

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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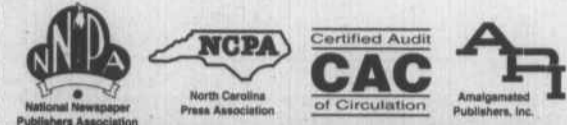
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The justices of the U.S. Supreme Court

One-strike housing policy is wrong

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to let stand the government's extreme "one strike and you're out" eviction policy. Under this policy, innocent family members of people who have used drugs can be evicted from public housing, regardless of whether the family member was aware of the drug use and regardless of whether the drug use took place in the public housing residence. The ruling applies to 1.2 million tenants of the nation's 3,200 public housing developments and means any individual may be held responsible for a guest's on-the-premises drug use even if the tenant has no knowledge of the violation or no control over a guest at the apartment.

Once again, we see that the poor and disenfranchised are held to a higher standard than people of means in this country. Evicting innocent people from their homes—many of them frail, elderly and living in poverty—and pushing them into homelessness is not a viable solution. The law should not punish people for being poor.

Recently, President Bush's 24-year-old niece was charged with trying to buy the prescription drug Xanax with a fraudulent prescription. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and his wife immediately issued a statement saying that they were deeply saddened by their daughter's troubles and they asked that the public respect their family's privacy. Soon thereafter, the governor's daughter entered a drug treatment program. Once completed, all criminal charges will be dismissed.

Contrast that scenario with the case of Pearlle Rucker, a 63-year-old great-grandmother who has lived in public housing in Oakland, Calif., since 1985. Rucker lives with her mentally disabled daughter, who was found in possession of illegal drugs three blocks from their apartment. As a result of her daughter's arrest, Rucker, her daughter, two grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter were faced with eviction in late 1997. No doubt Mrs. Rucker would also have preferred that this remain a "private family matter." However, faced with eviction, she did not have that luxury. She did not have a press secretary or spin doctors to issue a statement on behalf of her family. Instead, Rucker became the lead plaintiff in HUD v. Rucker, which was argued before the Supreme Court and decided last week.

Pearlle Rucker and her daughter and Gov. Bush and his daughter (and even President Bush and his twin daughters,) have more in common than the Bush brothers might like to admit. All are residents of public housing. Each has a daughter who at one time or another had legal problems with alcohol or drugs. But the consequences of their actions are vastly different: eviction for an elderly woman with no knowledge of her daughter's drug use, which took place away from the home, vs. medical treatment for a young woman with a history of substance abuse and addiction.

This one-strike policy is fundamentally wrong, but if it stands, and it is the law of the land as of today, then it be applied from the executive mansions to the poorest of public housing. This is not a single abhorrent case. For example, Herman Walker, 75 and disabled, had lived in public housing for 10 years when eviction proceedings began after his care-giver and two others allegedly were found with cocaine in his apartment. There are literally thousands of Mrs. Ruckers and Mr. Walkers across the United States.

This decision is sure to leave many of our most vulnerable citizens worried about losing what little they have because of the act of another, an act for which they neither had knowledge, nor participated in. At the same time, the president and the governor no doubt sleep soundly knowing that their children are receiving the medical help and support that they need with their addictions, and that the ample roofs over their heads are going to be there for the foreseeable future...or at least until the next election.

The law should not punish people for being poor. Keep hope alive!

—By: Jesse L. Jackson Sr.

Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/Push Coalition.

Clarification

The photos featured in last week's Chronicle Awards pictorial tabloid were taken by photographer Patrick Golding.



Letter(s) to the Editor

Article was great

To the Editor: I enjoyed your fine article about the 1950s Camels immensely. I graduated in 1953 and the article and the photos of the players brought back a lot of pleasant memories. Especially, "Head" Griffin—what a ferocious competitor. He was in a class all by himself...football and basketball. I played with him briefly, and vividly recall some of his "hits" in the brickyard at the old Atkins field.

I was also a member of the 1953 Atkins baseball team, coached by Cal Irwin. That was one of the first baseball teams the

school had fielded in years. After graduation, I played baseball in the service—Europe and California, where I presently reside. (also played a lot of baseball at Happy Hill Rec).

Thanks again for such a wonderful article. I happily shared it with my adult children. Surprisingly, they were rather impressed that Winston-Salem produced those kinds of athletes "back in the day."

Thaddeus Rice

TV station deserves kudos

To the Editor:

I would like to thank WXII News Channel 12 for their Putting the Piedmont Back to Work series. The station-wide promotion, which aired during the 2002 Winter Olympics and provided great coverage, was an unprecedented commitment to the unemployed and underemployed of our community and to the community colleges that provide the education and skills needed in today's workplace.

WXII focused on the unemployment problem in the Piedmont Triad by looking at what people can do to retrain themselves for new jobs by attending community colleges. Featuring

the career opportunities that exist in areas like health services and information technology and by communicating the many assistance programs available through community colleges, WXII provided hope for many of its viewers.

Forsyth Tech and the 11 other local community colleges in the station's viewing area are valuable resources for individuals who are looking for ways to get back into the work force, and we appreciate the help of WXII in spreading the word.

Dr. Gary M. Green
President
FTCC

Another fox guarding the hen house



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

If nothing else, the junior George Bush's recess appointment of Gerald Reynolds as assistant secretary of education for civil rights proved that he is a good student of history.

A decade ago the senior George Bush ignited one of the most bruising and ugly confirmation hearings in living memory when he nominated hyper-black conservative Clarence Thomas to succeed Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court.

Civil rights groups, women's groups and abortion rights groups stormed the confirmation hearings and filled the airwaves with sledgehammer assaults on Thomas for his retrograde turn-back-the-clock stance on civil rights, civil liberties, abortion rights, and his barely literate reading of constitutional law.

Thomas was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and confirmed by the Senate by the squeakiest of votes. Thomas has turned out to be an even more terrifying nightmare than even his fiercest opponents imagined. His neanderthal votes on prisoner rights, the death penalty, affirmative action and school prayer have often been the deciding votes in many recent 5-to-4 court decisions.

As for the senior Bush, the Thomas debacle hopelessly tarnished his political star and earned him the eternal damnation of civil rights leaders.

The recess appointment of Reynolds was the junior Bush's back-door ploy to avoid the same political embarrassment that befell his father. Reynolds will serve in the post until the current Senate ends its term in 2003.

The original idea behind the recess appointment was to give presidents a tool to get top officials into vital departments and offices during periods when Congress was out of session and unable to approve presidential appointments on a timely basis.

While Sen. Ted Kennedy and other Democrats slammed Bush for the appointment of Reynolds, it's hardly the first time a presi-

dent has made a recess appointment in order to slip his ideological clones and pals into office when Congress is out of session. During his one term, Jimmy Carter made 68 recess appointments, and the senior Bush made 77 during his term. Reagan topped the list with a whopping 243 appointments during his two terms.

But it was Clinton's 56 recess appointment, especially the appointment of Bill Lann Lee to run the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, that had Republican conservatives frothing. They accused Clinton of mocking the constitutional process by appointing liberal activists to government positions.

In the case of Reynolds, civil rights groups would have waged the same battle royal over his confirmation. Reynolds is a former staff counsel and board member of the hard-core right Center for New Black Leadership. This is the Washington, D.C., outfit that claims personal responsibility and free market solutions are the solutions to discrimination, and rails against civil rights leaders for promoting "racial victimization."

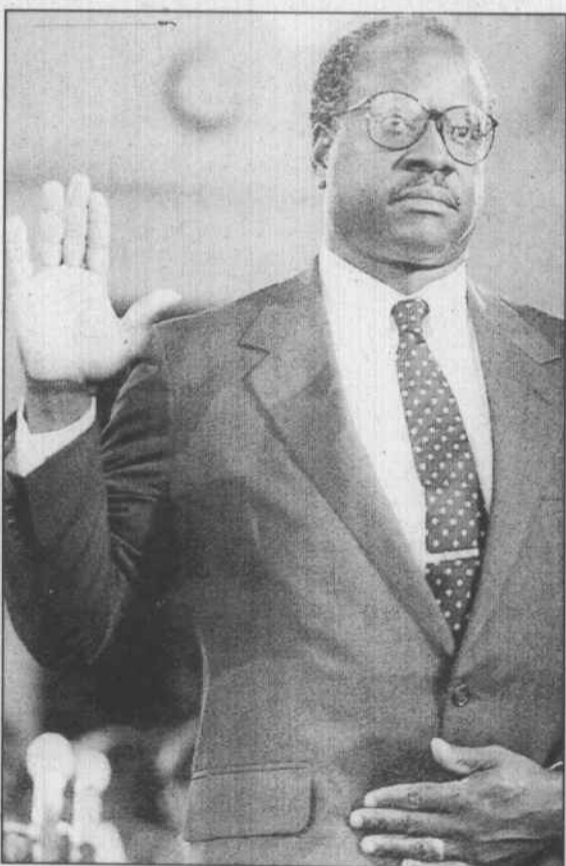
He's also a former legal analyst for the even harder-core right Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO). The CEO, founded in 1995 by notorious liberal baiter Linda Chavez, describes itself as the "premier voice" opposing affirmative action, bilingual education, and immigration reform. It has ferociously opposed vigorous enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities law, even urging Congress to narrow (i.e. gut) the law.

The instant Bush told the Senate in September 2001 that he intended to nominate Reynolds, more than two dozen civil rights groups, women's groups and disabled groups screamed foul.

And with good reason. Reynolds will oversee the Education Department's Office of Civil Rights. This is the unit responsible for ensuring that school districts, colleges and universities comply with civil rights laws.

Unlike the close-mouthed Clarence Thomas, Reynolds has publicly ranted against affirmative action and the ADA law. Nearly 60 percent of all discrimination complaints are for violations of the disability rules.

Reynolds has called the ADA



Clarence Thomas is sworn in during his controversial confirmation hearing.

a bad law that "would retard economic development in urban centers across the country."

In a 1997 Washington Times op-ed piece he slammed affirmative action as "a corrupt system of preferences, set aside and quotas against affirmative action," and branded civil rights leaders, "the civil rights industry." In a 1999 op-ed piece in the San Jose Mercury News, he harangued Jesse Jackson as a "race hustler" for leading a discrimination fight against Silicon Valley computer corporations.

At a Feb. 26 hearing, Ted Kennedy openly questioned his credentials to head the civil rights office and called his appointment a disaster for civil rights enforcement.

But Bush's deft move has rendered Kennedy's gripe a mute point. Reynolds is now in office and civil rights and disability rights advocates must keep a

hawk-like vigilance over Reynolds' actions to ensure that he isn't the total disaster for civil rights that Kennedy fears he'll be.

Meanwhile, Bush has served notice that he will do what other presidents have done and use recess appointments to get whom he wants in office, regardless of whether it angers civil rights groups and Democrats.

The next time he makes such an appointment, and there will almost certainly be a next time, civil rights groups must quickly blow the warning whistle before it's too late.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and columnist. Visit his news and opinion Web site: www.thehutchinsonreport.com. He is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black" (Middle Passage Press).