

# The welfare state destroys society's bonds

By Father Robert Sirico  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Let me tell you a story about growing up in Brooklyn, New York. The kids in our neighborhood, maybe 15 to 20 of us, would play stickball in the streets.

Presiding over us from her stoop was the lady my mother referred to as "the mayor of the neighborhood," Mrs. Rabinowitz. She would sit on her stoop and look at anything that went on in the neighborhood. If at any point in the stickball game this group of boys would get a little too rambunctious, Mrs. Rabinowitz would lean over just a little bit and bellow out one of our names: "Robert, I see you." Everything would stop.

We'd all get back in alignment. It's remarkable that not so very long ago one little Jewish lady sitting on her stoop could control a group of teenage boys in Brooklyn. But Mrs. Rabinowitz is not on her stoop anymore. That ability to have governance without government in a neighborhood has evaporated. In its place now we have to send in armed troops that sometimes are still not successful. What has happened?

We knew that behind Mrs. Rabinowitz's bellowing voice was moral authority. And we respected that authority. We had a self-government instilled in us by certain moral principles that were expected of us and to which we acquiesced. The fallacy of the welfare state is a parallel fallacy to the whole socialist construct. I'm not saying the welfare state is the equivalent of Stalinism.

I'm saying that there is something systemically wrong with the welfare system.

Everyone across the political spectrum acknowledges that the welfare state has failed in its objectives. What we do not fully understand as a society is why the welfare state has failed. I suggest that it has failed for very similar systemic and economic reasons that socialism failed in Central Europe, and that is the fallacy that might be called the synoptic delusion.

Synoptic literally means "one eye." The synoptic delusion is the notion that there can be one central eye that can see all of the needs that exist across the social spectrum and can coordinate all of the resources necessary to meet those objectives.

In the name of the poor our society has constructed a massive welfare system. And yet the poor have gotten worse and worse. This is because of the violation of a principle that in Catholic teaching is called the principle of subsidiarity. Basically, what this says is that needs are best met at the most local level of their existence. If you have a need, you should be the first person to fill it. If you are unable to do that, your family should help you. If your family is unable to do it, then people close to you should do it.

Only when all of the immediate, local levels fail do you bump it up to higher levels of social ordering. Moreover, the principle of subsidiarity says that it is a danger to have higher levels of government intervene and prevent the natural coordination that would occur on the most local level. It is the intervention of the state with the pre-

tense of knowledge that prevents more natural, knowledgeable social systems from meeting basic human needs. To the extent that the state has collectivized the normative service of social remedies, we have had a secularization of our society. When you can no longer challenge people with a moral message, how are you going to go about remedying the problem of illegitimate births? The solution the state has is to distribute condoms or Norplant, or to make abortion more available. The solution of religious institutions is to instill that sense of self-governance, to give people a sense of self-dignity, of self-respect. To the extent that the state has marginalized the church and the religious institutions, it has also muted the moral sensibility that we used to have.

We all recognize that this is more costly because it fails to recognize the deepest human needs, and it is predicated on a materialist assumption. If a person is hungry, we only provide food. If a person doesn't have housing, we provide housing. While those needs may be real, they are only an outward exhibition of a deeper human need. The more important thing is to get to know the person and say not only, "you do not have a coat," but, "how has it come to pass that you do not have a coat?" It is this human bonding that can only take place between people who know each other that can ultimately get to the roots of the problem.

FATHER ROBERT SIRICO is founder of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty in Midland, Michigan

## Ebonics under undue attack

By Ron Daniels  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

When the Oakland, Calif., School Board voted to recognize Black English or Ebonics as the primary language of many African American youth attending that city's public schools, controversy erupted all across America.

The attacks on the predominantly Black Oakland School Board were almost hysterical. The Rev. Jesse Jackson was quick to denounce the decision as madness and Kweisi Mfume, President of the NAACP derisively called the board's resolution laughable. Indeed, in an appearance on ABC's "Nightline," Mfume showed a total lack of knowledge of black linguistical patterns by disputing the fact that Ebonics has roots in African languages.

The debate over Ebonics was not confined to African American leaders, however. At the dinner table, on talk shows, on street corners, buses and subways, the controversy over Ebonics consumed Black America. The early verdict among most African Americans was that Black English was little more than street slang. Overwhelmingly African Americans expressed the view that the Oakland School Board had erred badly in voting to recognize Ebonics within the educational arena. Black America seemed angered that an errant group of "brothers and sisters" on the Oakland School Board could embarrass the race with such an outrageous decision.

Unfortunately, much of the early debate about the Oakland School Board's decision was based on ignorance and misinformation. In the first instance there is a vast body of research and literature which definitely establishes that Black English/Ebonics is not bad English but a distinct dialect, if not complete a language system, which is clearly rooted in the African languages of ethnic groups from West and Central Africa (the regions where most enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas came from. African American and even some European linguists have discovered that there are distinct structures and patterns to Black English/Ebonics which most black people, even highly educated professionals, speak in informal conversation on a daily basis.

Whether or not one feels that Ebonics should be "officially" recognized or not, it is important that Africans in America be aware of that we have a unique manner of speaking which is not simply some bad English, an embarrassing badge of degradation that should be dispensed with post-haste. Secondly, it is important to understand that the primary purpose of language is communications and that there is nothing inherently "better" about "standard" English than any other language or manner of communicating including Ebonics. In fact for those who have been conquered and oppressed by English speaking Europeans - Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, Africans - to be compelled to speak English as if it is a "superior" language is adding insult to injury.

The purpose for learning standard English in an English speaking nation is the same as the reason for learning French in a French speaking nation. One has to learn to speak the language of the society in order to function effectively within that society, even if one is committed to changing that society. Learning the "dominant" language should never imply that any other language or form of communication is inadequate or inferior.

RON DANIELS is a syndicated columnist.

# We're in need of progressive black leaders



Like many of us, Henry Louis Gates grew up poor and didn't know it.

All he knew was that his father worked two jobs - loading trucks at a paper mill and as a night janitor at a phone company - and that the family always ate well, dressed nicely, and managed to put a little money away for college. He also knew that what his parents expected from him didn't sound like poor folks' expectations.

"Certainly my parents never allowed my brother or me to doubt that we could become whatever we chose," Henry says in his new book, "The Future of the Race," which he wrote with fellow Harvard scholar Cornel West. "Nor did they let us doubt that the world would yield its secrets if only we turned our attention to it. They believed in the possibility of upward mobility, of racial betterment, of col-

lective progress. We were to get just as much education as we possibility could, to stay the enemies of racism, segregation, and discrimination. If we heard it once, we heard it a thousand times: 'Education is the one thing nobody can take away from you.'

But as the great black scholar W.E.B. DuBois noted nearly a century ago, education, and any upward mobility that came as a result, meant a whole new set of responsibilities. DuBois wrote that the "Talented Tenth," "the most fortunate, gifted, and successful minds in the black community, were obligated to help those less fortunate. 'Dr. King did not die so that half of us would 'make it' and half of us would perish, forever tarnishing two centuries of struggle and agitation for our equal rights," Henry and Cornel write. "We, the members of the Talented Tenth, must accept our historical responsibility and live King's credo that none of us is free until each of us is free... and that all of us are brothers and sisters, in spirit."

When I was growing up, I was

taught that the world had a lot of problems that I should struggle and work to change. My parents taught me that extra intellectual and material gifts brought with them the privilege and responsibility of sharing with others. They believed that service is the rent each of us pays for living, and that service is the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals.

Cornel and Henry say that the lessons of recent history and the many challenges we have yet to overcome as black people require us to take a fresh look at our ideas about what it will take to move us forward. They believe that we must all find opportunities for positive change - within ourselves and within our community. What about government's role? They make the case for getting people off welfare, training them for good-paying jobs, and putting them to work.

We must demand a wide range of economic incentives to generate new investments in inner cities, youth apprentice-

ships with businesses, and larger tax credits for money earned. And they urge us to stand boldly against anti-black racism, but warn us against continuing to repeat the same old, stale formulas: "to blame 'the man' for oppressing us all, in exactly the same ways; to scapegoat Koreans, Jews, women, or even black immigrants for failure of African Americans to seize local entrepreneurial opportunities," is to neglect our duty as leaders of our own community.

"Not to demand that each member of the black community accept individual responsibility for her or his behavior - whether that behavior assumes the form of black-on-black homicide, violations by gang members against the sanctity of the church, unprotected and too early sexual activity, gangster rap lyrics, and hate of any kind - is to function merely as ethnic cheerleaders selling wool tickets from the campus or the suburbs, rather than saying the difficult things that may be unpopular with our fellows.

Being a leader does not necessarily mean being loved; loving

one's community means daring to risk estrangement and alienation from that very community, in the short run, in order to break the cycle of poverty, despair, and hopelessness that we are in, over the long run."

I agree. What we desperately need now is the kind of leadership that will allow us to move forward as a community and as an entire nation. Given the multitude of problems we face today, we must recognize that we all have a responsibility to serve as leaders.

"The Future of the Race," written by Henry Louis Gates, chairman of Harvard University's Afro American Studies Department, and Cornel West, professor of Afro-American studies at Harvard, is published by Alfred A. Knopf and is available at most major book stores or by calling (212) 751-2600.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund and a member of the Black Community Crusade for Children Working Committee.

# New word to send us into orbit



Ebonics.

Just that word, a word we had never heard until a few weeks ago, now gets all our juices running.

Why?

It touches at least two of our "hot buttons," either of which could send us in to orbit. The two together could shoot us to Mars.

There are times when we might sit back and quietly discuss how we can best teach English to kids who don't speak "standard" English at home or understand our language well enough in the classroom.

On those days we could even calmly think about whether or not there might be some merit in using patterns from the way a child normally speaks to help that child learn to speak, understand, read, and write correct English.

We might even have a polite disagreement about the best way to help such children learn "good" English.

One of us might say, "The best way for children to learn is for their teachers to establish high standards for speaking and writing English - and insist that they be met by everybody. Don't allow any crutches. They just hold the kids back. Throw them into the ice water and insist that they perform well. True, some kids may not make as good progress as others. But most will learn, if they under-

stand what is expected of them - and are not excused for non-performance."

The other of us might respond, "No, a better tactic is to try to find out the way each child learns faster and better. Then try to use that way whenever possible. And if it could be shown that it helps teach standard English, then we should even consider using - Ebonics."

Whoa!

When we hear that word, we just stomp our feet and say, "That is the most ridiculous thing that I have ever heard of." (Forgetting, by the way, that we shouldn't be ending our sentences with a preposition.)

That word immediately keys us in to things we care about passionately. It hits those two hot buttons I mentioned earlier. They are (1) the English language and (2) race.

We worship the English language - with good reason.

It is the great rope that binds our country together. We regard it with reverence as our symbolic and practical unifier. A common language makes a common culture possible. And a shared or common culture helps make it possible to be a unified people.

don't know for sure. But I do know, for sure, that any threat to the English language gets me excited.

And then there is race.

Writing about race is dangerous. Thinking and talking about race often puts us so much on edge that we leap to misunderstand each other. Race is so close to the surface of our skin that even little misunderstandings can create big problems and strain friendships.

Honest inquiry or commentary often comes across as condescension or inconsiderate - or racist. We can't joke about it. The balm of humor that heals other wounds can turn to salt when it touches race. We avoid it if we can - and if we talk or write about race at all, we do it with glum, serious, sanctimonious, scientific-sounding rhetoric.

Therefore, I am going to say this quickly: Ebonics has become one of those race words or images like the Confederate Flag, the "N" word, and "racial quotas." It is one of those things that instantly inflames our racial divisions.

Let's put the word "Ebonics" aside.

We are united in our commitment to give all of our children the skills they need to succeed.

We don't need another code word to divide us and put us in orbit or send us to Mars. We need to keep our minds cool and our feet firmly planted on the earth when it comes to educating our children.

## Follow O.J. money trail

By Dennis Schatzman  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

LOS ANGELES - As the Women's Progress Alliance seeks to recall an Orange County judge who granted O.J. Simpson custody of his two youngest children, the group, headed by activist Tammy Bruce and Simpson's former sister-in-law, Denise Brown, is seeking \$200,000 from the Texaco Foundation possibly to perform this and other tasks, mainly in the black South Central Los Angeles community to promote "social action on violence against women and children."

Instead of returning a reporter's call last week, Bruce, former president of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization of Women, called black leaders sympathetic to their causes to try to get the reporter, who was seeking clarification, to back off the story.

According to the proposal obtained by this reporter, the \$200,000 "would provide start-up funds, operating costs and expansion" for what will be called the South Los Angeles Allinace. Yet the Women's Project Alliance, the parent group, is simultaneously raising funds to conduct a recall against Orange County Superior Court Judge Nancy Weiben Stock. There has also been no explanation as to how safeguards will be implemented to assure there will be no co-mingling of funds or activities.

As has been reported during the Simpson criminal trial, Denise Brown was involved in a

foundation named after her slain sister, Nicole Brown Simpson, which raised money by selling angel pins and seeking donations from such notables as talk show host Geraldo Rivera. Much of the money raised remains unaccounted for, according to published reports.

Last November, top leaders within the civil rights movement, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson of the People to Save Humanity, Kweisi Mfume, executive director of the National NAACP and Celes King, III, state chairman of the Congress for Racial Equality of California, worked tirelessly to help resolve a class action discrimination suit filed against Texaco by its 4,000-plus black employees. The suit was settled for just under \$200 million. Part of that settlement is earmarked for charitable work in the black community via the Texaco Foundation.

Brown, Bruce and a group that is "men and women, gay and straight, Republican and Democrat and is ethnically diverse," intends to work with three predominantly black-run social service organizations; the Creative Neighbors Always Sharing House, the Family Helpline and the Continental Healthcare Alliance.

The Continental Healthcare Alliance is an independent physicians' association committed to offering quality medical care to minorities in South Central Los Angeles. The physicians provide free medical treatment to indigent patients on Saturdays.

DENNIS SCHATZMAN is a National Newspaper Publishers Association columnist.

D.G. MARTIN is Vice President of Public Affairs for the University of North Carolina system. He can be e-mailed at dgmartin@ga.unc.edu.