COMMENTARY

Examining Juneteenth: Are Blacks totally free?

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Back in 1865, General Gordon Granger brought the news of freedom to the brothers and sisters in Texas. He told them they were free by reading the following: ''The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.''

Now in 2003, we still have "generals" telling us we are free, with qualifications of course, similar to those in General Order #3 which Granger read to the people in 1865. The slaves were encouraged to stay with their "former masters" and "work for wages;" they were also advised they would not be allowed to "collect at military posts" or be supported in "idleness." (I wonder if Whites folks were ever idle during that time?) In other words, slaves were told they were free, but they were given no means with which to be free, no back pay for all their years of labor, and no land, the very basis of wealth in this country, especially in 1865, on which they could start a new life. They were advised, however, to stay with their former masters and work for them, thus continuing to create wealth for those who had enslaved them.

That reminds me of the 13th Amendment that also supposedly freed the slaves, but says, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Did you notice that little word, "except?" Another qualifier. There's always a qualifier, folks, always a qualifier.

The problem can be appropriately couched in the words of Martin Delany. He said, " No one ever frees a slave; a slave must free himself." It's too bad that in 2003 we still have not fully absorbed nor acted upon that message of freedom from our Elder. Yes, there is a qualifier in that message as well, a qualifier based on Black people gaining our psychological freedom.

Now, let's get back to Juneteenth. It is a freedom celebration, right? Well, the local newspaper in my hometown had an article titled, "Locals pitch in to save festival." It dealt with the 16-year-old Juneteenth Celebration, and described a desperate event organizer scrambling to raise money to save the festival. "I was petrified," said Lydia Morgan, event organizer, obviously at the thought of Juneteenth not being held because of a lack of funding. How much funding? $12,000.

That's right, $12,000 is all it costs to celebrate Black Freedom Day–Juneteenth in Cincinnati, Ohio. The article went on to describe how a Black-owned radio station, Kroger, and UPS stepped in to save the day. (By the way, lest you think I am just

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Black America: Support Immigrant Freedom Ride

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Beginning in late September buses will pull out of cities around the United States converging first on Washington, D.C., and ultimately arriving in New York City on Oct. 4 for a massive rally at Flushing Meadow Park. In a dramatic gesture not seen on such a scale since the 1960s, activists for immigrant rights will traverse this country raising awareness of the plight facing immigrant workers. This effort is very timely, badly needed and one that African-Americans must support.

Immigrants of color have historically been poorly received in the United States. This has been true whether one speaks of Asians in the late 19th century and again later in the 20th century; Mexicans from the late 19th century and on; Cape Verdeans in the 19th century and then again in the late 20th century; or Haitians from the late 20th century until now. The list could go on and cover a multitude of immigrants of color who have been subject to vile and inhumane treatment upon arrival in the United States. In each case the immigrants were not simply subject to the wrath of nativist sentiment from White America, but they additionally faced the toxin of racism, including lynchings, segregation, perpetual job discrimination, and a basic denial of human rights.

The increased entry of immigrants of color into the United States has raised the concerns of some on the White political Right that the texture of the nation is changing too quickly, too dramatically and too colorfully. Nevertheless, immigrants and their allies have fought an on-going battle to have their rights respected, with some periodic breakthroughs.

What is all too often missed in discussions about immigration is that the massive global flow of people over the last 20 years is the direct result of the legacy of colonialism, wars and economic crises driven overwhelming by governments and corporations in Europe and North America. One cannot, for example, separate Latino immigration to the United States from the reality of U.S.-supported dictatorial regimes that did not serve the interests of those countries and their citizens. One cannot separate this immigration from wars that the U.S. government helped to incite or inflame, as in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, only three examples from a much longer list.

To put it more bluntly, immigrants in huge numbers come to the United States for a better life precisely because the U.S. and U.S.-supported regimes have made life in their countries of origin often inhospitable. Thus, it is ironic that once these immigrants arrive at our borders they are treated with no sense of dignity and no acknowledgement of the complicity of the U.S. government in their plight.

Another reality is that the U.S. economy could not work without immigrants, who play a critical role in enlarging the workforce. Additonally, many immigrant workers are central to the lower-end jobs in the economy, jobs that many non-immigrants will not take (or from which non-immigrants are excluded).

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Affirmative action foes played race card in Supreme Court

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Race played a larger part in the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision Monday to uphold the University of Michigan's law school affirmative action program than most people realize.

Even while rejecting the undergraduate admissions process that automatically awards 20 points to people of color by a vote of 6-3, a majority of the judges ruled that race could still be a factor in admissions as long as it is not given too much weight.

In addition to awarding extra points to underrepresented groups, the undergraduate admissions counselors also automatically awarded 20 points to all scholarship athletes, it provided 20 points to economically disadvantaged White applicants and awarded extra points to applicants from geographically underrepresented areas of Michigan.

The cases were being heard by an institution that has upheld White supremacy throughout most of its existence. Of the nine justices, seven were appointed by Republican presidents.

In 1857, the pre-Civil War court ruled in the Dred Scott decision that slaves were "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect."

The "Plessy v. Ferguson" decision in 1896 upheld "separate but equal" facilities for the races. And, it wasn't until 1954, that the Supreme Court repudiated segregation and ordered the desegregation of public schools in "Brown v. Board of Education." In the "Bakke" case 25 years ago, it ruled that race could be used as a "plus factor" when evaluating college applicants.

Congress, on the other hand, had a much better record, enacting the first Civil Rights Act in 1866. Two years later, it passed the 14th Amendment to the constitution, which was ratified to protect former slaves from the wrath of Southern lawmakers. The amendment prevents states from denying or abridging the rights of any citizens and forbids any state from denying any person "life, liberty or property, without due process of law."

In its pleadings, the Center for Individual Rights (CIR), the Right-wing law group that brought the two suits against the University of Michigan on behalf of rejected White applicants, has turned the 14th Amendment on its head. Instead of protecting African-Americans, as originally designed, CIR has used the amendment to argue, in this case, that White applicants to Michigan were not being afforded equal protection under the law.

They've adopted that tactic even though some Whites with lower grades and test scores than the plaintiffs were admitted to the University of Michigan.

Moreover, as the University of Michigan acknowledges on its Web site, "Every year some White students are admitted with lower test scores and lower GPAs than some minority students who are rejected."

That notwithstanding, the CIR only chose to attack the affirmative action programs that primarily benefit people of color. Because the only issue before the court pertained to race, the justices did not rule on other aspects of the University of Michigan admissions policies that also award extra points.

Of course, if African-Americans were getting as much "preferential treatment" as CIR professes, they would represent more than 8.1 percent of the undergraduate student body and 6.7 percent of the law students.

CIR has attempted to put a soft edge on its crude actions by hijacking the language and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, even to the point of claiming they are acting in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The fact that nothing could be further from the truth has not prevented them to trying to perpetrate that hoax on the American public.

The Center for Individual Rights has a Right-wing political agenda and they attacked the Michigan programs for political reasons. Lee Colorinos, author of "The Assault on Diversity: An Organized Challenge to Racial and Gender Justice," describes CIR as, "perhaps the most politically extreme of the groups challenging affirmative action, civil rights, and racial equality in the United States today."

CIR is the same group that represented Cheryl Hopwood to get affirmative action outlawed in Texas and brought a similar, though unsuccessful, suit against the University of Washington. Monday's ruling supercedes previous efforts to outlaw affirmative action in Texas and California.

George W. Bush is expected to appoint one and possibly two Supreme Court justices before leaving office. While campaigning for president, he declared that any appointment he makes to the court will be in the mold of Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, the two most conservative members of the conservative court. Bush is also pushing through a group of ultra conservative judges at the lower levels. When they rise through the ranks, Monday's victory may eventually be a fleeting one.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.