

COMMENTARY

Money not compensation for blood-stained progress

Rainier Spencer

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Some people want to be paid. They want to be paid not for anything they did but for the things their great, great, great-grandparents did. I'm talking about the idea of reparations for slavery in the United States. Essentially, the idea is that since American slaves were not compensated for their labor, this overdue compensation should be pro-rated and paid to their descendants in the present day. There are two problems with this idea—one practical and one moral.

To take the practical aspect first, it would be impossible to come up with anything approaching accurate figures, either in terms of people or money. How much money should go to someone whose ancestors in 1865 were all enslaved? Should the same amount of money go to someone whose family line includes far fewer slaves because some of those ancestors had already been living free in Massachusetts for a hundred years? Even if this kind of genealogical detective work

could be done accurately (and in the case of Afro-Americans it surely cannot), there are huge problems involved with granting each present-day Afro-American an equal share.

Unless we are going to say that simply being black entitles one to an equal share regardless of how much or how little one's ancestors suffered, this is a major problem. I suppose that Halle Berry should get only half a share since at least half of her family tree going back to colonial times is white. And how about those free mulattoes during the period who distanced themselves from their darker sisters and brothers?

It doesn't seem fair that an ancestor who actively avoided a connection with black people should count towards someone getting an equal share for just being black. Indeed, they weren't always mulattoes, either. We've all heard of those black families who claim that they have no slave ancestors, or that their family has been free since the Revolutionary War. It seems to me that someone who makes that claim has talked himself out of a share of

any reparations windfall.

Those are all practical problems, and they truly are insurmountable if fairness is of any concern. However, there is an even bigger problem with "getting paid."

The real problem is that no amount of money paid to me can come close to compensating my slave ancestors for the horrors they suffered. Indeed, I would refuse to accept such a payment. First of all, I certainly haven't experienced even a fraction of what they went through, and I think it would be immoral for me to accept a cash payment for the abuse they suffered.

Secondly, to accept money for the pain and suffering of my enslaved ancestors would at some level suggest that the debt owed to them by the United States had somehow been paid. It would suggest that an arrangement can be conceived of whereby a cash price can be put on the moral cost of one human being owning another.

I won't be a party to any such suggestion, however. Instead, the debt should remain

forever unpaid because there is nothing the United States can do to make up for it. Our government has a responsibility to stamp out racism and to live up to the ideals embodied in its founding documents, but it is insulting to the memories of the millions who toiled endlessly at cultivating cotton, rice, indigo, and sugar, for example, to suggest that their suffering can be made up for with a check.

On my office wall is a painting one of my most favorite students gave me last year, and it is something I really cherish.

The painting is a rendition of an advertisement for a slave auction, and it reads: "To be sold & let by public auction, on Monday the 18th of May, 1829. For sale, the three following slaves: Hannibal (aged about 30), William (aged about 35), and Nancy (an excellent house servant)." Regardless of how many people today want to "get paid" for someone else's suffering, I can't support the idea. My respect for Hannibal, William, Nancy, and the millions like them just won't let me accept blood money.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Bush's anointing forestalled by socio-political land mines

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Some "funny" things are happening on George W. Bush's cushy ride to coronation and the White House. Some turbulence has entered the Texas governor's friendly skies at both ends of the political spectrum.

Both the conservative wing of the Republican Party and the minorities that Bush has wooed with great success seem to be concluding that Bush's vagueness, his refusal to take a stand on certain issues, could eventually show them to be "suckers."

Erstwhile Republican Sen. Robert C. Smith of New Hampshire has bolted the party, charging angrily that Bush "won't take a position" on such issues as the right to bear arms, abortion and tax cuts. He said GOP moderates have made a "charade" of a party platform that "isn't worth the paper it's written on," so he intends to run for president as a third-party candidate.

Meanwhile, Gary Bauer, another conservative candidate for the GOP nomination was telling editors of the *Washington Times*: "I do not believe the Republican Party can win if it serves up a candidate who tries to muddle all the major issues and will not talk in a clear and convincing way about those issues that motivate conservative voters."

Bush is expected to prevail because a huge majority of Republicans seem convinced that he can defeat any Democrat because he is an unusual Republican who has the support of large numbers of blacks,



CARL ROWAN

Hispanics and women. But questions are arising as to how quickly he might lose that support.

Minorities expressed serious doubts about Bush after he made only a cameo appearance at a Seattle conference of about 5,000 minority journalists—and this

only after he learned that Democratic contenders for the presidency, Vice President Al Gore and former senator Bill Bradley, would speak there. Bush declined to submit to the usual question-and-answer session and handed out his stock double talk about how he supports equal opportunity but is opposed to "preferences" and "quotas."

Bush lost more stature among minorities when it was revealed a few days ago that before he moved into the governor's mansion, the house he owned in Dallas had a covenant restricting occupancy to "white persons only, not excluding bona fide servants of any race."

Bush's campaign tried to dismiss that as "irrelevant" because the covenant was "null and void under Texas law." It is true that this racial exclusion couldn't be enforced in Texas courts, but it was enforced in the court of public opinion in Bush's social circles, as witness his aide Mindy Tucker's assertion that "All the houses in that neighborhood have it."

Bush is still so far ahead that Republicans may wish to cancel their nominating convention; but we still need to hold the election.

Bias tainting drug tests used in hiring practices

Emory Curtis

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Almost all personnel directors of government units and companies of medium size require two completed pieces of paper before making a hiring decision—a completed application and a negative slip from the required drug test.

That second piece of paper is a report from a lab that tests urine or hair samples. They like hair samples more because they can register positive for drugs used months before. Urine tests only catch drugs used a few days before. But, scientific results suggest that we ought to be concerned about the extensive use of hair testing for drug use.

One of my step-daughters, Judith Peterson, told me about her co-worker in the food preparation unit for Daly City schools, who had been steadily working her way up the bus driver candidate list for the school district. Judy said her friend came to work one day smiling from ear to ear. She was at the top of the bus driver list. All she had to do was pass the drug test in the next day or two. She wasn't worried.

The strongest drug she had was coffee, and she probably put cream in it. She took the drug (hair) test. It came out positive. She cried so much that they broke tradition and retested her. It came back positive again. She couldn't understand it. Then she put two and two together and concluded that her husband's nightly joint had affected her test results.

However, according to information about testing hair for drug use, she may be wrongly accusing him. It could be that she is one of the few with the kind of black hair that makes that test return a false positive for drug use. It has happened before.

Complaints have been filed against the Chicago Police department by six recent candidates for the Police Academy there.

One of them was filed by a Sister, mother of two, who had a lifelong dream of being a police officer. They tested a sample of her hair, and it came back positive. The sister was floored. She couldn't believe it.

"I don't even smoke or drink," she said. "I was heartbroken."

Since she couldn't get into the Police Academy, she is now a criminal justice major at Chicago State University. Another sister there had the same problem. She was a senior in college and submitted a hair sample, which returned positive.

She said, "Everybody knows I don't use drugs. They have shattered me."

Eight Chicagoans have filed complaints of racial discrimination against the Chicago Police Department because of hair testing which gives more false positives on black hair, which we have.

A brother in the Army who passed seven random urine tests in a two-year period had a forced hair test come back positive. He protested and wanted another test but ended up with a bad conduct discharge. He was only six years away from retirement.

According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse's leading researcher, Edward Cone, "The consensus of scientific opinion is that there are still too many unanswered questions for (hair analysis) to be used in employment situations."

That opinion is backed by Dr. Bruce Gurlington, director of the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Devices and Radiological Health. A 1995 U.S. Navy study shows that the dark coarse hair of African Americans, Hispanics and Asians is more likely to absorb drug residues from the environment (second hand smoke) and then test positive, even if the individual never used drugs. And, a 1997 National Institute for Drug Abuse hair test study showed a "significant ethnic bias" in their tests for cocaine.

In African-American hair there is a significant amount of melanin, which acts as a binding site for cocaine. That means, with equal exposure, we don't pass and they (whites) do.

Because forensic toxicologists have found it to be racially biased, Representative Cynthia

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