

Editorials & Comments

Refugees Are Brothers, Too!

The Refugees Are Brothers Too
During the 1960s Americans were introduced to a foreign country - Vietnam - via involvement in a war that few of us understood and even fewer knew little about the Southeast Asian nation or its people. The prolonged nature of the war and the ideological reasons for American involvement in a no-win international conflict contributed to dividing our nation and raising serious foreign policy questions.

Yet, even with the loss of American lives and growing inflation attributed to our involvement most Americans viewed the Vietnam conflict as another "over there" conflict that didn't directly affect our daily welfare. In fact, while the tragedy of Vietnam entered our homes via television and newsprint most of us went on our merry way with little consideration given to the possible long impact of the no-win war.

Now, four years after the fall of Vietnam and a desire to forget our nation's most disastrous encounter, we, as in the past have been asked to open our borders to thousands of refugee victims of that war. However, because of the ideological nature of the Vietnam conflict and the state of our economy there have been mixed reactions to allowing the so-called "boat people" to settle in America.

While U.S. immigration policy has never been equally fair to Africans, Asians and even Southern Europeans, Americans have falsely continued to view themselves as the world's "melting pot" where all nationalities and ethnic groups are welcomed to melt into the American, waw

Mixed Reaction

The mixed reaction to the importation of the Vietnam refugees has contributed to the myth of the American "melting pot." Some Vietnam war veterans have expressed opposition to aiding the refugees. Steve Balazs, an Army veteran who served in Vietnam reportedly said recently, "We lost a lot of lives and minds over there. Now we are paying double. I wouldn't want to...see someone who shot a friend of mine. That would be a slap in the face."

More directly to the point, nearly 400 of the "boat people" have settled in Charlotte and more are on the way. They have been settled, with \$250 relocation grants from the federal government and help in housing, educational, medical and employment needs is provided through some private local sources, in three Charlotte communities.

In one of the refugee settling

communities, largely black Grier Heights, some residents have expressed concern that the refugees will change the character of the community. The residents' fears and frustrations were heightened when officials of the Catholic Social Services Agency that is assisting in the refugees' settlement said most of those living in Grier Heights would be permanently relocated elsewhere. This implied the Grier Heights housing for the refugees was temporary and there would be continued instability in the area.

Job Opportunities

Grier Heights residents have expressed concern too that bureaucratic red tape has been cut to allow immediate remodeled housing, temporary welfare assistance and even job opportunities for the refugees when they have been unable to secure similar services. The basic

dilemma here is that many Americans themselves have unmet needs with regard to housing, medical care, education and employment; therefore, can we afford to share our resources with others, that is, the refugees? Furthermore, should the American needs of the poor be a basis for refusing to admit the refugees?

The dilemma is compounded by the fact that it is easy for us who are privileged to be middle class and do not have to feel the direct impact of the refugees upon limited resources for the poor to say let them in because it is the American way. Furthermore, the refugees are not moving into our middle class neighborhoods - at least not until they are educated and fully Americanized - at which time they too will snub and ignore our poor and black citizens.

In spite of these concerns and the fact that the great-grandparents of the blacks in Grier Heights were undoubtedly brought to America in slave ships, we believe that few Charlotteans - blacks and whites - as well as other Americans would oppose assisting an oppressed homeless people.

There is something about the American character and the American spirit that says give us your tired, your hungry, your homeless and we will help them to find a way. Thus, in spite of our domestic ills and the ravages of inflation Americans, we believe, continue to have a sharing and confident spirit. Therefore, President Carter's crisis of confidence notwithstanding, we should offer a helping hand to our refugee brothers. They too are sons of the God who has made us all.

PRESIDENT CARTER, IN HIS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT CHEYNEY STATE COLLEGE, STATES HE CAME NOT TO SOOTHE, BUT TO CHALLENGE. HE ASKED 250 BLACK GRADUATES: 'HOW ARE WE GOING TO HAVE THE LEADERSHIP TO FIGHT FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN JOBS, SCHOOLS AND HOUSING IF EVEN THE ACT OF VOTING IS TOO GREAT AN EFFORT?'



"Now, If Blacks Want Power - They Will Have To Get Through The Ballot Box."

as i see it

Chrysler Is Not Taxpayer's Responsibility

By Gerald O. Johnson
Special to the Post

If you haven't heard, Chrysler Motor Corporation is going under and they would like the government to bail them out.

Chrysler's car sales are down drastically from last year and they have been plummeting ever since the government forced car dealers to build pollution control fuel efficient cars. Chrysler failed to conform to the regulations citing financial problems wouldn't allow them to conform. Consequently, they can't sell their gas guzzlers and foreign imports and the big two (Ford & GM) are forcing them out of business.

Chrysler contends that it is the government's fault that they are going out of business and that it is the government's responsibility to save them.

The government is seriously considering saving Chrysler because if Chrysler is forced to shut down, hundreds of thousands of people will be unemployed. Well, with the recession and all, Chrysler's going out of business will put a serious crunch on unemployment. Since next year is an election year the decision will be more political than rational. I say that because the government will save Chrysler.

I say let them fold. It is not the government's responsibility to save bankrupt companies. It is completely against



Gerald O. Johnson

the free enterprise system. It is not fair to GM or Ford to have the government step in and save a competitor.

Moreover, since I own a Chrysler and the car isn't worth the paper the price sticker was printed on, then I say let it fold. My Chrysler is '74' so there is no excuse. Sorry for getting personal.

The only solutions to Chrysler's problem, barring selling to a foreign investor, is for the stockholders, employees and creditors to buckle under. Stockholders will have to sacrifice dividends, employees will have to forego pay raises, and banks and other short term paper issuers will have to extend the time Chrysler has to pay back their loans. If these people aren't willing to sacrifice to save Chrysler, then to heck with Chrysler.

It is not the taxpayers' responsibility to save Chrysler and if Carter feels it is then I think he would have broken through the thin ice he is already skating on.

One final note before closing. During the rest of this year and most of 1980 a lot of businesses will find themselves in the same boat Chrysler's in. One commonality about most of these businesses is a strong labor union. When labor unions negotiate for new contracts they generally are two to five years. The contracts are binding. During recessionary periods when companies' sales fall off tremendously and consequently their profits, the one thing that is still rising is the cost of the terms in the labor contract. If a company isn't large enough to absorb this rising cost it folds. Even if the company is large enough to absorb the cost, the contract is inflationary.

The union was just one of Chrysler's problems, but the unions are the thorns in many companies' britches. In a coming article I will try to show how the unions have broken the delicate balance between employer and employee.

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TO BE EQUAL



Death Penalty Must Go

After Florida executed John Spenklink several weeks ago, a local police union raised money for its softball team by selling T-shirts with the message "1 Down - 133 to Go." The message referred to the 133 people then still on Florida's Death Row awaiting execution. The union reportedly did a booming business in the shirts with the grisly message.

The story of the T-shirts symbolizes the core issue of the death penalty - what kind of people are we? If we as a nation strive toward a humane society, then it is clear there is no place for the death penalty in our system of justice. But if we value human life so little that we're willing to tolerate murder by the state, we reveal an immoral callousness that strikes at the roots of civilized behavior.

Over 500 people are now in Death Rows across the country. Unless the death penalty is finally set aside, America will be the scene of a legalized bloodbath in the coming months.

The fight against the death penalty is one we thought had been won back in 1972, when the Supreme Court ruled that the arbitrary nature in which it was carried out made it an unconstitutional cruel and unusual punishment. But then many states just rewrote their laws to try to meet the Court's objections. In 1976 the Court approved some of those new death penalty laws, saying they now met standards of fairness.

In effect, the Court abdicated its responsibility to uphold the Constitution. It just kicked the whole thing back to the states, so long as they avoided the grossly arbitrary excesses of the loosely drafted previous laws. What the High Court failed to admit is that no death penalty law can avoid being unconstitutionally arbitrary.

The Spenklink case is a good example. Like many other murder cases there was considerable doubt about the circumstances. The prosecutor charged him with first degree murder, a capital offense. But another prosecutor in another locality could just as well have charged him with second degree murder, manslaughter, or even, in the view of some, justifiable homicide in self-defense.

If the defendant is rich, his top-ranked attorney can work out a plea bargain. If he has roots in the community and is established in the locality, he'll get different treatment. If he commits his crime in a conservative "law and order" community he's more likely to get the death penalty than in a more liberal town in the same state.

The standard of whether the sentence is arbitrary derives from the practice of sentencing blacks to death for the same crimes for which most white defendants received prison sentences. This blatant demonstration that society valued white lives over black was a major reason for the Court's original ruling that the death penalty is unconstitutional.

The states that now have legally acceptable death sentences have managed to overcome the racial bias against black defendants - most of the convicted murderers awaiting execution are white. But the startling fact is that racial bias continues to be applied in capital cases, and the numbers show society continues to value black lives less than white lives.

The Black Beat

Blacks Haven't Learned To Play Political Game Very Well

by Milton Jordan
Special to the Post

The 1980 elections in North Carolina will again prove that we haven't learned to play the political game very well.

We will wait, as we always do, until the sides get chosen and then on who has the best laundry list of promises, or who is the lesser of two evils, and a few of us will trot out to the polls and vote.

By then we will have largely forgotten some of the promises incumbents made back in 1976, and even if we remember a few of the unfulfilled promises, we are likely to forgive the offenders. And we will wrap ourselves in our cloaks of righteousness and explain our forgiveness by saying, "Well, at least he's better than so and so."

There will be a few blacks running for various state offices, and like we always do, we will drag out a lot of dirty laundry, and defeat most of them.

In the end, very little will change. Let's look at a few specific predictions.

+ Governor Jim Hunt will probably "run on this record." You see he reduced the sentences of the Wilmington 10 and the Charlotte Three, making it possible for them to get out of prison earlier. I suspect that even Ben Chavis will be

out by then. And he will come or send his emissary to the black community saying, "Well, I gave you what you wanted. You wanted them out of prison. They are out of prison."

+ State Insurance Commissioner John Ingram will probably run, noting to black folks that he has always had their best interest at heart, and just wants to be governor so he can continue to sort of "look out for us."

+ There will probably be a black candidate for state senator, probably out of Greensboro who will have all sorts of problems raising sufficient money to run a viable statewide campaign.

+ Speaker of the House, Carl Stewart, will run for lieutenant governor. He will come to the black community and point out what a joy it has been to work with those few blacks who have made it to the House over the years. But he will deny the fact that about the time you get one "trained" the governor or someone snatches him away to some appointment or another.

+ There will be a lot of the same political rhetoric, both from without and within the black community.

Oh no, I'm not critical of the expounders of rhetoric, but I am just a little incensed that we haven't learned to play



Milton Jordan

politics well yet.

One of the clearest evidences of poor political savvy is the fact that we don't play the game year-round. For the most part, you hear of politics in the black community only when elected officials have cut off some social program or another, or threaten to do so, or when a black politician comes under fire, unless of course, we put him under fire, and when it's about time to elect people.

Another evidence is that we begin talking about voter registration just a few months before election time. It's almost too late then. By that time, the numbers have been counted. The black community has been weighed in the

political balances and found to be politically wanting. And our political gains (hoped for, that is) are given to others.

Yet another evidence is the fact that when we say political education, we often mean a laundry list of candidates "the leadership heart." I don't know of a strong black political group anywhere in this state that works hard to educate people to the real issues of government which affect their lives daily.

For example:
+ When the state government "fathers" announce that they are industry hunting, why isn't there some group which studies that process to determine how we can be ready for the developing economic trends?

+ Why don't the black colleges in North Carolina put together an urban studies consortium that researches and reports on urban questions of significant importance to black people?

+ Why isn't there an organization in this state that can tell me whether I live in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Durham, Halifax, Beaufort, or Greenville just how the state representatives from my area voted on issues of critical concern to me?

+ Why isn't there an organization that develops a political

talent bank of blacks who have an interest in public office? Why doesn't this organization develop a series of educational programs for these interested persons that gives them background on the office they are interested in, and further grooms the talent bank folk to be ready for public office?

I have a hundred or more questions like these, but I think the point is clear. To us, political education doesn't seem to mean education. Rather, it seems to mean "convincing folks to support

whomever the political leadership supports."

So it seems that 1980 politically for black folks in this state will be just another case of business as usual.

When are we going to wake up, and begin harnessing the power at our disposal and move forward from a strong political base, rather than from voting for cronies and folks with big smiles?

I hope soon.
Next Week: The South, A New Political Base

County Official Wins EHJ Award

Edward L. Woods, Director of the Mecklenburg County Building Standards and Code Enforcement Department, has recently received the Edison Hubert Johnson Award, which is the highest award given by the North Carolina Building Inspectors Association.

Woods was recognized for his outstanding performance in directing the County department that is responsible for issuing permits and conducting inspections for construction in the unincorporated areas of the County and for administering the County's Minimum Housing Code.

The award was presented at the 24th annual meeting of the State association, held at

Wrightsville Beach the last week in June. At the same meeting, T. L. Brotherton, Building and Housing Code Administrator for Mecklenburg County, was elected for a two-year term on the association's board of directors.

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