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Black churches are still under attack

Bernice P. Jackson



I believe it was the artist Andy Warhol who was credited with the comment that everyone has their 15 minutes of fame. Many of us working on social justice issues have been keenly aware for years that the American public has a short attention span and will only deal with an issue for a brief period. Sadly, that seems to be the case for the burning of African American and multiracial churches.

A recent report released by the Center for Democratic Renewal, a nearly 20-year-old organization dedicated to researching, monitoring and analyzing hate groups, showed that churches are still burning, albeit at a much reduced rate, and that there is evidence of conspiracy on the part of some white supremacist groups, particularly in the South. But while 1996 was the year of headlines for the burning of black churches, 1997 seems to be year of media

silence about this ongoing problem.

Entitled, "The Fourth Wave: A Continuing Conspiracy to Burn Black Churches," the report shares CDR's deep concern about South Carolina, where there is evidence uncovered by the Justice Department of a conspiracy to burn black churches and where public promotion of such acts takes place, together with encouragement of other acts of violence by white supremacists for the purpose of starting a race war. CDR also points out that church burnings in South and North Carolina, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Alabama and Georgia are of more concern to them in 1997 than they were in 1996.

One of the most startling facts relayed in the CDR report is the death of a 23-year-old black man, who "may be the only human during this period to have died in a burned black church." Peter Adams, a vagrant, may have fallen asleep in the South Richland Bibleway Church in Richland County, S.C. when it was destroyed by arson. CDR points out that what is most

troubling about his death is the fact that his body was not found by firefighters on the night of the fire, but by church members who went the day afterward. To date the church family has no knowledge that there was ever an arson investigation into the church fire or a criminal investigation into the death of Peter Adams. CDR has filed a formal complaint with the Justice Department concerning both the fire and the death.

In addition, the CDR report traces the history of the white supremacist movements in the South and Pacific Northwest and shows how white males, ages 14-45, who generally travel in small groups and strike under cover of darkness, have been overwhelmingly responsible for the fires. It also points out its concern about the recurring involvement of white volunteer firefighters in the burning of black churches.

The Center for Democratic Renewal now includes some 200 African American and multiracial churches on its list of burned churches. Three African American and one multiracial church, all in Georgia, were burned in March, 1997.

Property damage is estimated to be somewhere around \$25 million. There is no estimate of the human damage - of churches lost which have been the historic and cultural centers of their communities or of the fear aroused in thousands of African Americans who live in these communities. There is no estimate of the sin incurred when a house of God is burned.

The Center for Democratic Renewal has sent this report to President Clinton and his administration, with strong recommendations for strict monitoring and training of local law and fire department officials and more federal personnel and resources for the monitoring of white supremacist groups across this nation. We may not read about these burnings or this report in the headlines, but unless we address them as a nation, we will never be free from racism or racial violence. (For copies of the report, write to the Center for Democratic Renewal, P.O. Box 50469, Atlanta GA 30302.)

BERNICE P. JACKSON is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice in Cleveland, Ohio.

Apology deserved

Tuskegee syphilis study put people at risk

By William Turner
THE (WINSTON-SALEM) CHRONICLE

Public health professionals and those who find it hard to understand why most poor black people are suspicious of the profession should watch President Clinton Friday when he issues formal apologies to the living survivors of the Tuskegee syphilis study.

In the ceremony planned for the Rose Garden at the White House, the president will attempt to make apology and offer an excuse for the 40 years of wrongdoing committed by the U.S. Public Health Service.

Between 1932 and 1972, the Public Health Service withheld treatment from 400 black men infected with syphilis. In order to study how this venereal disease spread and how it affected and killed its victims, a group of guinea pigs was needed.

Black churches in rural Macon County, Ala. - an hour east of Montgomery - became the target area, where some of the area's population had earlier attracted Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee Institute's organizer and first principal. Washington's leadership, credibility, and influence among poor blacks has never been equaled, some say not even by Martin Luther King Jr.

By the time the syphilis study was launched, the locals had developed an almost unquestioning faith in Tuskegee, one of the first and finest independent colleges. Tuskegee's School of Nursing was literally an outpost of the Public Health Service. Tuskegee's trusted staff was used to recruit the men under the guise of free medical service.

The study group was not told that they had the disease and were denied penicillin, which became standard treatment for syphilis in 1947. Another 200 men who did not have the disease were the study's control group. By 1972, when the study became public, 28 men had died of syphilis, four times that many had syphilis-related complications, three dozen wives had been infected and nearly two dozen black children had contracted the disease at birth.

Most of the Tuskegee staff, by all accounts, were unwitting accomplices to this unethical power play and atrocity against the powerless. When Tuskegee officials did protest the study, officials in Washington did not listen - for four decades.

Washington officials still are not listening, according to Fred Gray, attorney for the victims and their families. "The President should come to Tuskegee to make the apology," says Gray. "It would mean more if it were done in Alabama, in person, where the injury occurred, where the people live."

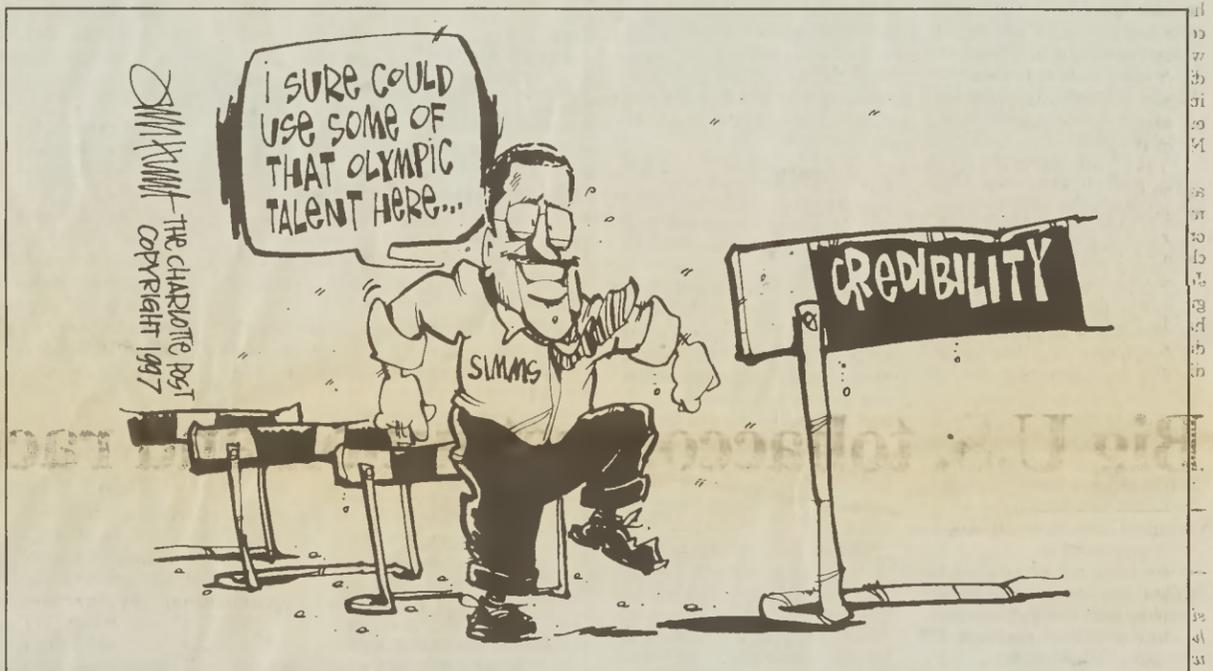
According to White House officials, Clinton's schedule can't accommodate a trip to Alabama. It is not even certain how many of the study's survivors will attend. The few survivors of the study - ranging in age from 87 to 109 - are weak and frail and cannot spend the two hours in flight to Washington. Most live that far in round trips to their airport of departure.

In an ironic concession, the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control is picking up the tab for the survivors' travel. The government has paid out nearly \$10 million to victims and their survivors.

Today - as a direct result of the public outrage caused by the infamous Tuskegee study - medical research practices have changed a lot. But black people are much less likely to sign up as organ and blood donors. The debate about "AIDS as a genocidal conspiracy" is no longer confined to free-floating radicals.

Is there a silver lining in this dark cloud? Yes, some suffered and died so that we all might live healthy lives. Ethics is now taught in most medical schools. Public health officials are much more sensitive to the wariness of blacks that are served by teaching hospitals.

Finally, the health profession might learn from the Tuskegee study something about those deep and underlying cultural dynamics which might explain why many poor blacks don't always take their prescribed medicines. Finally, President Clinton will have to swallow a bitter pill for the health profession.



An efficient affirmative action program

By Clark Ross
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It can be fair for everyone

All too often the debate about affirmative-action employment has contrasted unattractive polar positions. On one side are those who prefer a color- (or gender-) blind hiring process that inevitably perpetuates occupational segregation. The other side seems to advocate hiring minorities and women who are apt to be less qualified than whites or males.

The passage of Proposition 209 in California shows that the public has been persuaded by the second argument, that affirmative action programs are both inefficient and unfair. I would argue that a properly designed government subsidy to encourage firms to participate voluntarily in affirmative action hiring could both increase the efficiency and fairness of the labor market.

This proposal presumes that increased diversity within currently segregated occupations has a social benefit. Showing young African Americans and women that they can become college professors or hospital administrators would clearly encourage them to pursue studies that qualify them for these positions. Proportional representation of all demographic groups in different occupations would also provide more hope for members of the underclasses, reducing social tension and resentment, and possibly reducing crime, drug abuse, and welfare payments.

Even though these benefits are apparent, employers don't

consider them in hiring decisions because they apply to the whole of society, rather than yielding immediate and tangible benefit to individual firms. Economists argue that a potential remedy for a "positive externality" such as this is to offer a subsidy to encourage an increase in the "transactions," which are in this case the number of blacks and women hired for professional positions. To illustrate this process, assume the following:

1. There are two groups of individuals who can be divided according to some criterion (e.g., race, gender, height). Call them group A (white and/or male) and group B.
2. Within each group there is a known variance in the expected performance index for each individual. Assume that the effectiveness indices of the five individuals in group A are 3,4,4,5,5. The effectiveness indicators of the five individuals within group B are 2,3,3,4,5.
3. It is costly to individual employers to determine the actual effectiveness of any applicant from either group.

Consider a firm that needs to hire one additional employee, and attracts one applicant from group A and one from group B. In this example an unbiased employer would find it profit-maximizing, when knowing little about an individual applicant, to employ an "A" over a "B." That's because mathematically there are 25 pairs of A-B appli-

cants who could apply. Among those pairs, 15 of the 25 pairs (or 60 percent) will have a stronger applicant from group A; 6 pairs will be of equal strength (24 percent); and only 4 pairs (16 percent) will have a stronger applicant from group B. In other words, it is rational to discriminate under this set of circumstances. Individuals from group A will be consistently hired, and individuals from group B consistently rejected. This behavior will be reinforced if those making the hiring decisions (e.g., whites or males) are more comfortable with members of their own demographic group (group A).

But group B has an applicant who is just as well-qualified as the two best applicants in group A, and more strongly qualified than the other three members of group A. It is neither efficient nor fair for that individual to be summarily rejected. Additionally, the closer the qualifications of those in group B to those in group A, the greater the inefficiency and unfairness of this hiring bias. Now consider an affirmative action program that requires the employer to seek new hires from group B. If the firm could afford to spend the funds necessary to determine the actual effectiveness level of each applicant, it could hire the "level 5" individual from group B, have no reduction in its efficiency, and contribute to greater societal diversity. But most employ-

ers would oppose this type of affirmative action labor market initiative because of its cost. In fact, socially conscious firms that pursue costly affirmative action strategies are at a competitive disadvantage compared to firms that continue to discriminate.

But what if the government subsidized the extra search costs of firms that voluntarily participate in affirmative-action hiring? Then firms committed to increased diversity wouldn't find themselves at a competitive disadvantage, and they might even receive consumer support from individuals who applaud their efforts at employment diversification. Firms that oppose affirmative action could simply refrain from participating in the program.



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certain groups that are otherwise under represented in certain occupations. Such a subsidy is justified by the positive externalities for society in general that were outlined above. Rather than force firms to participate in an effort they do not support, let's give the firms that are committed to affirmative action hiring the financial support that they justifiably merit.

CLARK ROSS is professor of economics at Davidson College.