

COMMENTARY

Littleton commentary on sad state of psychology

Special to Sentinel-Voice
America seems desperate to find someone or something to blame for the tragedy in Littleton.

Many theories have been floated; from it being the fault of the families of the two boys, to the school's inability to control the kids, to the availability of guns, the proliferation of violence in the movies, and the Internet.

As a development psychologist, I think these explanations are misguided.

The tragedy in Littleton no doubt had many causes. But one that stands out for me is the failure of the science of psychology.

Psychology, after all, is supposed to be the science of helping people. But we are

more and more coming to see that psychology has no capacity to deal with the deep sense of alienation — the experience of being an outsider — that is so predominant in our culture. The problem is immense. The treatment, in all its variant forms, is ineffective.

Consider this: The boys responsible for the massacre had gone through counseling and psychological testing at Columbine.

The counselors thought they were okay, based on that testing. Does that mean the counselors were bad? No.

In fact, from the reports, the counselors sounded like decent people who cared about the kids. But the "tools" they had to work with are

This Way
For Black
Empowerment

By Dr. Lenora Fulani



missing the mark. The testing is missing the mark.

The whole approach that counselors have been trained to use is defective. What can we say about a field — in this case, psychology — where two young men who kill 15 people, try to blow up their school and commit suicide aren't intercepted and helped, in what is probably the most optimal circumstances for

doing so?

Many commentators, including various politicians, insist that the parents have to be held responsible. But the parents presumably assumed that the counselors — who are trained professionals — were doing a good job, and an effective job.

Yet, the tools these professionals are working with don't work. It's like

trying to fly to Saturn on a tricycle. It can't be done.

The level of alienation in our society is so extreme that psychology's efforts to treat it are missing by a mile.

You see how alienated things have become in the response to Littleton itself, in the kinds of explanations that are offered.

One big focus has been on the role of the Internet. But the "Internet connection" is a bogus issue. If you live in a culture where more information is available at faster and faster rates, more people will have access to wider ranges of information.

Blaming the Internet for Littleton is like blaming the Encyclopedia Britannica for World War II, because it

provided information on World War I.

Information is simply information.

It's not the cause of violence.

The problem with the search for blame is that it means we're searching for the "aberration" that caused it.

The far more serious issue is that there is no aberration. It's normal, everyday life that produced Littleton.

Until we're ready to face that, we won't come close to being able to see or deal with the problem.

Dr. Lenora B. Fulani is currently a leading activist in the Reform Party and chairs the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Journalists' wordplay demonizes concept of affirmative action

Special to Sentinel-Voice

A while ago, I indicted my own profession while speaking at commencement ceremonies for Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

I told the proud young men and women how they will soon, as journalists, be able to turn noble endeavors into social catastrophes — just by manipulating a few words.

I told them how, by using the words "race preference" to describe affirmative action programs, the media has transformed laudable efforts to right past wrongs into something that sounds despicably "un-American."

I could speak boldly on the subject because I would not have been invited to Columbia to speak and to receive the journalism school's highest honor had it not been for affirmative action.

Fifty years ago, having failed to get into Columbia, I earned my master's in journalism from the University of Minnesota, at a time when only a handful of mainstream newspapers would hire a black reporter. Desperate for a job, I applied at the nearest likely place, the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

Fortunately, publisher John Cowles, a man of great social conscience and bravery, had decided that his lily-white news staff didn't reflect society.

Cowles' "affirmative action" gave me a measure of justice.



CARL ROWAN

By demonizing "racial preferences," newspapers change attitudes, in turn, hurting many promising youngsters. Journalists seem to be giving credence to efforts by the powers-that-be to stunt, stifle and stymie affirmative action.

It's fitting that a day after my speech at Columbia, the nation learned of the damage wrought on California by Proposition 209, the ballot initiative that slams the door of admission on blacks and Hispanics applying to colleges in the respected University of California system.

At Berkeley, the freshman class of 3,600 this fall will include just 98 blacks, compared with 260 last fall. The number of Hispanics will drop from 492 to 264. Berkeley's chancellor, Robert M. Berdahl, calls the situation "grim."

UCLA will have just 131 black freshmen in a class of 4,267 this fall, compared with 219 last year. The Hispanic enrollment will fall from 603 to 458. Vice chancellor Theodore R. Mitchell says that if this trend continues "the diversity of our campus will be seriously compromised and with it, our greatness."

I think the Columbia grads saw the damage wordplay can have, especially when we, as journalists, use loaded negative phrases to describe actions that are meant to be positive and programs that are complicated but fair. But I left asking myself: How many of them will remember not to fall into the same trap?

Blacks should help in doing away with the "Death Tax"

*Harry C. Alford, President & CEO
National Black Chamber of Commerce
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

We, as a people, have been freed from physical slavery for over 134 years and we have yet to begin building wealth. We cannot begin utilizing all of the advantages of this free economy until we have gained enough wealth to actively participate. It's just not civil rights; civil rights can get you dignity and respect but we need more. It's just not political empowerment; look at Zimbabwe or South Africa where we now have enormous political empowerment but, yet, no power due to lack of Black wealth. Civil rights and political clout are nice but economic empowerment will get you freedom and authority. Freedom and authority are the keys to earthly happiness.

The total net worth of African-Americans is only 1.2 percent of the total - versus 14 percent of the population. We have been stuck at that number since the end of the Civil War in 1865. Getting rid of the "death tax" will start to create a needed legacy and begin a cycle of wealth building for Blacks in this country. That would be a great start to breaking the economic chains that bind us.

What is the death tax? The "death tax" is levied against the government-assessed value of the deceased's estate. The rates can start at 37 percent and can climb to 55 percent. In essence, your last remaining parent dies and the estate they leave to you and your siblings will be reduced by the IRS by an amount equivalent to 37-55 percent of the total worth. Thus, the legacy left by your elders or left by you to your children can be significantly reduced or even wiped out.

An example: the *Chicago Daily Defender* - the oldest Black-owned daily newspaper in the United States - was forced into bankruptcy due to financial burdens imposed by the estate tax. We all remember what happened when the great Sammy Davis Jr. died - his wife was in bankruptcy within six months due to the vicious "death tax."

Store owner Leonard L. Harris, a first generation owner of Chatham Food Center on the South Side of Chicago, can envision all

the work and value he has put into his business disappearing from his two sons. Says Harris, "My focus has been putting my earnings back in to grow the business. For this reason, cash resources to pay federal estate taxes, based on the way valuation is made, would force my family to sell the store in order to pay the IRS within 9 months of my death. Our yearly earnings would not cover the payment of such a high tax. I should know, I started my career as a CPA."

We cannot begin to build wealth until we start to recycle our precious dollars. We cannot recycle our precious dollars until we have businesses and ventures to invest in. The "death tax" is in our way!

Fortunately, we now have an opportunity to get the "legacy killer" out of our lives and future. There are two bills in the House and Senate as I write this editorial. HR 86 and S 56 will repeal the "death tax." HR 8 and S 38 will phase it out over a specified period of time. Please keep in mind that this estate tax only contributes about 1 percent of the total federal revenue, and of each dollar collected, 65 cents is spent on collecting the tax. The tax promotes virtually nothing but financial hardship and a serious insult to the hard work of our parents.

These bills are making progress on Capitol Hill. However, we need to provide a needed boost, especially to members of the Congressional Black Caucus who, many times, aren't where they should be on financial gain issues. Please call your applicable congressman or senator and tell them you support these bills to end the "death tax." Tell them it is alright for Black folks to begin building wealth in this country. It is not against the law and it certainly is more enjoyable than poverty.

Building wealth will lead to better education, better health care, safer streets and sustainable communities. Poverty and the lack of economic empowerment will get you frustration and hopelessness. The only way to fight poverty is good government and laws that do not penalize hard work, success and savings.

Let's put to death the "death tax!"

We accept letters to the editor

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All letters must be signed and contain a daytime phone to be verified for your protection.