

commentary

Editorial

Betrayed....

When Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall was about to retire, in answer to a query about his successor, Marshall commented that a black snake and a white snake will bite you. In other words, color has nothing to do with the probability of being bitten by an animal designed to do just that.

Well, the black snake — Clarence Thomas, who was put on the Court at the urging of John C. Danforth (R-Missouri) and by President George Bush — has bitten and probably will continue to bite. Danforth and Bush had to know that Thomas could be depended upon to do their bidding. Clarence Thomas is the epitome of the person historian Carter G. Woodson was talking about in that famous quote:

"If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door, he will go without being told. And if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one."

We urge everybody who can read to get a copy of the November issue of *Emerge* magazine that has a picture of Clarence Thomas on the cover with a "handkerchief" tied around his head. The lead story in that issue tells of the disappointment of those who supported his nomination to the Court and documents Thomas' votes in several cases crucial to African Americans.

If there was ever a case of betrayal [to some folks], this is it. Many of Thomas' supporters thought that surely any black person in a guaranteed lifetime position — where he would never have to be beholden to anyone for anything — would govern his actions with fairness and understanding. Not so. They have been betrayed and have now found out that Thomas' "very nature" demands that he make a "back door".

Professor William E. Nelson, a professor of political science and black studies at Ohio State University, summed up the debacle: "From the time he was chair of the EEOC, I always considered Clarence Thomas to be the worst kind of racist — a black man who hates himself."

To Be Equal

Discrimination Impacts Black Job Losses

By John Jacob

Last month, The Wall Street Journal published a page one story that should have rocked the nation. Instead, it was met with silence and indifference.

The story was about job losses in the last recession. And the big news was that African American workers were the only racial group to suffer a net loss of jobs during the 1990-1991 recession.

The figures came from employment reports filed with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission by over 35,000 companies with more than 40 million workers.

The net job loss for black workers at those companies was almost 30,000, while Hispanics gained over 60,000 new jobs, Asians, 55,000, and whites over 70,000. The black share of jobs at those companies was also down, for the first time in nine years.

And at some companies, blacks lost jobs far out of proportion to their share of the company's workforce. At one large firm, for example, African Americans made up 13 percent of the payroll and 32 percent of the job losses.

There are plenty of explanations for this unacceptable situation, but none of them convince me that discrimination and ethnic stereotyping don't play a part.

One supposedly non-discriminatory factor spells serious trouble ahead for the African American community.

Blacks lost blue-collar jobs, but gained jobs in managerial, professional, and technical occupations. That reflects a changing economy in which lack of educational credentials leads to fewer employment opportunities and greater vulnerability to layoffs.

But a changing economy still doesn't explain why black workers were the only group to have a net job loss, or why their job losses in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs were disproportionately larger than those of other racial groups.

Whites, by the way, did not have a net job loss in any occupational category; further indicating that who works and who doesn't is subject to a lot more than just blind market forces.

The story also spotlights a worrying new trend. Some companies said they had no idea that black job losses were so disproportionate because they only track total minority employment. So rising Hispanic and other minority employment masked black job losses.

That suggests that some corporate "diversity" programs are being run as black removal programs.

It also tells us that many companies are, at best, indifferent to their social and legal obligations. And at worst, as in companies where black job losses were grossly disproportionate, it indicates an illegal pattern of discrimination.

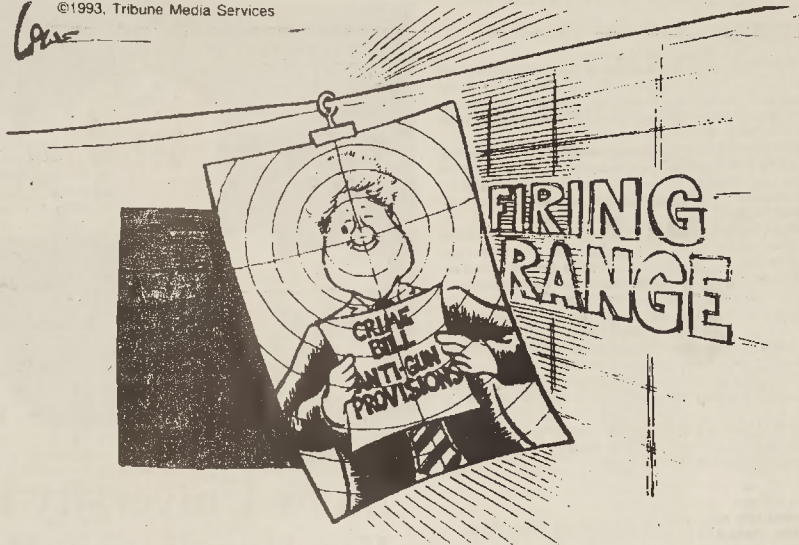
This grim story requires action on several fronts. Corporate leadership has to review and correct all policies and practices that impact on equal opportunities, with special emphasis on reviewing diversity programs that result in fewer opportunities for African Americans — the only Americans who have historically and persistently been excluded from the workplace.

The EEOC should also take aggressive action to enforce the law's equal employment mandates. At the very least, it needs to require explanations from companies with disproportionate black job losses.

Congress too, needs to get into the act. It should investigate disproportionate black layoffs and if there is a need for new laws, pass strong, loophole-proof equal employment legislation.

Unless action is taken, the black economy will continue to be eroded by discriminatory employment policies and by restricted opportunities. This is an issue the African American community must not allow to be ignored.

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NEWEST NRA POSTER BOY

Along the Color Line Beyond Diversity

Dr. Manning Marable

For half a century, we have pursued the goal of "diversity" in higher education, with at best mixed and uneven results. In the 1950s, liberal educators would say with pride that they were committed to the goal of a "color blind" environment. I distinctly recall professors saying to me that they "could not remember" whether this or that student was a "Negro." They fully embraced the liberal perspective of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that individuals should be judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." It speaks volumes about the problems inherent in such a statement, when one realizes that black conservatives like Shelby Steele can simplistically advance the same words today, but for a reactionary purpose.

We should all agree that "color blindness" is our goal. As the great Reggae artist Bob Marley of Jamaica observed, "Until the color of a man's skin is of no greater consequence than the color of his eyes, there will be war."

But the question should be, how do we get there? How can we "deconstruct" race? We cannot get there by pretending that "race" and "color" no longer matter, that they have magically declined in significance since the sixties. In a racist society, color symbolizes the inequality of power relations, the ownership of property and resources, between various groups and classes. To end racial prejudice, we must restructure the power relations between people of color and upper-middle income whites. This means that we must pursue a "color-conscious" strategy to create the conditions where color is one day irrelevant to determine the positions of power, educational access, health care and to other opportunities of daily life.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ideal of color blindness gave way to what could be termed "symbolic representation." Liberal educators believed that the recipe for cultural diversity would be achieved by bringing representatives of a new spectrum of interests into the academy—women, racial minorities, physically disabled people, lesbians and gays, as well as others. Programs were established to create new academic courses in women's studies, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, gay and lesbian studies, and Asian-American Studies. Minorities and women were "symbolically represented" with their appointments as counselors and college recruiters. Multicultural student services centers were established to address perceived concerns of the students of color.

These reforms should have represented a beginning, rather than the end, of a process of education reconstruction on issues of social and cultural difference within the academy. Instead, somehow we have lost our way. And at many colleges and universities, we are actually moving backward.

One reason is that women and racial minorities were usually hired and subsequently located in the bureaucratic margins of academic institutions, rather than within real centers of power. There were few deliberate programs which actually tried to identify scholars of color and/or female faculty with administrative abilities, to mentor and cultivate them, and to advance them forward. At some institutions, minority faculty occupied a revolving door position, usually at the designated ranks of instructor or assistant professor, never to be tenured or reappointed.

Transcending the old, restrictive boundaries of "diversity" means going beyond the old language of "minority groups" within our colleges and its society as a whole. We must settle for nothing less than the fundamental redefinition of the "mainstream," to be fully inclusive of the broader range of cultural perspectives, religious and philosophical values languages and social traditions which reflect all of America.

Going beyond diversity means fostering a cultural dialogue between the representatives of various ethnic groups on campuses which leads to exchange, sharing and cultural synthesis. Universities must go out of their way to create spaces for people of color and other oppressed groups to express themselves culturally, and to dialogue with others. As things now stand, too often we find students of various ethnic backgrounds relating to each other at a polite social distance, never really learning about other groups' experiences. We only begin to appreciate our own culture, when we take the time to learn what is valuable in someone else's culture.

Going beyond diversity in higher education will require a change in the power relations between people of color, women, and the traditional elites which dominate our universities. By redefining the mission and core content of our education, we can begin to move from the margins to

the center.

Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of History and Political Science, and director of the African-American Studies Institute, Columbia University. "Along the Color Line" appears in 250 publications and 75 radio stations throughout the U.S. and internationally.

Carolina Beat

Why Government Can't 'Reinvent' Itself

By Marc Rotterman

RALEIGH - "Reinventing government" has become the new in-phrase among the policy wonks inside the Washington Beltway and in state capitals across the country (including Raleigh).

Bill Clinton aides, policy types and politicians from both major parties have embraced the concept. Vice President Al Gore is chairing a study commission on reinventing government, looking for ways to create a more efficient and responsive government. State governors and lawmakers as well as mayors and other local officials across the country are also talking up "reinventing government" as a solution to problems of government inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Case in point: our own Government Performance Audit Committee, which identified hundreds of millions of dollars in savings in North Carolina state government.

This exercise to me, seems to be a terrible waste of time and taxpayers' money — not because government isn't ripe for "reinvention," but because trendy language and study commissions have a poor track record in the government-reform game.

Having served in Ronald Reagan's administration during its first term, I remember how hype can overtake reality. Gore's "reinvention" audit was ordered during the 1991-92 budget crisis but by the time the study was ready in 1993 the legislature had no fiscal crisis to fix. Unfortunately, fire trucks can only fight blazes. They don't do much to prevent conditions (neglect, drought, etc.) that can lead to fires later. Ideally, that's what these government efficiency efforts would do: prevent future crises.

Ross Perot, in my opinion, is right when he says that we need to downsize the federal government agency by agency. Some political junkies will remember that Nebraska Sen. Bob Kerrey, during his ill-fated bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, proposing radical changes in the federal government which would have cut the number of departments and consolidated many agencies. He made few friends in Washington with this idea.

Kerrey's colleagues on Capitol Hill are, in fact, a significant part of the problem. Recently, on the front page of *The Washington Post* an article pointed out how much excessive power and authority the Congress wields over federal departments, by mandating programs that can't be cut, even if a departmental secretary wanted to. The executive branch is, to a large degree, losing its autonomy. Separation of powers must be maintained.

Code words like reinventing government won't work. This nation needs to get about the business of restructuring, downsizing, and even, in some cases, dismantling government. While this requires radical action, it does not require "reinventing" anything. John Locke, the namesake of the think tank I direct, wrote in the 17th Century that government should be limited in both scope and size. He specifically attacked the idea of large government bureaucracies making policy through regulation and administrative decisions, arguing that "absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled standing laws, can neither of them consist with the ends of society and government."

We need to rediscover how government should be organized, not "reinvent" it.