

OUR VIEW Regression

Kramer is a racist. By now, you've either heard about or seen comedian Michael Richards' racist, profanity-laced tirade at the LA Laugh Factory. Richards, who played the dimwitted Kramer on the cult classic *Seinfeld*, lost it when two African-American audience members told him he wasn't funny.

"Fifty years ago we'd have you upside down with a f**king fork up your ass," Richards frothed. "You can talk, you can talk, you're brave now motherf**ker. Throw his ass out. He's a nigger! He's a nigger! He's a nigger! A nigger, look, there's a nigger!"

But Richards wasn't done yet: "They're going to arrest me for calling a Black man a nigger."

If we needed a reminder that racism is alive in well and that it remains as pernicious (if hidden) now as it was vicious and blatant back then, Richards provided just such a reminder. He's tried to make amends for his rant, saying he is "sick" over it. But you can't make amends for prejudice. What he should be sick over is that he slipped up and exposed his bigotry for the world to see.

These types of incidents are part of a familiar pattern in American race relations. For every step forward, we seem to take two steps back. More companies than ever before are inculcating diversity into their corporate DNA and working diligently to level the playing field, shatter the glass ceiling and give all people a chance to climb that professional ladder. Yet affirmative action continues to have a huge target on its back. This month, Michigan joined California and Washington as states that have banned affirmative action in the public arena based on race, gender and ethnic status. No doubt emboldened by these victories, expect affirmative action opponents like Ward Connerly to launch a fresh round of attacks.

One step forward, two steps back.

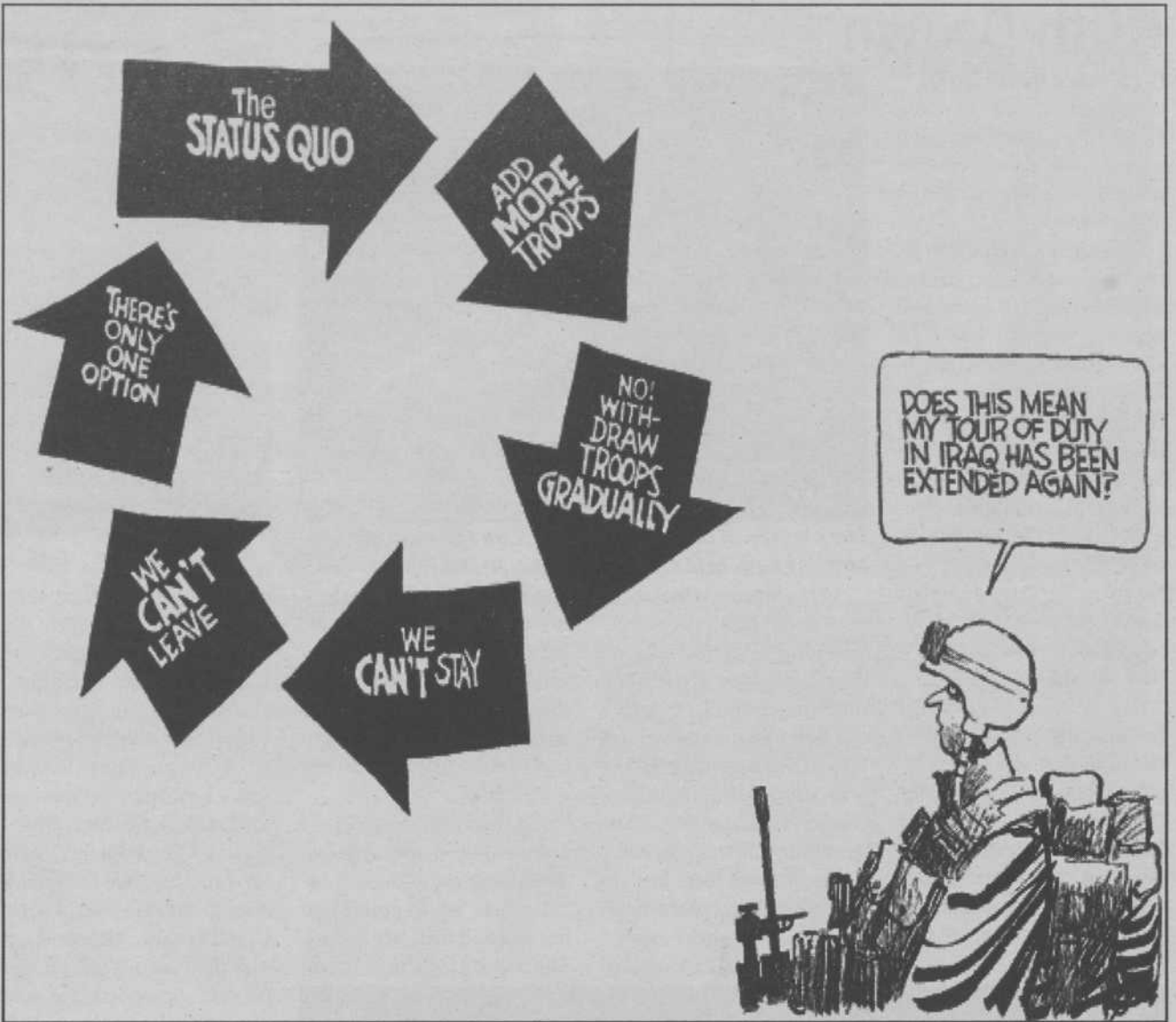
Another area of regression: housing. Though more people are off welfare and into jobs than previous years, the poor in many major cities are finding themselves in a quandary. Their communities are now hot property, eyed by investors looking to gentrify previously undesirable zip codes with condos, lofts and homes. In some cases, longtime residents have been given first dibs on the new properties. However, many of them won't be able to afford the property taxes, so they'll have to end up leaving. Compound this with the fact that the Bush administration has cut nearly \$1.5 billion in funding from the federal Housing and Urban Development department. What was supposed to be a positive thing has turned into a negative.

One step forward, two steps back.

Democratic House Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi, the first female speaker of the House, recently drew fire for (unsuccessfully) endorsing longtime ally John Murtha as majority speaker (Steny Hoyer won the nod.) This move is important because Pelosi's shown that she backs her friends. And the Congressional Black Caucus hasn't been a friend to the San Francisco liberal. More than any other group, the CBC stands poised to gain significant power with the Democrats' takeover of the House and Senate. Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., could get the chair of the House Judiciary committee; Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., the chair of the House Intelligence committee; Charlie Rangel, D-N.Y., the chair of the Ways and Means committee, Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., the chair of the Homeland Security committee, and Juanita Millender-McDonald, D-Calif., the chair of the House Administration Committee. This is in addition to at least 15 subcommittee chairs could go to CBC. But the group shouldn't count its chickens before they hatch. As CBC Chairman Mel Watt, D-S.C., recently told *Time* magazine: "We can be a lot more aggressive than we have been. You may not see immediate results, but I think you'll start to see some [votes] on some of those issues."

Certainly if the CBC gains don't materialize, it will be one step forward, two steps back.

We can't pretend attitudes like Richards', Connerly's and Pelosi's don't exist. We must champion Black America. If not, we risk nullifying any forward advancement and progress we have made.



Lott has record of racism

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After expressing support four years ago for Senator Strom Thurmond's pro-segregation 1948 presidential campaign, then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott went on Black Entertainment Television to repudiate himself, calling his comments insensitive, repugnant and inexcusable.

Lott was apologizing for having said at Thurmond's 100th birthday party: "I want to say this about my state. When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years."

When interviewed on BET by Ed Gordon, Lott, in an unsuccessful attempt to save his Senate leadership position, said he was wrong to have voted against establishing a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday and said that he now favors affirmative action "across the board."

He said, "As majority leader, I can help move an agenda that would hopefully be helpful to African-Americans and minorities of all kinds and all Americans."

The groveling didn't stop there. "I'm trying to find a



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way to deal with the understandable hurt that I've caused," he told Gordon. "I obviously made a mistake, and I'm going to do everything I can do to admit that and deal with it and correct it. And that's what I hope the people will give me a chance to do."

And what has Lott done to "correct it"?

Nothing. On the NAACP Legislative Report Card for the 109th Congress (Jan. 4, 2005-Dec. 22, 2005), Lott received an "F," voting in favor of issues supported by the NAACP only 5 percent of the time.

Instead of contrasting Lott's words with his record, the media has been covering Lott's one-vote victory margin to become Senate Minority Whip as a story of redemption and vindication.

An Associated Press headline proclaimed, "Sweet Redemption: Republicans return Lott to Senate Leadership." The New York

Times called it an "unlikely study in professional redemption." To its credit, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that Lott has "a credibility problem on issues of race."

In describing Lott's noxious comments, some outlets were especially timid. For example, the Associated Press gingerly described them this way: "At Senator Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday bash, Lott had saluted the South Carolina senator with comments later interpreted as support for Southern segregationist policies."

Although Lott denied being a racist on BET, his record arguably supports such a conclusion. Both MediaMatters.com and Fair.org, media monitoring groups, have Trent's civil rights record posted on their sites, pointing out:

- In 1981, Lott filed a "friend of the court" brief opposing the IRS's decision to terminate Bob Jones University's tax exempt status because it prohibited interracial dating.

- In 1982, Lott voted against the extension of the Voting Rights Act.

- In 1983, he voted against creating a national holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

- He voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1990, a measure that reversed five Supreme Court rulings that would have made it more difficult for people of color to win job discrimination lawsuits.

- In 1992, he spoke to the Council of Conservative Citizens, a successor to the White Citizens' Council of the 1960s, saying "the people

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