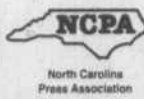


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

The Choice for African American News

ERNEST H. PITT Publisher/Co-Founder
ELAINE PITT Business Manager
ERICKA ASBURY Office Manager
T. KEVIN WALKER Managing Editor
KAY STULTZ Production Supervisor



Child poverty needs attention



Akilah Monifa
 Guest Columnist

Child poverty is at shameful, epidemic levels in the United States, especially for black and Latino kids.

The Children's Defense Fund recently released a study that revealed that the number of black children under 18 in extreme poverty was at a record high.

The organization, using current U.S. Census figures, found that the number is the highest it has been in the 23 years since the statistics have been kept.

"Extreme poverty" is defined as a family whose after-tax income is less than half of what the federal government defines as the poverty line. In this study, the "extreme poverty" line for a family of three was a mere \$7,064 of disposable income.

Although the study also showed that overall poverty is down in this country, that is not the case for extreme poverty of black, Latino and white children. There were nearly 932,000 black children in extreme poverty in 2001, the latest year the statistics are available. That is up 50 percent from 622,000 in 1999. Latino children in extreme poverty numbered at 733,000, an increase of 13 percent from 1999. And white children in the same group numbered at 1.8 million, up 2 percent since 1999.

We may like to think that poverty is something that exists only in some so-called Third World country. But these statistics should force us to focus on extreme poverty right here in the United States. Too many of us are ignorant of, or indifferent to, the plight of poor and minority kids.

As Congress debates proposed tax cuts and whether to renew the 1996 welfare legislation - including cuts of Head Start programs and child health programs - policy-makers should consider the study carefully before enacting laws that could have detrimental consequences on the well-being of millions of children.

The startling figures should force us all to take action. We can no longer afford to sit idly by as large tax cuts for the wealthy few supersede the day-to-day needs of those in extreme poverty.

Congress should increase the childcare supplements, and the welfare reauthorization bill should specifically direct more money to job training. Additionally, states should offer wage supplements to women in minimum-wage jobs. Filling these holes in the "welfare-to-work safety net" would benefit parents as well as to their children.

In the richest nation in the world, we should not measure our success in economic wealth, but in the social condition of our downtrodden-especially our children.

Akilah Monifa is a freelance writer living in Oakland, California. She can be reached at pmproj@pressive.org.

NCLB has many drawbacks

To The Editor:
 "Our children, our future, our schools" should become a rallying cry for every parent in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System in light of the "No Child Left Behind" federal dictate which has no financial incentives for the classroom educator, but public scorn for not meeting a guideline set in Washington, D.C.. I am especially appalled at the nerve of a federal law that gives a report card on the success of an educational environment based on so many loosely defined sub-groups. It is educationally invalid to measure a child's most precious life-time opportunity to learn with a single test or for that matter with two test. All research based on any decorum of common sense would measure a child's entry abilities when the child arrives at school to a child's exit skill abilities at the end of a specific time period. The level of progress that a student achieves should be based on an individual criteria of accomplishment for that student alone. At least give the student a pre-test and a post test on a certain level of mastery. If the student is able to improve from a level of 1 to a level of 2, that student has progressed. Celebrate the student's growth and thank the school's more for shaping our future, our children.

When will parents really say in a loud voice that the learning environment in my child's classroom consist of a caring teacher, an inviting, stimulating classroom where every child is encouraged to do their individual best and learn how to truly respect themselves and others in the same way that they expect to be respected and appreciated? We need more support for teachers to establish genuine relationships with their stu-



dents instead of another test dictated by the government that has no real understanding why little Johnny or Rashad can't read.

It is essential that all parents become more active in our children, our future, our schools. I am a father of five children, four of whom matriculated from this school system and have successfully continued their education in college and graduate schools. I am not convinced that this federal mandate (NCLB) would have prepared them for their career choices. The key to their success has been caring teachers who saw the strengths that they had that no test could have measured. I strongly encourage every parent, especially the African-American parents to commit to challenging these mandates when they impede on the necessary assets that every child needs to succeed. I invite you to become involved in a community organization that has your child's interest at heart. You choose the organization,

but you cannot afford not to get involved. Our future is at stake.

Fleming El-Amin, Co-Conyener, Black Leadership Roundtable

Thoughts on nationalism

To The Editor:
 * I cannot accept the thinking that nationalism transcends morality.

Morality is the embodiment of man's love for his fellowman.

Nationalism is a product of man's invention.

It may vary from century to century. Just as a nation may be an ally for a decade then become our enemy for the next decade, all depending on the politics of the time. But humanitarianism has both good and permanent significance. It is the concept by which we measure love for our fellowman. Every man is

somebody, a living part of his creator, and should be recognized and respected as such.

This philosophy in no way diminishes our love for our country. We exercise free will to do our best to be good citizens, and if circumstances dictate, we make the ultimate sacrifice and give our lives for our country.

I believe that morality transcends nationalism because God and creation are all that is good and permanent. Our love for mankind is the necessary criteria for being a good American. All nations, when formulating their foreign policies, and deciding what is in their vital interest, should give high priority to the moral implications of that policy and how resulting actions will affect people around the world. When mankind is able to comprehend that morality and humanitarianism must be civilizations guiding principles, then maybe we will see an end to war.

J. Raymond Oliver

Felon vote ban stains democracy



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
 Guest Columnist

Florida recently took a grudging step toward righting one of the nation's most blatant outrages when it restored the voting rights to more than 100,000 ex-felons. While the action was welcome, it won't do much to boost black voting power. It only applied to those ex-felons released between 1992 and 2001. Human Rights Watch estimates that the ban in Florida and Alabama, one of the six other states that permanently bar ex-felons from voting, prevents one out of three black men from voting.

Most of the states that perpetuate this morally and legally indefensible practice are Southern states. The South has had a long and deplorable history of devising an arsenal of politically abusive tactics including poll taxes, literacy laws, and political gerrymandering to drive blacks from the voting booths.

This thinly disguised relic of the South's Jim Crow past has done much to drastically dilute black political strength. In the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections more than 4 million black men voted. If the tens of thousands of black men on parole, and thus permanently disenfranchised because of their past criminal record, had been allowed to vote it might have made a crucial difference in deciding some close contests in swing and toss-up states. Florida is the best example of this. The black ex-felon vote, most of which almost certainly would have gone to Democratic presidential contender, Al Gore, since blacks voted nearly 9 to 1 for him in the state, would have tipped the vote total and the White House to him.

With the march upward again in the incarceration rate in state and federal prisons, black disen-



franchisement will probably get worse. According to recent FBI figures, blacks make up nearly half of the more than two million prisoners in the nation's jails, and forty five percent of prisoners who will serve sentences longer than one year.

The Sentencing Project, a Washington D.C. based criminal justice advocacy group, estimates that at the present rate of black incarceration upwards of 40 percent of black men could be permanently barred from the polls in the vote restricted states in the next few years. And since most state officials are scared stiff of being publicly branded as soft on crime, state legislatures have either ignored the issue or stonewalled legislation that would end the archaic policy. Congress hasn't been any better. A bill, which would restore vot-

ing rights to ex-felons in federal elections, has languished in the House for the past few years.

Conservatives passionately defend the policy of ex-felon disenfranchisement.

They claim that in barring criminals from voting society sends the strong message that if you break the law you should pay, and continue to pay dearly. The argument might make sense if all or most of the disenfranchised ex-felons were convicted murderers, rapists, or robbers. And they were denied the vote because use of a court-imposed sentence. This is not the case.

None of the states that bar felons from voting in near perpetuity require that judges strip them of their voting rights as part of their sentence based on the seriousness of the crime or the severity of the punishment. The

majority of ex-felons were jailed for non-violent crimes such as drug possession, passing bad checks, or auto theft. In most instances they fully served their sentence and in theory paid their debt to society.


Most of the convicted felons were young men when they committed their crime.

The odds are that most of them won't become career criminals, but will hold steady jobs, raise families and become responsible members of the community. Yet imprinting these ex-felons with the legal and social stigma of hereditary criminals and banning them from voting until death makes politicians and many Americans seem like the worst kind of hypocrites when they say they believe in giving prisoners a second chance in life.

The Sentencing Project and Human Rights Watch have denounced the exclusion of ex-felons from voting as a racially bigoted, blight on society. But they have been lone voices screaming for change. Though the ACLU, and the Florida Conference of Black State Legislators forced Florida to partially lift the ban, civil liberties groups and civil rights organizations have mostly taken a hands-off stance on the issue and filed few court challenges or mounted any sustained lobbying campaign in Congress or state legislatures to get this discriminatory voting law changed.

That the right to vote for thousands of black American citizens is still an issue decades after the end of slavery and legal segregation is worse than a travesty of justice. It's a stain on the democratic process. Florida took a small step toward wiping away the stain, other states should do the same.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and political analyst. Visit his news and opinion website: www.thehutchinsonreport.com He is the author of 'The Crisis in Black and Black (Middle Passage Press). Ehutchi344@aol.com



Submit letters and columns to:
 Chronicle Mailbag,
 P.O. Box 1636,
 Winston-Salem, NC 27102

Please print clearly. Typed letters and columns are preferred. If you are writing a guest column, please include a photo of yourself. We reserve the right to edit any item submitted for clarity or brevity. You also can e-mail us your letters or columns at:
news@wschronicle.com