

FORUM

Lessons on the Redistribution of Wealth in America:

Newt Gingrich on the Public Dole

"Every able-bodied man and woman must pay his or her own way and get off the public dole."
"Welfare, as we know it in America, must end!"



At least for the past two decades, these have become the most widely used buzz phrases around Washington, mouthed most often by politicians who win victories beating-up on the most vulnerable among us.

No politician in recent memory has been a more articulate mouthpiece for "Welfare reform" than Newt Gingrich, R-Ga. Gingrich is held in high esteem for leading the Republican Revolution in 1994, which resulted in a GOP majority for the first time in memory; and, in victory, the conservative-dominated House elevated him to the powerful role of speaker.

Then, last week, in a twist of fate that put yet another straw on the back of the camel that carries the weight of American-style inconsistencies, Mr. Newt himself went on the public dole: former senator and presidential candidate, Bob Dole.

Dole doled out the \$300,000 Gingrich needed to pay the House Ethics Committee for the money they spent to investigate the lies he — Gingrich — admitted telling them. According to reports in the "Washington Post," Dole and Gingrich "struck the deal" on a balcony at the Capitol Building.

The interest rate on the loan is very low — far below market rates — and Mr. Gingrich does not have to start paying the money back for five years, and has eight years after that to retire the loan.

Dole, in his matchless cheerless and gaunt style, referred to the ethical box his friend was in. According to Dole, it was best for the

Party and the country that the speaker not borrow the money from a bank. After all, bills are constantly coming before the Congress. Nor



LIFT EVERY VOICE

By BILL TURNER

was it advisable for poor Gingrich to raise it from wealthy friends." Fact is, Mr. Dole didn't tell his wife about his plans to give Newt the money until after the deal was done, says "Newsweek" in its latest edition. Now that is real John Wayne drama from a fellow whom taxpayers "lent" \$51 million for his ill-fated presidential bid.

According to John Cassidy in "New Yorker" magazine, workers' hourly wages went up one nickel — 4 percent — over the last year. Prices for goods and services rose 3 percent. And, with this arithmetic, the average Joe and Jane were a tad ahead of the curve. But, in stepped the Federal Reserve Board — ever mindful of inflation — and raised short-term interest rates last month, making it more expensive for the average American to borrow money.

In a unique way, the Dole/Gingrich buddy system could be just the example America needs to jump-start small minority-owned businesses. Right now, with the roll-backs in affirmative action and government-backed loans to upstart private enterprises, any number of CEOs at some of the top American companies should — in Dole-like fashion — send just a fraction of their hard-earned money to hard-working and struggling small private business people.

What better way for the Republican-dominated Congress to strike a blow at those who speak of the cozy relationship between big busi-

ness and government as "corporate welfarism?" Somebody has to help the little guy in America, the government seems not to want to do it. How about some at the top of the American corporate ladder holding out the hand to some of our salt-of-the-earth entrepreneurs the way Dole did Gingrich?

For example, in 1996, Michael Eisner, the chairman of the Walt Disney Company, received nearly \$300 million in salary and stock options. He could help quite a few Pocahontases. That is a quarter of a billion dollars!

The head of General Electric, Jack Welch, was paid nearly \$22 million. Doesn't GE's "We do good things for life" do a lot of good business with the Pentagon? What measure of community development in enterprise zones could he manage alone if Mr. Welch advanced a few low-cost loans to some black and brown Newts in South Central Los Angeles?

Then there are the guardians of American capitalism on Wall Street. There's the CEO of Solomon Brothers investment house, Deryck Maughan. He was paid \$11.5 million last year, a raise of 1,000 percent over his 1995 salary. It would be noble of Larry M. Coss, the top man at Minnesota-based Green Tree Financial Corporation, if he aided the flood victims in North Dakota. In 1995, he made \$37 million heading up a company that makes high-interest loans to low-income retired people. Last year he made \$102 million.

All of these fellows are friends of Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich. They are the ones who despise the thought of the redistribution of wealth. But, the source of the "corporate windfalls" that makes it possible for many CEOs to earn ten thousand times more than the average American worker is found in Washington. It is in these tax-supported corridors where Newt and Bob walked last week, and where Alan Greenspan of the central bank decides who gets what money.

(Bill Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

Tiger Woods: Sign of Hope

As we celebrate Jackie Robinson's entry into the big leagues 50 years ago, we find ourselves celebrating another first — Tiger Woods becoming the first person of color to win the Masters golf tournament. Some might argue that firsts in the world of sports are not really meaningful, but history shows that Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier was the dawning of a new day.

Clearly Tiger Woods has not suffered the abuse, indignities and threats that Robinson did half a century ago. But the reality is that were he not the famed Tiger Woods, there would be golf courses and clubs where he, as a person of color, would not be welcome even today. At the Augusta National, home of the Masters, no black had played in this famed tournament before 1975 and the club had no African-American members until seven years ago.

After his win, Woods acknowledged those who had paved the way for him — Charlie Sifford, Lee Elder and Teddy Rhodes. These men endured hostilities and insults just to play a game which they loved. These men, and other athletes of color before them, established a level

of excellence and a measure of grace which Tiger Woods has learned well.

Jack Robinson had to endure taunts, name-calling and mean spir-



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

ited pranks from his team members, as well as spectators. He found himself isolated from most of his teammates, some of whom threatened not to play with him. He was spiked by opposing players, called "nigger" and other racial epithets, and yet his playing was so outstand-

ing that he was named Rookie of the Year."

Tiger Woods, only 21 years old, broke a multitude of records with his one Masters Tournament win. He already has much poise and is growing in his self-awareness and respect for those who have gone before him. He has refused to be categorized as an African-American player, recognizing that half of him is Asian-American. He has grown in his self-understanding, for it was only a couple of years ago that he seemed to be struggling with racial identity labels. Some African Americans saw this as a denial of who he was, but his speech after the Masters win showed that he has matured in his thinking around race.

Some have said that they find it difficult to understand why Tiger Woods' win is a race issue. Unfortunately, as long as there are still racial firsts in this nation and as long as discrimination keeps young people from reaching their potential, race will be a factor in all that we do.

(Bernice Powell Jackson is the executive director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice.)

The True Confederate History

Amid the celebrations of Jackie Robinson's achievement 50 years ago and Tiger Woods' Sunday at Augusta — evidence of what can happen when barriers are dismantled — I noticed that a report released last week by the Harvard Project on School Desegregation found that the nation's public schools are more segregated now than at any time since the 1954 Supreme Court school integration decision.

And I noticed last week President Clinton again reiterated that he is determined to find a way to heal the racial division which he called "America's constant curse."

I thought of these developments after I had learned that Virginia Governor George Allen has designated April "Confederate History and Heritage Month."

Praising the Confederacy's "four year struggle for ... independence and sovereign rights" and "the cause of liberty," Gov. Allen told a reporter that the Confederacy is part of our history. "Many Virginians — families have ties to those who were involved in the war between the states ... For people to selectively exclude certain parts of our history from any recognition or mention is to me poor history."

Civil rights groups have protested Gov. Allen's open admiration for the principles of the Confederacy — and with good reason. After all, those principles are what led to the Brown decision in 1954. That people like century, the president of the United States has to be concerned about the fact that America is still not one nation indivisible.

So, let us not "exclude" the history and heritage of the Confederacy from our schools and colleges, and from the national discussion.

I mean, it's true history and heritage, of course, not Gov. Allen's gauzy mint-julep-on-the-veranda confection that's been the stuff of Confederate propaganda since Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox in 1865.

African Americans especially must challenge the claim that examining the Confederacy is a whites-only activity. In fact, of course, our



TO BE EQUAL

By HUGH B. PRICE

roots in the Antebellum South go very deep. We saw the region and its white citizens from the keenest vantage point: from the slave quarters.

But one need not depend on family experience or group lore to determine the truth about the Confederacy.

For example, it is true that the 1860 census found that 3.95 million, or about 89 percent of the 4.4 million people of African descent in America at the time (4 million of whom were in the South) were held in bondage.

And it is true that such men as Alexander H. Stephens, the vice president of the Confederacy, were quite clear about their purpose.

In his speech, "Slavery, the Cornerstone of the Confederacy," given at Savannah, Ga., March 21, 1861, Stephens declared: "The prevailing ideas entertained by Thomas Jefferson and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the (United States) were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature, that it was wrong in principle, social (sic), morally and politically.

In contrast, Stephens went on to say, "Our new Government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea. Its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery, subordination to the superior race is his natural and moral condition."

That Stephens accurately stated the Confederacy's guiding principle is confirmed by the breakaway region's blueprint for nationhood: the Confederate Constitution of 1861. That brief document's five "negro (sic) slavery" clauses leave no doubt that the maintenance and expansion of slavery was the entire purpose of the Confederacy.

Of course, one can understand why those gripped by the perverse romance of the Confederacy never mention these and many other facts. They prove that there was nothing positive about its principles.

Why is it important to refute the assertions of Gov. Allen and other modern-day Confederate sympathizers?

Because, as his proclamation and events in the society at large make clear, White America is still divided in some significant measure about which principles — those of the United States Constitution or those of the Confederate Constitution — it will pledge alliance to.

The Confederates not only believed in the master-race theory, they sought to build a separate nation on that evil foundation. These sentiments, codified into law throughout the South 30 years later, were what black America and its white allies spent most of the 20th century forging a civil rights movement against.

How revealing that, now, at the century's end, a United States governor thinks the principles of the Confederacy are worth honoring.

(Hugh B. Price is the president of the National Urban League.)

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