

Editorial and Opinion Page

The Way I See It

by Dr. Dean Chavers, President
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The Rich Get Richer

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Washington State Senator Ken Jacobsen has found some amazing things in his tenure as Chairman of the Higher Education Committee. The most amazing thing is the myth that low tuition rates at colleges give equal access to the poor.

That myth has been disproved by several pieces of research done for the Committee. The entering freshmen at the University of Washington have average family incomes of \$70,000 and their tuition is \$2,500 a year. In contrast, Seattle University, a private institution, has freshmen with average family incomes of \$45,000, and tuition of \$12,000. So the State of Washington is subsidizing the children of the rich much more than it is subsidizing the children of the poor.

Another piece of research shows that the rich pay a much lower rate of taxes than do the poor. The very poor (under \$12,500 annual income) pay 8.6% of their income in taxes, while the middle class and the rich (over \$67,500 annual income) pay only 4.0% in taxes. Very interesting.

What their research does not show, but what is well known, is that the children of the rich attend college at a much higher rate than the children of the poor. The latest national figures from the Department of Education (ED) show that 62% of all graduating high school seniors go on to college.

But for Native Americans, the figure is only 17%. For the very rich, the actual figure is close to 90%.

Despite the fact that the poor pay much more in taxes (and more dollars, too, since there are so many of us), the poor do not get access to the best colleges. In the state of Washington the differences are nothing less than astounding. The numbers show that very few children of the poor actually are admitted to the University of Washington, the "flagship" institution of the State. Ironically, the children of the poor are much more likely to be admitted to the private Seattle University, which apparently cares more about them than does the huge UW.

Sen. Jacobsen, a Democrat who represents the 46th Legislative District in Seattle, has been following the trends in college enrollment, the impacts of tuition on enrollment, the progression of minorities through the state system, and a number of other such issues for years. He is an advocate of equal access to higher education for all groups, something which has not yet occurred anywhere in the U.S.

He noted in a recent speech I heard him make in Seattle that the poor should not fear increases in the tuition rates. What increases do, he pointed out, is make the rich pay more of their fair share. The poor, in contrast, will not pay more when tuition is increased. Their "extra" payment will come from federal and state financial aid programs.

This kind of thinking is backward to many people, but it makes a lot of

sense for someone who cares about equity and fairness in college admissions.

Sen. Jacobsen has introduced a bill he calls the "Higher Education Declaration of Independence" to help to remedy the situation. His bill would allow the colleges, for the first time in history, to raise tuition as they saw fit--up to a point.

The bill would give the colleges some flexibility in setting tuition rates. Up to now, the state legislature has reserved to itself the right to set tuition rates. Thus the bill would call for the legislators to give up some of their power and authority.

In the budget crunches of the 1980's, public support of higher education in the State dwindled. In 1980, the higher education budget was only 14% of the state budget. Thus the colleges lost a third of their support.

Two things could happen with the extra income generated by tuition increases. One, they could be used to improve the quality of programs. Two, they could be used to increase enrollments, with minorities possibly being some of the beneficiaries of increased enrollments. The poor could also possibly benefit from increases.

The tuition at the colleges now in the State only pay for a fifth to a quarter of the total costs. At the Evergreen State College (TESSC), average family income is \$76,000 and tuition covers 21% of total costs. At Eastern Washington University (EWU), average family income is \$52,000 and tuition pays for 26% of total costs. So even within the state system, the poor pay more and the rich pay less.

In Washington, Sen. Jacobsen has found that minorities overwhelmingly get into community colleges, and the rich overwhelmingly get into the state university system. This is of course true in most of the U.S. Miguel Olivias found 15 years ago that two-thirds of Native Americans who went to college went to community and junior colleges. At the same time, the percentage of Native Americans at the Ivy League colleges was minuscule.

There are limits on Sen. Jacobsen's bill. Colleges could only raise tuition rates a maximum of 10% a year. Students would have to be involved in any decision to raise tuition rates.

If tuition were to be raised, 5% of the additional tuition dollars raised would have to go into a fund for financial aid for students in need.

State universities could contract with private universities to provide services if their services would be more cost effective.

If any action which will open access to Native Americans, minorities in general, and the poor (bless our hearts--we'll always be with you). But Sen. Jacobsen has picked up opposition to his bill.

Students, who generally oppose any type of tuition increase are against it. The employee unions, fearing losses of jobs to private institutions, have expressed opposition to it. But the public in general has not

been heard. Only time will tell what they think. We can predict that the rich parents will oppose the bill though.

Since I am one of those who worked his way through college, before there was a financial aid program, I have no problems with students paying a decent amount of tuition. Back in 1960 when I started at the University of Richmond, tuition was \$1,575 a year. Today, at the University of New Mexico, with inflation having doubled six times, students are paying less than \$2,000 a year in tuition.

If equity were prevailing, these students would now be paying close to \$8,000 a year. I can already hear the yells and screams from students opposed to tuition increases. But some time or another we have to face reality. Budget cuts are going to continue. Tuition is going to be increased. I just hope it is done in a way that will let more equity in enrollment rates for Native Americans come about. We still have a very long way to go to catch up.



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Along the Robeson Trail

by Dr. Stanley Knick
Director, UNCP Native American Resource Center

In the past two weeks, we have been discussing the Lumbee evidence in context. We stopped last time with the question: "What is evidence, really?"

The word "evidence" comes into the English language from the Latin word *evidens*, meaning "clear." This definition stems from the Latin prefix *e-*, meaning "from," and the verb *videre*, meaning "to see." Thus evidence is a thing from which we see something else more clearly, a thing which indicates something else. In legal terms, evidence is something which "bears on or establishes the point in question."

Study of the history and culture of a people depends on evidence. Without evidence, there is only speculation. Evidence can take many forms, from a simple record of what someone said or did, to a more complex compilation of observations from widely differing sources. A newspaper article can be taken as evidence, as can the oral testimony of an informant in the community. A statement based on the synthesis of diverse but concordant information can also be used as evidence.

But how do we know which evidence is reliable and which is suspect? Often the reliability of evidence can be judged by how well one piece of evidence fits with all the other bits of evidence on that subject. If something fits the known pattern, it is frequently accepted as reliable.

But there is a caution. What happens if several bits of otherwise unreliable evidence, things that are actually untrue, are introduced into the study in such a way that they tend to support each other? As a group, and because they support each other, they might then be taken to be reliable. What was actually untrue might be taken as being the truth.

In this same manner, most of the existing evidence at one time in history proved to the satisfaction of a great many people that the world was

flat! That was the conventional wisdom of the day. When new bits of evidence began to arise which suggested that the world might really be round, they were for a long time rejected because they did not fit with the existing "evidence." These new bits of information were not accepted as evidence until much later, when the weight of evidence became so overwhelming that even the most conservative Flatworlder was compelled to concede that the world was really round.

Serious scholars must always keep an open mind. They must always be willing to consider new evidence, even if it does not agree with the conventional wisdom of the day. However, this is not the way most humans operate ordinarily. Instead we tend to get certain things in our minds, learned from our parents or teachers or our own experiences, and thereafter to hold fast to those ideas as though they were the one true reality. This has been an adaptable way to live within human cultures. We are conditioned to believe certain things depending on the local culture in which we were raised, and we declare those "truths" to be self-evident.

Not everyone in a culture agrees on what the truth of a particular bit of evidence really is. Court cases such as those of Rodney King and O. J. Simpson have clearly demonstrated this in American culture. This is partially due to the fact that all evidence exists within, and comes from, a continuous flow of historical and cultural things -- and this flow influences how individuals see the evidence. Not all evidence is found. Not all evidence is considered to have the same weight. Not all evidence takes the same form. Not all people were brought up with the same beliefs, values and experiences relating to the evidence.

This constant flow of things which influences how we see evidence leaves us with a matrix of difficult questions: What form would the evidence take

to, certain things? Would the evidence be in a form that we might reasonably hope to find it, and if we did find it, would our various backgrounds allow us to recognize it for what it is? Would everyone read the same meanings in the evidence? Faced with such questions we are forced to accept two apparently inescapable realities.

First, evidence is often transitional. Even evidence which seems incontrovertible should probably be considered capable of being refuted -- if not now, maybe later when more evidence becomes available.

Second, interpretations are often provisional. Given the transitional nature of evidence, every interpretation based on that evidence should probably be considered as preliminary. The search for absolutes in the interpretation of evidence can be frustrating. We may move from evidence to interpretation, but we must do so with the humble understanding that even the most widely accepted scientific law, the Law of Gravity, has been found to apply only in certain defined circumstances.

Study of the history and culture of a people, especially one as complex as that of the Lumbee, requires that we try to look at and interpret as much of the evidence as we possibly can. It also requires that we learn to reconcile, or at least make some sense of, bits of evidence which may seem to contradict each other. When we find something which does not seem to fit with the other evidence, we must resist the temptation to toss the first thing completely out of the equation. We must search for ways to connect all the existing evidence into discernible and meaningful patterns.

In the next segment, we will continue discussion of the Lumbee in context. For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

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Geraldine Maynor



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