

Forum

Immigrants face racial discrimination

Now that a new commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service has finally been confirmed, it is hoped that the cries of thousands of persons seeking immigration or an adjustment in their INS status will receive timely and fair responses.

There have been many allegations concerning racism and discrimination involving the process of immigration to the United States, particularly for those persons from Latin-American, African and other nations from the developing world. In addition, there has been gross discrimination aimed particularly at undocumented workers who labor throughout the nation under often difficult and inhuman standards.

The news from the city of Los Angeles concerning current U.S. immigration laws and the plight of undocumented workers sheds a ray of hope for thousands. Los Angeles has taken the lead on this issue by establishing a formal program to help find jobs for day laborers, most of whom are undocumented workers whom the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service would like to deport. Most of the workers in this pilot program are Hispanic.

Having a job is critical to making it in this society. Despite the myth of laziness of the immigrant community, thousands of persons come to the United States not to steal, not to loathe, but to make an honest day's

work and to make a contribution to society. The whole concept of "illegal aliens" has been used to systematically discriminate against certain immigrants, again particularly those immigrants who are non-European racial

We agree with many immigration rights organizations that all laborers in this nation should be treated with dignity and respect. We caution the INS not to attack the outreach of the city of Los Angeles to members of its



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BENJAMIN CHAVIS JR.

and ethnic.

According to *The New York Times* the city of Los Angeles plan to facilitate the finding of jobs for day laborers "is technically legal despite its clear challenge to the 1986 Immigration Law, under which it is illegal to hire illegal aliens." In many cities the INS has carried out raids on sites where day laborers gather. To be sure, the present policies and laws on immigration need to be made more humane, and the enforcement of present immigration restrictions needs to be done even-handedly and fairly without racial discrimination.

Many cities -- particularly in Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York and in California -- will be monitoring the Los Angeles experiment. The success of this project may provide a unique bridge to change some of the other discriminatory practices of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

community who simply want to work and have decent living conditions. We agree with the Coalition for Humane Immigration Rights, based in Los Angeles, as they have challenged the hypocrisy and racism of current U.S. immigration procedures. Linda Mitchell of the coalition has stated, "you can either hunt them down or you can integrate them into your community . . . if you deny them health care, schooling and right to work, you will just further impoverish them."

Now is the time for all Americans to work harder to make this society not a place divided by racist stereotypes and institutionalized alienation but a place where we all can work together and live together to improve the lot of all humanity.

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ.

Is the glass half full or half empty?

The victories earned by Afro-Americans in last week's elections nationwide have brought mixed reviews from some of the majority media, but one has to wonder if some of the analyses are more telling than what is being analyzed.

The close-but-historic triumphs of L. Douglas Wilder and David N. Dinkins perhaps have received the most scrutiny because Lt. Gov. Wilder, D-Va., was elected this nation's first Afro-American governor and Mr. Dinkins, a Democrat, became the first Afro-American to be elected mayor of New York City.

Rather than focus on the significance of the elections themselves, apparently many in the majority media preferred to focus on one negative -- if it accurately can be called negative -- aspect of the victories. They call it "White Flight" during crunch time.

Going into Election Day, both Mr. Wilder and Mr. Dinkins had been projected to win their races rather easily in that each held comfortable leads in various polls. Exit polling on Election Day appeared to confirm earlier projections. Mr. Wilder was winning by 10 percentage points, and Mr. Dinkins was winning by more than five, depending on the poll.

Actual election results, however, showed that the margins of victory were much smaller. Mr. Dinkins won by 2 percent and Lt. Gov. Wilder's margin was by fewer than 8,000 votes, less than one-half of 1 percent. In fact, Republican challenger Marshall Coleman has called for a recount

in the Virginia race.

Why the projection and polling errors?

One theory is that some white voters lied when they completed their exit poll forms, saying they voted for the Afro-American candidate rather than risk telling the truth and being

errors. "Ever since the highly respected Field Survey incorrectly predicted Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley would beat Republican George Deukmejian in the California gubernatorial race in 1982, pollsters have been concerned that a hidden racial component could skew results of polls involving



AGAINST THE GRAIN

By ROOSEVELT WILSON

accused of voting against the candidate because of his race.

Another is that when it came time to pull the lever, some whites simply could not force themselves to vote for an Afro-American over a white. Of course, there is also the usual sampling error theory.

No matter the reason, the projection and polling errors became a major issue for some, overshadowing the great strides this nation made with the election results.

Sandy Grady, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, wrote: "Wilder made history, all right -- a disputed victory in the closest major election of Virginia's 200 years. And instead of the triumph of Virginia's color-free politics, Wilder's narrow edge left the taint of secret racism."

Though he reached no harsh conclusion like Grady, Chris Black of the *Boston Globe* placed no less significance on the projection and polling

black candidates," he wrote.

Well, lah de dah. So the elections were close. That's happened before. Pollsters were wrong in their projected margins of victory. That's happened before. Perhaps the election results show a hidden racial component. That, too, has happened before.

An Afro-American was elected governor of Virginia and another was elected mayor of New York City. That has never happened before.

So one could view the results of last week's elections as psychologists say we view a glass containing half its capacity of water. The pessimists view it as half empty. The optimists view it as half full. Let the majority media call it what they will.

For most Afro-Americans, our cup runneth over.

Roosevelt Wilson teaches journalism at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Fla.

Our civic duty: Holding officials accountable

I am always amazed and disturbed by the number of people who do not vote or stay in touch with their elected officials, yet claim to care about our children and community. When asked to contact a representative about a given issue, they respond by admitting that they do not even know who their representatives are.

If you don't even know who they are, you probably have absolutely no idea of what your school board and city council members, your representatives and senators, are doing in your name.

This problem cuts across all segments of our community. Otherwise sophisticated people seem to assume that local, state and federal officials will simply know the right thing to do, even if we do not tell them what we do or do not want. Well, they had better remember Frederick Douglass' advice that "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will."

Our failure to communicate with

CHILDWATCH

By MARIAN W. EDELMAN

those we have elected is particularly hard on our children, who suffered \$10 billion in budget cuts during the Reagan years. Corporations, public institutions, industries and powerful interest groups all hire full-time professional lobbyists to register their concerns. Even more significantly, many donate large sums of money to candidates -- sometimes to both candidates in political campaigns -- in order to ensure that their interests are kept in mind. Almost every major industry has formed political action committees, or PACs, to provide campaign contributions and assure protection of corporate interests.

Some people argue that any lack of involvement on the part of Afro-Americans should be excused because we are relative newcomers to the political process. Such commentators argue that it is unfair to compare us

with other groups that have long-established political contacts because the time since the 1965 passage of the Voting rights Act is only slightly longer than a generation and we need more time to politically mature.

I disagree. There is no excuse for our not voting. Two hundred years have passed since the ratification of a Constitution that excluded our ancestors from citizenship. More than 120 years have passed since the 14th and 15th amendments were supposed to have assured us equal protection and the right to vote. The fact that we have only been able to freely exercise our voting rights for 24 years should make us more, not less, inclined to participate than others.

Every single office holder expects to hear from his or her constituents, and equates silence with apathy. If we are to fulfill our responsibility to our children and the Afro-American community, we must get more involved in the governmental process.



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