

Forum

The High Cost Of Racism

Study after study shows that racism costs the nation billions in lost productivity and social disorganization. But all those studies put together will sometimes have less effect on the discriminators than a few well-placed lawsuits or public scandals.

Just recently, for example, we had the highly-publicized incident where the owner of the Cincinnati Reds, Marge Schott, was subjected to public humiliation and suspension from organized baseball for a year.



TO BE EQUAL

By JOHN E. JACOB

Her peers in the executive suites of organized sports probably breathed a sigh of relief that it was she who was caught, not them.

It's generally known that racial slurs are common among baseball's top brass, although it seems that Schott's comments were a lot more colorful than most, as well as being directed at just about every available racial and minority ethnic group around.

But I'm less exercised about what Ms. Schott said how she acted — virtually barring African Americans and other minorities from jobs in her organization.

She had to grudging "hire African American players since no team could win without them. But while those black and minority players drew fans and enriched the team's coffers, their brothers and sisters were denied employment opportunities in the front office and in the dugout.

As part of the "price" of settling the scandal caused by her slurs, the Reds reportedly have instituted an affirmative action program, and they now have a Latino manager.

Ironically, the ultimate result is to strengthen the Reds organization since it can now draw business talent, as well as playing talent, from a more diverse population.

But organized sports can't take refuge in handing out light punishments to individuals bought in public scandals, for the real issue is fair hiring and promotion practices.

Professional sports are big business. If major companies can find, train and promote minorities throughout their organizations, so

can baseball and football teams. The net effect of the Schott scandal is healthy — it sensitizes people to racism in high places and forces a closer look at the discriminatory hiring patterns that pervade professional sports.

If momentary public embrace is the price

organized baseball has paid for Ms. Schott's racism, some companies are finding that racism has an immediate monetary cost, as well.

While the Reds' owner was suspended, a court awarded \$105 million to African American victims of job discrimination by Shoney's, inc, the restaurant chain.

Not only does Shoney's have to cough up that large sum, it also will be under court supervision for ten years to ensure that it adheres to fair employment policies and practices.

According to testimony, the former chief of the company was so prejudiced that when he visited the company's restaurants managers told blacks employees to hide until he left.

The company used color-coded employment applications to track the race of applicants, and when blacks were hired they were stuck in kitchen jobs and denied promotions.

The court's decision sends a signal to other companies that discriminate — racism has real bottom line costs that no company can afford.

It also has costs the nation can't afford — huge costs to productivity and to the social fabric. America won't be able to compete successfully if it refuses to make full use of the potential and the abilities of all of its people.

And that reality holds for a ball club, a restaurant chain, a multinational giant, and the total economy. Racism costs, and even in 1993 that lesson still has to be learned by too many employers and citizens.

Support ESPY's Empowerment

Times are changing and inside of at least one federal department there is a "brother" who is taking care of business in behalf of "the least of these." Secretary Mike Espy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced his intention to help lead the way for the "empowerment" of millions of people who are trapped in the deepening pit of poverty in the United States.

From the Delta of Mississippi, Secretary Espy has already distinguished himself as an effective administrator who cares about the poor. Yet, Espy's care about the poor goes beyond sentimentality. He has correctly stated — in our opinion, more clearly than most that the question is not how to help the poor, but how the help eliminate the institutionalized poverty and discrimination that keeps the poor in the status of being poor.



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS, JR.

was one of the few members of Congress who championed the cause of those in poverty. His Mississippi roots and experience in the struggle for justice and empowerment have helped to steer his vision in the right direction.

As Secretary of Agriculture, Espy has supervision over the programs involving food stamps, feeding programs for pregnant women and new mothers, school lunches, and rural development projects as well as many other important programs. We believe that Espy will bring a new and more constructive administration of these programs.

Again the issue is how to reduce the number of those in poverty and work over the long term toward the goal of eliminating poverty. When leaders of this new administration do or say something that appears to be on the right track it is important to let them know.

Espy has shown that he is a leader who is sensitive to the needs of others and that the same time he has the courage to challenge our community to be more involved in the long term struggle toward full empowerment and development. Now is the time to move forward and regain some of the progress that was dismantled by Reagan-Bush.

Doonesbury

BY G.B. TRUDEAU



This Week In Black History
 Pan-African Congress, organized by W.E.B. Du Bois, met at Grand Hotel, Paris. There were fifty-seven delegates — sixteen from the United States and fourteen from Africa — from sixteen countries and colonies. Blaise Diagne of Senegal was elected president and Du Bois was named secretary.

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