

Forum

Black Contributions Not Taught in School

With a student's car radio loudly reminding passersby that Dr. King died 25 years ago, one white Ohio University coed asked, "Dr. King wanted America to do things for his people - but what did his people do for America?"

Although the loud question was not spoken to me, I was tempted to say, "We want nothing more than other Americans want -- simple justice, fair play and equality." As I walked farther away from the group, I realized the coed considered black people an appendage to America -- not a part of America but a tolerated liability, a burden.

So I walked around the campus and asked two white students,

"Do you know anything about Dr. W. E. B. DuBois?" Both looked at me with blank stares and suggested that I look in the faculty directory for his name and office number.

I walked farther into the Campus Green and stopped several white students to ask, "Do you know about Dr. George W. Carver or James Weldon Johnson?" Again, none showed a glimmer of name recognition. Several more interviews revealed equally futile results.

Then I drove home and called several of my white colleagues -- professors. Three did not recognize any of the names. One recognized the name of DuBois and another recognized the name of Carver, but their information about these black men was hazy skimpy. The one who recognized DuBois is a Canadian neighbor who teaches geography and the one who recognized Carver teaches journalism.

Obviously, main stream America know practically nothing about the historically significant contributions black men and women have made to this nation. This ignorance causes second-class citizenship for blacks.

Two factors obviously caused this widespread lack of knowledge about black people in history:

1. America was populated largely by the underclasses of Europe -- its "losers." Carvings on the Statue of Liberty describe them as Europe's "huddled masses," its "wretched refuse." Americans need to redefine themselves to themselves, to Europe and to the world.

They need to bolster their own egos and appear to be special. Therefore, Americans used real and mythical heroes to build their own self-confidence. Some of these included

fables such as George Washington and the apple tree, Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett and others. America had its national "image" problem to solve.

2. America wanted to display to the world and to pride themselves with some type of exclusivity and homogeneity to dispell the "Stench" of the "melting pot" and "mongrel" image. Therefore, European-Americans used the barrier of race instead of the barrier of class that was used in Europe.

How can Afro-Americans gain the respect that brings genuine equality and first-class citizenship?



MINORITY REPORT

By JAMES E. ALSBROOK

1. By realizing that trivialities such as hyphenated names and changed initial placements are merely amusing, cosmetic flourishes and do not constitute solid, substantive achievement. Real achievement and respect come with the performing or developing of some kind of service or some kind of product or thing that serves or benefits people. Self-appointed status without real substance is self-defeating.

2. By winning the battle to incorporate knowledge of black historical events and persons inconspicuously but effectively into the narratives of historical textbooks at all levels of American education -- elementary schools through colleges. African-American Studies help, but their content must be distributed and infused throughout the entire fabric of American education.

With the NAACP at a crossroads, trying to plot a new course, and with Jesse Jackson at a crossroads, trying to plot a new course, these two could join forces to win the common goal of educating America -- its black and its white people -- about the real contributions blacks have made.

If this information were taught nationwide in public schools with good textbooks and dedicated teachers, a new day of overdue respect for blacks would dawn in America.

Economic Rebound Could Lead to Complacency

While Washington debates the Administration's economic recovery plan, many have an uneasy feeling that events may be passing us all by.

They point to a worsening employment outlook and suggest that the only thing that can pull the nation out of a long-term job drain is a massive, long-term public works improvement program that goes beyond anything yet proposed.

Those voices need to be heard in the debate, because the economic recovery now under way may lead to a new complacency about America's ability to generate jobs for all.

Such faith is unwarranted, for there is evidence that this is what has been called "a jobless recovery." The statistics say that the recession is over, but employment is higher. Fewer new jobs are being created, and many of those are part-time.

Despite stagnant job growth, last year's productivity growth was the biggest in twenty years.

Largely because many companies are restructuring, or as the current term has it, "re-engineering" to produce more goods and services with fewer workers.

According to a recent Wall Street Journal story, some experts estimate that re-engineering could wipe out as many as 25 million jobs, or almost a fourth of total private employment.

It would be easy to dismiss that view as a scare story, if there wasn't so much evidence to support it.

Almost every day another major corporation announces massive layoffs, plans to shrink jobs by attrition, or restructuring of operations to cut its workforce.

We've come to expect technology to destroy manufacturing jobs, but now it threatens service jobs as well. That's especially worrying because the service sector is where the jobs are.

The Journal article quotes one expert who predicts that over the next seven years re-engineering will destroy over a third of all jobs in the banking industry -- and financial services has been one of the few areas in our economy

where job growth was strong.

Because the technological revolution is making it possible to increase productivity with fewer workers we may be in a long "Silent Depression" different from any in our history. The economy could grow, but job opportunities could be stagnant.

The Great Depression of the 1930s didn't end until World War II soaked up employment with military service and defense production.

It didn't return after the end of the war, because of two development: the Cold War, which created jobs in the military and in defense industries, and massive government investment in the infrastructure, such as the federal, highway program that opened up the suburbs and spurred a housing and consumer boom.

How do we end the "Silent Depression" in today's changed economy?



TO BE EQUAL

John E. Jacob

Some say all that needs to be done is to cut the deficit and spur private investment. But much of that investment will go into labor-saving technology that cuts potential job growth.

Another view says that public infrastructure investments will create jobs and will lead to a boom in consumer goods and services that will create more jobs.

But the huge deficit stands in the way. Even supporters of federal job creation and infrastructure investment programs fear a ballooning deficit that could lead to financial collapse.

The trick is to find the right balance of politics that lay the groundwork for an adequate public investment program while reining in the long-term deficit.

The Clinton Plan tries to do that, which is why it inspires so much hope. Whether it is bold enough, or goes far enough, is something time will tell.

Doonesbury

BY G.B. TRUDEAU

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