



viewpoints



Winston-Salem Chronicle
Founded 1974



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To Be Equal

Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

King Tribute Overdue



Profiles in Piousness

The howls of politicians have been heard from coast to coast in response to the news that some of the public assistance recipients receiving special energy assistance do not actually pay their utility bills.

'It's a waste, a giant rip-off, the government is throwing away tax dollars,' they chanted in unison.

As a result of that conclusion, they did say that had regulations been drafted more stringently, those persons actually paying utilities might have been able to receive more assistance. Instead they said, "Let's get rid of the program altogether."

Memories are very short. Had those who have been so quick to shoot off their mouths paid attention recently, they would have learned about the recent rent refunds settlement for Section 236 apartment complexes.

Persons who lived Section 236 housing during a three-year period are getting the money because the U.S. government declined to pay appropriated funds to apartment managers to cover rising utility costs.

The rationale behind the payoff is that managers had to pass along rent increases to meet the costs, meaning that whether the residents actually paid the utility or not, they had to pay more because of increased energy costs.

In the same way, the cost of housing, transportation, food and everything else poor people have to buy has

risen because of the energy crunch.

But, AFDC payments, for instance, have only risen once in North Carolina in recent years, a five per cent increase enacted in the current budget.

In as much as the people receiving automatic assistance are all on either AFDC or SSI, or both fixed income programs, it takes a particularly narrow-minded person to begrudge them a couple hundred dollars, just because of the particular hole their money is being sucked into.

There is a valid issue involved with the supposed mixup. Congress simply waited until the very first day of winter to approve a bill that would provide energy assistance to the poor.

Agencies involved from the federal government down to local public and anti-poverty agencies had mere days in which to put together procedures for distributing millions of checks before the winter would be over.

There was no way every possible contingency could have been planned for in such a short time.

Considering the impact of energy policy on the poor is the way to address the problem in a timely fashion. Demagoguery will not bring that about. It will only deepen the divisions in our society.

Congress' calculated insults to blacks and minorities are becoming more frequent, the latest being its rejection of the proposal to make January 15, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, a national holiday.

Passage of the bill in the House of Representatives seemed possible, but then, when the bill hit the floor, all sorts of phony excuses were invented for not voting for it. After a counterproposal to make the holiday one of those Sunday non-events was introduced, the sponsors of the bill rightly withdrew it.

Making the King Birthday a Sunday holiday would put it on par with other routine "Days" ignored by all. Martin Luther King Jr., black people, and all believers in the message of non-violence and racial equality deserve better.

In fact, the nation would be well-served by making January 15 a national holiday.

It would be an act of homage to the greatest American of modern times, a symbolic assertion of the vast contributions blacks have made to America, and a substantive commitment to the humane values that inspired Dr. King and, for a brief time at least, his fellow citizens.

King's stature is indisputable. His moral leadership inspired the nation. His courageous non-violent strategies toppled the institutions of segregation.

His contributions to the entire world, a world hungry for spiritual and humane leadership, was recognized by his 1964 award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

There are those who object to a national holiday in his honor on the grounds that he was an ethnic leader and if Dr. King is so honored, other groups will come forward with parochial claims.

That's the kind of argument that can't be taken seriously, even if its adherents are temporarily in the majority on Capitol Hill.

The very fact that he led black people, the nation's largest and most influential minority, through a period of peaceful revolution, is a strong claim for honoring him.

This America that has treated its black citizens so

harshly needs to make a strong symbolic gesture that reaches across the troubled past with new hope for the future. A Martin Luther King Jr. Day would do just that.

Through such a gesture, the nation would be striking a great blow for the pride of all its neglected people. It would be saying in the most effective way, that it too honors and venerates the memory of this great black leader.

But Martin Luther King Jr. belongs to all Americans. His efforts to free black people from the vicious heel of segregation resulted in freeing all Americans from the economic, social and moral wounds it inflicted on the nation.

The South especially, should exalt Dr. King and support a national holiday in his honor. For the changes he helped bring about provided the impetus for the enormous and healthy changes that have taken place there.

In fact, Dr. King belongs to the world. His commitment to non-violence, his moral leadership, and his inspiring message of faith penetrated into every nation on the globe. His name symbolizes the best in America even in places that proclaim their dislike of our policies and past.

It's hard to think of another American in our history who has meant so much to so many people at home and abroad. His life and his work inspire everyone who believes that all mankind is bound together in a chain of interdependence and mutual need.

In a world torn by terror and destruction, in a world torn by violence and oppression, he showed that by following a nobler, more moral path, people could free themselves from hate and complexity with evil.

Our America still needs to learn his lesson; it still needs to heal its racial wounds and become whole again.

And an important step toward that wholeness would be to make January 15 a national holiday honoring the birthday of a true national hero -- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Genie in a Bottle

A glass at a time or a sip at a time, alcohol seems harmless, but the cumulative effect of alcohol on individuals and society represents one of the greatest mental health problems facing the state of North Carolina.

Alcoholism costs \$700 million, or \$135 for every man woman and child in the state. Just at the tip of the iceberg is \$15.5 million spent for direct rehabilitation and treatment services by state government.

Add to that funds spent by local governments and private agencies, the cost of law enforcement services and courts for the overwhelming number of domestic offenses and assaults which stem from liquor doing the thinking, instead of brains.

Incalculable is the human costs which the 150,000 alcoholics or problem drinkers levy on their family, neighbors and co-workers.

Pregnant women who drink may be creating birth

defects for children yet unborn.

Fortunately, most people who drink are able to use good judgment, finding their limit and sticking to it.

It is the one in ten who do not who pose such a problem for everyone else.

January 20-27 has been proclaimed Alcoholism Awareness Week in North Carolina. The week is a time when you should evaluate whether your family and friends are beginning to make use of alcohol as a crutch.

Watch whether that "just one last drink" gets repeated over and over again; watch whether there are abnormal shifts in behavior.

If you detect such signs, refer your loved one or friend to the excellent alcoholism program operated by the Forsyth-Stokes Mental Health Authority or one of the Employee Assistance Programs operated in several of the city's largest firms.

It has now been recognized that alcoholism is a disease that needs treatment, the sooner the better.

Julian Bond

When Districts Shrink

Rep. Charles Diggs, D-Mich., and Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, are probably more interested in the outcome of the 1980 Census than the average American.

These two members of the Congressional Black Caucus have the dubious distinction of representing the districts which experienced the second and third greatest population losses between 1970 and 1978.

Diggs' constituency, for example, dropped a whopping 28.7 percent.

Four other black members of Congress--from Michigan, Illinois and Maryland--also made the list of representatives whose district population declined in the first eight years of the 1970s.

Black legislators are well represented on another list--that of the smallest-population districts among the 435 members of the lower house.

Ohio's Stokes has the fourth-smallest constituency--

347,000. Shirley Chisholm, D-N.Y., represents only 372,000 souls. William Clay, D-Mo., serves only 378,000 citizens of the "Show Me" state. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., has only 380,000 Manhattanites in his district and John Conyers, D-Mich., has only 389,000 Detroiters.

The Census Bureau emphasizes that these figures are estimates only, mandated by federal election laws which require publication of population figures for campaign spending purposes.

But whether accurate or not, they add up to difficulty for the Congressional Black Caucus and are a serious threat to the limited representation of blacks in Congress.

The "provisional estimates" also present a quick look at where America is growing and going.

Three-fourths of the nation's 435 congressional

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Return Draft?

With all the unrest in the Middle East including the holding of American hostages in Iran and the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, there has been increased talk reinstating the military draft. Chronicle Camera asked patrons of Jetway Shopping Center whether it should resume.

Dwight Jones -- I do. The way it stands we're going to end up with an all black, all poor Army. I never was in favor of it being abolished. It seemed like a political move. They should draft everybody the way it was when I got drafted. For instance, that clemency for draft evaders was nothing but a rich man's law. The people who couldn't afford to relocate to Canada had to go or go to jail.

Michael Ray Moore -- As blacks in America,

what are we going to fight for. That Shah, who's the cause of the hostages being taken, I'd send him back just like that. Don't draft us, just let the two presidents go out there and fight. They either put a black woman on birth control or send a black man to war.

Anthony Farmer -- I don't think they should reinstate the draft because the draft itself pulls someone against his will and there's nothing he can do about it. That defies some of our constitutional guarantees.


Evelyn Anderson -- I don't think they should have it at all. Didn't they say at one time that the war was over? We didn't start it, the president did. It's his mistake or whoever's mistake.



Farmer



Anderson



Pursuing Decent Housing

From The Grassroots

Manning Marable

Nothing is more important for black families' survival, than the continued existence of decent, liveable and affordable housing in the urban environment. Whether within the all-black ghetto or in an integrated or largely white community, black families cannot hope to build viable neighborhoods without access to houses or apartments at reasonable rates. Unfortunately, a combination of factors conspires against this pursuit of decent housing.

What is the reality of black housing in urban areas today? The statistics speak clearly for themselves. About 40 percent of all blacks live in homes that are over 40 years old. Blacks' homes are over twice as likely to have non-working plumbing, poor construction or other structural flaws than whites' homes - a situation created by speculators and real estate brokers, and perpetuated by a racist economy as a whole.

Black families are forced to exist in smaller and smaller areas, segregated through zoning patterns on the basis of race and class. According to a recent newspaper account, a recent study by the Regional Plan Association of New York City shows that two thirds of the total black population of that city live on only 1.35

percent of the total land area. Those geographic proportions are worse than the restrictions placed on African blacks who dwell in the Bantustans of South Africa.

Part of the reason for the urban housing crisis rests squarely on the pattern of racist politics and policies of the federal government. In 1950, the Department of Housing and Urban Development initiated and completed 50 studies criticizing racist housing practices. Since 1954, H.U.D. has conducted only one study dealing specifically with racist housing market patterns.

According to a recent report of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, H.U.D. has seldom been aggressive in attacking discrimination in public housing. The Fair Housing Act, passed by the Johnson Administration in 1968, conspicuously does not cover any discrimination for owner-occupied dwellings with four units or less - one single category that includes millions of apartments and houses in cities throughout the country. As Civil Rights Commission director Arthur Fleming stated recently, "the federal government must accept most of the blame for the lack of progress in this major civil

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