

New Orleans serving racial bias with smile

By George E. Curry
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Just mention New Orleans and festive images of the French Quarter immediately come to mind. Beneath that veneer, however, lies plain, old-fashioned discrimination, now disguised as Jim Crow, Esquire.

New Year's Eve, one of the most festive times in America's most festive city, should have alerted New Orleans officials that there was a problem. Levon Jones, a student at Georgia Southern University, and a friend entered Razzo Bar and Patio, a popular nightclub in the French Quarter. The friend was denied admission supposedly because he did not meet the club's dress code. A fight broke out and Jones was thrown to the ground.

According to authorities, three bouncers pounced on Jones. One pushed down on his back, a second held his legs and a third gripped him in a headlock for 12 minutes, causing Jones to suffocate. They have been charged with negligent homicide and are awaiting trial.

After such a high-profiled, racially-tinged incident, one would think that employees working in tourism-related industries would, at least for the time being, be more sensitive in how they interact with customers.

Following the choking death, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center dispatched interracial teams of researchers to 28 bars on Bourbon Street, which feature live music or a disc jockey. The testers often entered the same bars just minutes apart but did not receive the same treatment.

Of the clubs tested, 40 percent charged African-Americans more for drinks than White patrons. In one club, for example, a White man bought a Long Island iced tea for \$7.50, while the Black man was charged \$9. Another 10 percent of the clubs told Blacks there was a minimum-drink rule, but didn't say that to Whites. And 7 percent of the clubs told Blacks that there was a dress code while not holding Whites to the same standard.

"I knew racism exists, but I thought I'd never encountered it before," one of the Black testers told the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. "When I found out the results, it took a good five minutes to sink in and I was hurt."

Subtle discrimination is not limited to clubs and bars, says James Perry, executive director of the Fair Housing Action Center.

"Here's a case we had in New Orleans,"



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he told *New Orleans City Business* magazine. "An African-American male went to rent an apartment and was told that the rent was \$575. He had seen it advertised for \$500. So, he was kind of concerned. We sent two males—one African-American and one White male—to rent the same apartment. The only

difference in their profiles was that one was White (and) the other one was Black. They told our African-American tester that the rent was \$575 a month and that there was a \$200 deposit and a \$75 application fee. They told our White tester that the rent was \$475 a month, that there was no application fee, they didn't mention a deposit, and then they said that they were running a special...where you can get \$200 off your first month's rent."

Those are but two examples of Jim Crow, Esquire—or what I call discrimination with a smile.

When I was on a recent speaking engagement, a young African-American told me that racism is a thing of the past. I've had others—both Black and White—to contend that they are color blind.

Rather than immediately dismissing such assertions as nonsense, I resist the temptation and share with them my special research. When I arrive in cities for speaking engagements, I like to pick up the "personals" that people consult for dating. Without fail, there are numerous ads placed by people seeking companionship that specify they are interested only in meeting certain White people. They could be going out with an ax murderer—but they are concerned about whether that person is White. That's hardly being color-blind.

The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center made a dozen recommendations to the city for addressing the problems, including linking liquor licenses to records of non-discrimination, requiring nightclub and bar owners to undergo diversity training, devoting more resources to prosecuting discrimination, and insisting that bouncers let law enforcement officials handle unruly situations.

The report did not make recommendations to the Black tester who said he did not know discrimination existed, prior to his participating in the Bourbon Street experiment. Discrimination exists, whether you recognize it or not. The solution is to eradicate racial discrimination, not pretend it does not exist.

George E. Curry is editor the of NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Filibuster storm brews over female nominees

By Allison Stevens
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (Women's eNEWS) — In their campaign to compel approval of the administration's judicial nominees, Republicans are focusing on two female nominees.

The strategy, say insiders, will allow Republicans to paint Democrats who block votes on the nominations of either Janice Rogers Brown or Priscilla Owen—two conservative women who have been nominated to appellate court positions—as sexist.

Republicans are also planning to play the religion card against Democrats. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist spoke to a telecast organized by the Family Research Council and originating from a Fund Bush's nominees as being "anti-faith." President Bush appointed Brown and Owen to federal appellate courts in the 108th Congress, but Democrats blocked votes on their nominations, citing objections to their records on reproductive rights, civil rights, workers' rights and consumer rights.

Democrats also filibustered eight other appellate court nominees because they said their records were also out of the mainstream. They did so by preventing Republicans from reaching the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture, or end debate on the nominations. This procedure is a kind of filibuster—a maneuver senators use to stall or block legislation.

At the beginning of his second term, Bush re-nominated Brown and Owen, as well as many other nominees who were blocked in the 108th Congress. Now, insiders say, Republicans might use a floor vote on either woman's nomination as a launching pad to change the chamber's rules to ban filibusters of judicial nominations.

If successful, the strategy would have enormous implications for women's repro-

ductive rights because the minority party would lose its ability to block nominations to the federal bench, including the Supreme Court.

"If they eliminate the filibuster, the Senate will most likely rubber stamp whomever George Bush sends to them," said Vicki Saporta, president of the National Abortion Federation, an association of abortion providers based in Washington, D.C.

Saporta said two of the administration's "model" justices are Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia. Both, she said, have said extensively that they are opposed to the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion and would vote to overturn it.

"That is the type of justice that would most likely be sent to the Supreme Court, which is not what Americans want," Saporta said.

With new anti-choice allies on the court, many legal advocates believe the landmark decision legalizing abortion would be highly likely to be reversed.

Brown, an African-American who serves on the California Supreme Court, and Owen, a White conservative who sits on the Texas Supreme Court, "would be good ones to move forward with," said Sen. George Allen, a Virginia Republican who served as the head of the National Republican Senatorial Committee in the last Congress.

Both deserve up-or-down floor votes, Allen said, because both are highly qualified. He added that Democrats have "leaned over backwards" to deny both women—and a number of other appellate court nominees—their right to floor consideration.

Critics, however, charge that Republicans are focusing on Brown and Owen because they are women. If Democrats oppose their nominations, goes the suspicion, Republicans

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to establish more businesses, more rotating credit societies, more vertically integrated economic initiatives, and they continue to buy their own stuff from one another—no matter the cost, because they understand that the circular effect of money means "what goes around comes around."

The money they spend with their brothers and sisters will eventually return to them. They have no need or interest in fighting or switching.

If you want to keep fighting against the most powerful, most corrupt, most uncompassionate, most ruthless, most greedy, and the most arrogant economic force in the world, then you go right ahead. I have switched.

If you modern-day Black overseers, who are still suffering from the Stockholm Syndrome, want to keep running games on your

brothers and sisters by telling us to keep quiet and by selling us disingenuous "programs" that are kept alive by our dysfunction, there is absolutely nothing I can do about that.

But, if you happen to be one of those "hard fighting soldiers" we like to sing about on Sunday mornings, ready and willing to get serious about your economic freedom, ready to make the sacrifices necessary to be respected, like Booker T. suggested, and if you are unafraid of what White folks think about you standing up with and for your people, just as others do for their people, then you must switch rather than fight.

Switch to Black-owned businesses. Switch to Black-made products. Switch to Black-owned media. If you are serious, switch to Black.

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lize foreign assistance, have trained money managers, and etc.—they would probably not need it.

In his most recent book, "The End of Poverty," Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia has written that, essentially, poor people need direct financial investment in their societies to build economic infrastructure, to pay for

urgent health issues, to construct universal education, to perfect their governmental systems and the like. Then, he says, they will be able to more successfully deal with their own poverty by their connection to the international economic system. We know that he is right because it has taken 50 years to cut the official Black poverty rate in half in America, and we live in the most economi-

cally dynamic society in the world.

What I wonder is how many Black people have to die while the leading countries in the world and the major international institutions come to terms with how to really deal with poverty. And while many of them may be misguided, there exists in the United States a real resentment about dealing with such problems right now, even a feeling that the

poor have made these problems themselves so they have to fix them.

Poverty is a drain on the ability of countries in the global system to construct "democracy," to stop fighting and killing each other, in short, to stop calling on the Ron resources in states and institutions to deal with the results of poverty. Why does this strategy make sense?