 people surveyed by telephone in August, 47 percent said they strongly

disagreed with a statement that "the courts treat all ethnic and racial groups the same." Only 39 percent agreed with the statement, and 14 percent voiced no view.

Asked whether courts treat men and women alike, 55 percent said yes, 30 percent said no, and 15 percent expressed no view.

Anderson noted that another recent ABA poll indicated great disagreement between white and black lawyers over the justice system's racial fairness.

"This raises the obvious question that if people believe the justice system is tainted with bias, how long can they expect the courts to remedy

bias elsewhere in our society?" Anderson said. "Right now, the high degree of confidence in the courts exists side by side with the perception of bias in the courts. As the minority populations increase in America, will the perception of bias increase?"

He said the 350,000-member ABA "will intensify our efforts to eradicate gender and racial bias in our courts."

The poll released last week contains some seemingly inconsistent findings.

For example, most people — 51 percent — believe the justice system "needs a complete overhaul," but 80 percent also believe

America's system is the world's best.

A large majority of Americans, 78 percent, also voiced confidence in the jury system.

"Those numbers are high, and we can feel good about them," Anderson said.

Among the poll's other findings:

-90 percent believe wealthy people and companies often wear down their opponents by dragging out legal proceedings.

-77 percent say it costs too much to go to court.

-27 percent believe the best lawyers are selected to serve as judges.

Anderson said the poll

indicates most Americans need and want to know more about the justice system.

One tool, he said, could be increasing public access to the nation's courtrooms by televising more proceedings.

"I cannot think of a better civics lesson than ... to be able to see and hear every argument before the Supreme Court of the United States," Anderson said.

"One television camera in the Supreme Court will educate more people more effectively in one morning than the traditional methods can reach in one year."

All federal court proceedings currently are closed to radio and television coverage.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Review

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Capt. Staros (Elias Koteas) is a thoughtful, timid, intellectual desperately seeking to relinquish command. His courage shines through when he refuses to obey a foolhardy order from

Tall.

This film also lacks character continuity. Characters appear and disappear and reappear throughout the movie seemingly without explanation. There is a

method to Malick's madness.

He is making an existential statement about man. Rather than exhibiting man's complexity through one character, he uses various men and puts them in different situations to highlight

characteristics such as goodness, naiveté, cynicism, evil, pride, cowardice and courage.

The Thin Red Line is a thought-provoking, distinctive film that haunts the mind.

Espy

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Smaltz, maintained throughout the nearly two dozen Espy-related cases that it was not necessary to prove that Espy ever did anything in return for gifts, and that lobbyists or companies did not have to expect specific favors as a result of their largesse.

Espy was acquitted in December of 30 charges related to gifts he accepted from Sun-Diamond, Tyson Foods and others.

Sun-Diamond was convicted of giving \$5,900 in illegal gratuities to Espy, including tickets to the U.S. Open, luggage, meals, a framed print and a Waterford crystal bowl. A federal appeals court threw out the 1996 gratuities convictions on grounds the federal gratuities law requires a connection between a gift and official acts.

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