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Shifting lanes of fairness

Congressional redistricting is a threat to black representation

By George Wilson

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Just when we thought that the issue was settled of how congressional boundary lines are drawn, yet another challenge is being raised.

This time the battleground is Virginia and the target is Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Va.). Unfortunately, this has become an all-too familiar theme. An African American wins election in an area that previously lacked representation, then others claim that the boundary lines discriminate against them.

In Rep. Scott's case, someone doesn't like the way the district is shaped. "People have complained that my district is too long. I can drive from one end to the other in an hour and a half. The two adjoining districts from end to end - one is four and a half hours and the other is two and a half. They surround my district. They aren't too long, but of course, mine is," Scott observed.

The forces that challenge the constitutionality of districts that were drawn to assure minority representation will not rest until African American congresspersons become as scarce as talking horses. What we are seeing is a multi-pronged attack from adversaries of justice and equality. The first prong is the unprecedented attack on affirmative action. Its proponents say that America is colorblind and the playing field is level. The notion is easily debunked by people of color, women in general and those who have disabilities.

The second prong is so-called welfare reform. Those who happen to be on welfare are being told that in order to receive a government stipend that really isn't enough to live on, one must get a job or sign up for training.

Last, but not least, there are the challenges to the constitutionality of some congressional districts.

Congressman Scott agrees that challenges to districts and the redrawing of lines can only have a detrimental effect. "The original Voting Rights Act and the amendments in 1982 led everyone to believe that a special effort should be made to draw minority districts where you can. The court has put that in question and frankly it will make redistricting much more difficult in the year 2000 after the 2000 census. People will be confused as to what can and cannot be done," Scott somberly observed.

There are truly some rather difficult days ahead for specific categories of American voters and Rep. Scott has some advice for others who will undoubtedly find themselves living in a district that is the object of challenge. "The important thing is to draw the districts according to the law and get expert advice as you draw the districts. Frankly I would expect not only the congressional districts to be challenged again after the 2000 census but also the state legislatures, State House, Senate and city councils."

I know that many thought that the battle for voting rights was over. However, recent events indicate that fighting about the value of votes looms in the near future. Perhaps, these fights over affirmative action, real employment and voting rights will lead to an inevitable conclusion. Ida B. Wells said it best in 1882 when she wrote, "let the Afro-American depend on no party, but on himself for salvation." Wells' statement seems to be as applicable in 1997 as it was more than 100 years ago.

GEORGE WILSON is Capitol Hill correspondent of the American Urban Radio Network.

Clinton prefers quota systems

By Ward Connerly
SPECIAL TO THE POST

In his quest for a legacy, President Clinton recently staked a claim to the race relations debate.

During his June 12 commencement speech at the University of California San Diego, Clinton spoke of the "sting of discrimination" and the excellence of affirmative action. Lost in the pomp and circumstance stood a contradiction of word and deed many fail to recognize.

Affirmative action, as originally intended, was a set of outreach policies and programs designed to ensure equal opportunity specifically to black Americans to redress centuries of racial discrimination. Over the years, affirmative action evolved into preferences, quotas and set-asides. These new programs opened the door wider for women and "minorities," resulting in discrimination of another kind. The problem, of course, is not affirmative action, but racial and gender preferences. If you ask the Jesse Jacksons and Patricia Irelands of the world, preferences are the last line of defense for minorities and women against segregation and unemployment.

Logic assails this theory on two fronts: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bars discrimination on every level, and the misguided assumption that minorities and women cannot compete equally with white males. Using discrimination as a fight-fire-with-fire approach doesn't work; racial

preferences breed resentment, not equality.

At the time of Clinton's commencement speech, he introduced the American public to his advisory board on race relations. Designed to "help educate Americans about the facts surrounding the issue of



Connerly

race," the entire panel of four men and three women supports racial and gender preferences. The panel's chair, Dr. John Hope Franklin of Duke University, revealed his bias soon after the speech, saying, "the white side has been in control of everything, so they're the ones who need educating on what justice and equality mean."

When President Clinton created his race panel, he considered diversity of race and gender, but excluded diversity of thought. This is particularly significant in light of national polls released the week of the President's race speech showing that over 75 percent of the public rejected preferences.

Contradiction, not discussion, defines Clinton's legacy - from the selection of his seven member advisory board to his interpretation of federal court decisions. One case in particular, *Piscataway v. Taxman*, Clinton's shifting policy on race. In 1992, the Bush Administration sued

the Piscataway, N.J. school board, arguing that it had violated the civil rights of one of its teachers. The district had to lay off one teacher in the business department of the Piscataway High School and was forced to choose between two equally qualified teachers - one black, one white. In the past, the board had drawn names to break a tie. This time they simply retained the black.

In 1994, the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Deval Patrick, ordered the Justice Department to withdraw from the case and ask the court for permission to file a friend of the court, brief supporting the school board. Then, this August, Clinton urged the Court to uphold the award of damages to the white teacher. The catch? He wants the Court to interpret the case narrowly so it won't "become binding precedent for the entire nation."

Piscataway v. Taxman is just one example of Clinton's aggressive legal defense of preferences. The administration has promoted and defended quotas and set-asides - and lost in numerous federal cases, including Proposition 209, *Adarand v. Peña*, and *Hopwood v. University of Texas*. The *Adarand* case resulted in a Supreme Court decision striking down minority-based set-asides. The Clinton Administration's reaction was addressed by Deval Patrick, who said, "It is important for us all not to be intimidated by *Adarand*. We have to take *Adarand* on."

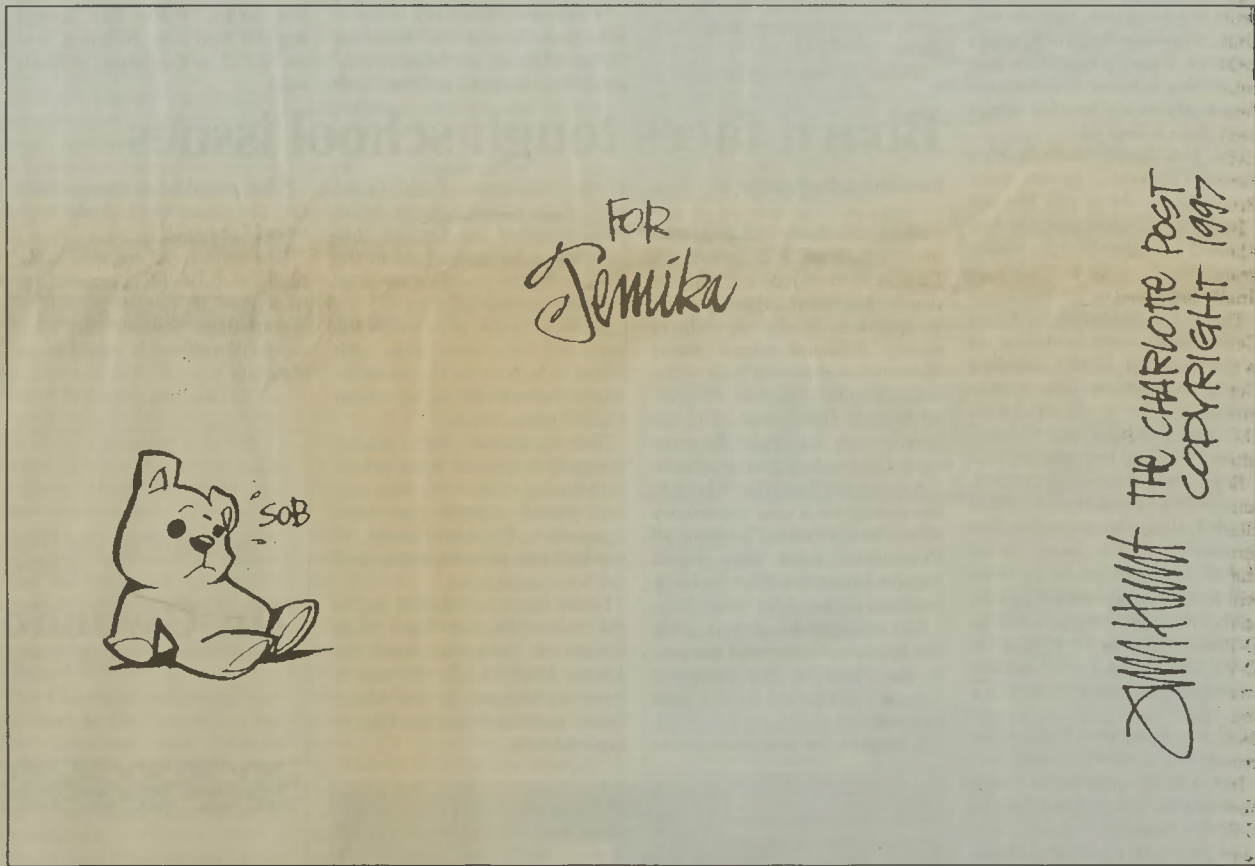
Before Proposition 209, Clinton gave his famous "mend it, don't end it" speech, in which he defended racial preferences and opposed the CCRI.

"Let me be clear about what affirmative action must not mean, and what I won't allow it to be," Clinton said. "It does not mean - and I don't favor - the unjustified preference of the unqualified over the qualified of any race or gender. It doesn't mean - and I don't favor - numerical quotas. It doesn't mean - and I don't favor - rejection or selection of any employee or student solely on the basis of race or gender without regard to merit."

The President, at the time, never suggested one program that could be mended or ended. He may argue that he has abolished some preference programs, but the facts show that any racial or gender preference program or policy eliminated during the Clinton Administration was eliminated either by the courts or Congress.

What Clintonian double-speak will say to future generations, anyone can guess. Meanwhile, the American voters, the courts and Congress will decide the fate of racial and gender preferences.

WARD CONNERLY serves on the University of California Board of Regents and founded the American Civil Rights Institute. This column was reprinted with permission from *Carolina Journal*, the bimonthly magazine of the John Locke Foundation, a conservative think tank in Raleigh.



Why didn't multiple birth elicit immediate response?

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
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If Jacqueline and Linden Thompson are perplexed over the massive national media attention and public outpouring of support for Bobbi and Ken McCaughey, the parents of the Iowa septuplets, it is understandable.

In May, the Washington D.C. couple set the record for the longest sextuplet pregnancy at 29 weeks and six days in the United States. They also were the first African American couple to give birth to sextuplets. Yet unlike the McCaughey's media-dubbed "miracle birth," the birth of their children stirred no interest in the media at first. There were no TV news features, special reports, or a story on them in any major newspaper. If not for a brief news blurb on the Thompson births in the black weekly, *Jet* magazine, the event would have gone completely unnoticed.

It's not hard to figure out why. Unlike the McCaugheys, the Thompsons are a low-income, working class African American couple. They do not

live in a small, tight knit, mid-American Iowa community. They did not use a fertility drug. As a result, the Thompsons did not get the following treatment:

- Free advertising in major newspapers for their family assistance fund.
- The donation of a 12-seat van
- The offer by Iowa's governor to build a larger home.
- A year's supply of groceries from a national supermarket chain.
- A year's supply of baby care products.
- A lifetime supply of diapers.
- A phone call from President Clinton congratulating them on their "amazing adventure."
- A special invitation to the White House.
- A bid of \$250,000 from a tabloid weekly to tell their story and;
- Countless offers from their friends, and neighbors to assist with the children.

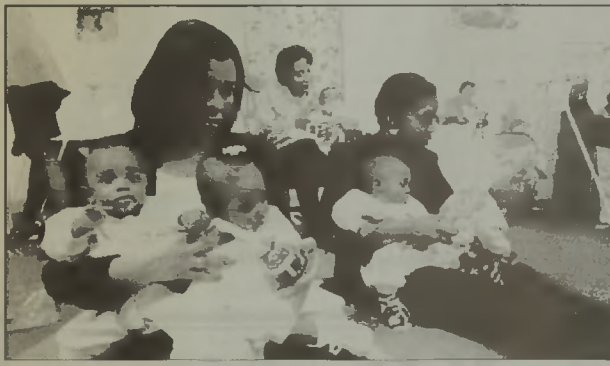
The Thompsons' story only became the subject of mild passing interest when the McCaugheys' septuplets made

news and a caller to the nationally syndicated "Tom Joyner Morning Show," complained about the lack of help the couple had received.

A Washington, D.C. community group, Sisters in Touch, has made the Thompsons' plight an issue. The Washington Post did a back pages story on them. But even then this was not enough to spark the kind of national offers of help that flooded into the McCaugheys.

A Procter & Gamble spokesperson hinted that the company would consider a six-to-eight-month supply of diapers but added that this was the standard contribution for families with multiple births. A spokesperson for Johnson & Johnson suggested that the Thompsons contact the company to determine if there are "things we can do."

With the assistance of the D.C. Housing Finance Agency, the Thompsons were able to move out of their cramped one-bedroom duplex unit into a three-bedroom apartment. Since then they have managed to find a six-bedroom house but



FILE PHOTO

The Thompson sextuplets were virtually ignored at first.

They have not been able to move in. Even with Linden Thompson's salary from two jobs, they can't afford the \$1,500 rent.

However, at press time, the Virginia-based Freddie Mac Foundation, which gives grants to organizations that supports children's issues and children at risk, has made a commitment to give the family a house from their inventory. The impetus for the foundation's involvement came from staff members who heard/read reports of the Thompsons' situation and recommended involvement, said

Shawn Flaherty, spokesperson for Freddie Mac. The foundation scheduled a Dec. 1 meeting with the family to access their needs.

Additionally, as a result of the appeal letters on their behalf by Sisters in Touch and the increased media coverage, the Thompsons are now receiving free day care at a local child care center, and they were notified that they will be eligible to enroll their children in the Head Start Program. Calls and offers of donations are coming from all over the U.S. and Canada.

While the Thompsons have been forced to shoulder much of the tremendous physical and emotional strain and financial burden of caring for five children (one of them died at birth) alone, they have expressed pleasure at the showering of support for the McCaugheys and for the way in which the African American community has now responded to them. Their only regret is, as Mrs. Thompson said, that her community and the nation did not support them until the media hype of the McCaugheys. And that shamefully underscores the general indifference of much of America when the children in need are not media sensationalized products of "miracle births" but children of the minority poor.

Donations and information can be sent to: Sisters in Touch, P.O. Box 4337 Largo, MD 20775 or call (301) 499-8976 or (202) 773-4006.

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