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Blacks still victims of racist stereotypes

By James E. Alsbrook
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Whether or not we like it, the fact remains that the progress black people have made since freedom came in 1865 is directly related to the distance we have moved from the lingering and devastating culture and effects of slavery.

Some high-achieving and upwardly mobile blacks have jettisoned the mental and physical chains of servitude, but the less-successful remain trapped and misdirected in a climate of negation, futility and hopelessness. The damaging effects of the slave culture have been contagious as well as continuous. They have touched all blacks generally but have singled out for special mistreatment those "darker than a brown paper bag."

When Paul Laurence Dunbar was a struggling young writer and elevator operator in Dayton, Ohio, he wrote good poetry and fiction in standard English but his writings were hard to sell. His skin was really black. He eventually met William Dean Howells, a prominent white editor and writer, who told Dunbar that Robert Burns and other European writers found fame and fortune by writing in nonstandard languages — cultural or regional dialects. He suggested that Dunbar do likewise.

Dunbar undoubtedly knew about Joel Chandler Harris and his best-selling "Uncle Remus" stories, so he decided to follow the lead of this Southern white Georgia native. "Uncle Remus" was a "good neegra" slave who entertained the young son of his master by telling "traditional Negro stories" in so-called slave dialect. These stories gave the white Harris prominence and wealth.

Young Dunbar decided to write in slave dialect also. He created stories, recitations and poems in slave language. Approval of Dunbar's dialect writings by the dominating white elite gave him an aura of "validity" and prestige, so he became a celebrity among many hero-needing black people. His writings were read and recited in "slave dialect" and were considered highlights of Negro culture in home entertainment, school assemblies, church programs and other public events. Slave talk and gestures were approved and considered funny.

Despite its evident implications of inherent black inferiority, the black stereotype was accepted and applauded by many unsophisticated black people.

Minstrel shows based on black buffoonery began in the 1840s with white comedians using burned cork to blacken their faces and white substances to make their mouths appear enormous and ridiculous. These white performers were applauded by whites, and soon some black entertainers used this black ridicule.

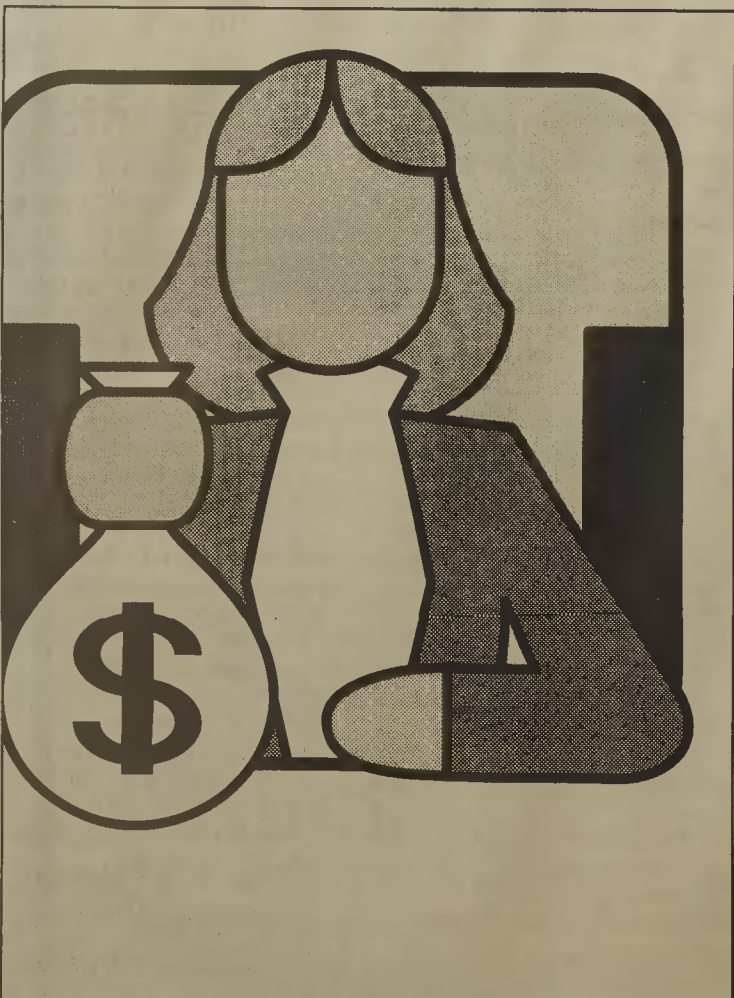
With allegedly "cultured" blacks reciting "Liza, Liza, bless de Lawd" and "Ah bees done gawn don theah," the stereotype of the ignorant, lazy, stupid black buffoon became popular even among many black people. They did not realize that stereotypes based on race do not exclude some, but instead they stain the worldwide image of the entire race. Millions of whites in the North and West never saw blacks in person and judged them by these phony stereotypes.

Black comedians Williams and Walker used black makeup as did other white and black entertainers who told "nigger" jokes with blackened faces. The black-faced stereotype represented ignorance, degradation, and laziness. That stereotype remains today but is generally associated with all black people and especially with dark-skinned black men.

Some blacks and many whites today love this trash that sends wrong messages around the world. These poisonous stereotypes are back-firing today on all black people and their children.

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Gambling on poverty in United States



Bernice P. Jackson



I do not consider myself a religious fundamentalist in any sense of that phrase. So I didn't understand the little nagging feeling of discomfort which was there as I began to think about gambling and whether I believe it is right or wrong.

I didn't understand what was bothering me until I read a recent article in Atlantic Monthly magazine which focused on Tunica County, Miss., the poorest county in the poorest state in the country. You remember Tunica County — the place which Jesse Jackson brought to the nation's attention following his 1984 campaign. The place he called "America's Ethiopia" and which had the eighth highest infant mortality rate in the nation, the fourth highest rate of births to teenaged mothers and the highest percentage of people living in poverty. The county where 70 percent of the adults had no

high school diploma and a quarter of the houses had no indoor plumbing. Tunica County, where there are also 30 millionaires and few, if any, poor whites, while most African Americans are poor.

Well, Tunica County is changing. It's not changing because industry has moved there. It's changing because casino gambling has moved there. Mississippi has become a casino-friendly state, with the lowest tax rates on casino gambling in the country, much lower licensing fees and a free market philosophy when it comes to regulation of casinos.

Indeed, Tunica County now has half the casino floor space of Atlantic City and the casinos earn \$60 million a month.

There are good results from casino gambling in Tunica County, to be sure. The percentage of residents receiving food stamps has dropped and the collection of child support payments has increased. But the reality is that most of the casino jobs have gone to people from outside the county and the county's unemployment rate is comparable to what it was in 1991. The reali-

ty is that almost every white child in Tunica county attends private school and virtually every African American child attends the public schools and the county has been resistant to using casino generated funds to improve the public schools.

Or take the case of the Back Bay Mission, located in Biloxi, Miss. Back Bay is a church-affiliated mission society which has ministered to the poor of Biloxi for 70 years. With the onset of casino gambling, Back Bay Mission has seen its buildings, which were located next to the casinos, taken over by the city and razed in order to widen the streets for the casinos.

Or take the case of East St. Louis, Ill., a city which is 98 percent African American and more than half of the population is officially unemployed. A city which has 3,000 abandoned buildings and where more than half of the children have elevated levels of lead poisoning. A city where the casinos generate something like \$500,000 a month for the city's tax coffers.

And what about gambling on native American reservations?

For many of these reservations the casinos are the only employer of note for their people and casino generated taxes allow the tribal councils to improve the reservations with educational institutions and human service agencies.

It seems to me that the poorest of the poor have been forced to invite casino gambling into their communities in order to survive. It's the only business our poorest communities can find willing to invest in them. And while casinos have positive effects on communities, they have negative ones as well.

It seems to me that we as a nation need to address the question of how to develop jobs for the poor, the poorly educated, the victims of racism and economic injustice. Casino gambling should not be the only choice a community can make for life.

The question of casino gambling is a complex one, with no easy answers. But some of us need to begin to ask the questions and grapple with finding some solutions.

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Newt and Bill meet at Gettysburg

D.G. Martin



It is just like Gettysburg. That thought jumped through my mind last week as our political leaders postured and re-postured during the federal budget debate.

I saw General Clinton, looking secure on high ground, drawing his opponents into an awful trap.

Then, General Gingrich, finally realizing starkly what was happening, suddenly drew back.

It is the mark of my generation, I guess. (One of my friends told me that he has read Shelby Foote's account of the Civil War several times — but only up to the description of the battle of Gettysburg.) We take the words of that long-ago and horrible war and try to match them

Clinton



to today's news. We can bring analogies of Civil War battles to the most unrelated situations.

Maybe my outdated way of

thinking can help us understand the political "in-fighting" about the federal budget. The drawn-out budget process began a year ago. Now we are already one-third of the way through the budget year — with no budget in sight.

Most of us don't understand the details. We only know that a great battle is threatened and that there are risks of great harm until the matter is settled.

If we use our Civil War lens to look at the budget battle, we see it as only one of many battles in a long war for control of our country. The November election battle is far more important than this year's budget battle in determining the war's ultimate victor.

That is what General Gingrich sees so clearly now. And what General Clinton has seen for months. The critical battle is in November. If General Gingrich won a skirmish in this Battle of the Budget, but gave up an advantage he needed to win in November, he would have no real victory.

Thinking about Gettysburg

again, let's say General Gingrich sees a big hole in General Clinton's army's front lines. General Gingrich sends his troops rushing through that hole, hoping to secure a quick victory. But, once through the lines, his troops find themselves surrounded by hills topped with all of General Clinton's artillery, which then sends down a barrage of shells that devastates the trapped Gingrich army.

It almost happened. General Gingrich and the Republican House majority almost made the mistake of breaking through. Pushing ahead to secure their version of the balanced budget, tax reductions, social reform, they thought they saw a great victory in the making.

So they rushed headlong at the opening in Clinton's lines — with abandon — towards the trap that General Clinton had set. They were afraid of nothing. Not closing down the government. Not a default on the credit of the United States.

And they worried nothing about the political consequences of pushing for quick cutbacks in programs for both the poor and the middle class-

es. They showed no concern that those people would be just beginning to see how much they were being hurt right about election time.

They were going to be trapped, right there surrounded by hills, and pounded by General Clinton's artillery.

Instead, General Gingrich pulled his troops back. It might have been a hard task. Some of his troops are anxious for battle now — and for victories. And they are not easily denied.

As he retreats to higher ground, General Gingrich gives up the temptation to try for all-out victory now. He will wait on the high ground — keeping the government open and the nation's credit good. He will make sure that the pain associated with budget cutbacks is deferred until after the election. And he holds back his army's greatest weapon — the dream of balancing the budget — to use in November's big battle.

You have to wonder how General Clinton feels now — shaking his head, thinking how close he came to trapping his opponent and watching General Gingrich take the high ground across the plains where the battle in November will surely take place — just like at Gettysburg.

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