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OPINIONS

Running a numbers game on black folks

Given our unique history, one would expect African-Americans to be more supportive of undocumented workers, many of them filling the low-paying jobs once held by blacks. Like many whites, blacks are quick to say the estimated 12 million immigrants who entered this country illegally should be deported.

But that's not realistic, as many of the blowhards on Capitol Hill already know. A study by the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank, found that expelling undocumented workers would cost from \$206 billion to \$230 billion over a five-year period. Taking the low figure, that would be \$41.2 billion a year. Even worse, the effort would reach only 20 percent of illegal immigrants.

That reality doesn't stop politicians from grandstanding for the folks back home. Consequently, both President Bush and Democrats looked silly when Congress failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

Some African-Americans are clashing with Latinos. There are gang wars on the streets of Los Angeles, prison inmates are dueling, and some poor blacks are angry that many once all-black neighborhoods have been taken over by Latinos. There is no denying that those tensions exist. But underneath the friction, there is one element driving the gulf between blacks and Latinos, two groups that should be allies: a numbers game.

Comparing blacks to Hispanics is a false equation. Latinos are not a race – they are an ethnic group. In fact, they can select their race on Census forms and more than half identify with being white. Therefore, Hispanics can't be "white" and a "minority" at the same time. Let me rephrase that: they shouldn't be allowed to have it both ways.

The Census Bureau reported a month ago that people of color now number 100.7 million in the United States, a figure larger than all but 11 countries. People of color are the majority in four states and the District of Columbia. Hawaii leads the way with 68 percent, followed by D.C. (68 percent), New Mexico and California (each at 57 percent) and Texas (52 percent).

Hispanic remained the largest minority group, with 44.3 million on July 1, 2006 – 14.8 percent of the total population," the Census Bureau said in a press release. "Black was the second-largest minority group, totaling 40.2 million in 2006. They were followed by Asians (14.9 million), American Indian and Alaska Native (4.5 million) and Other Pacific Islander (1 million). The population of non-Hispanic whites who indicated one or other race totaled 198.7 million in 2006."

Let's look at that again. There are 40.2 million blacks and 44.3 million Hispanics. But that's not where the fear factor kicks in. Another Census release show that the Latino population will double as a percentage of the U.S. population, from 12.6 percent in 2000 to 24.4 percent in 2050. The white population will decline during that period, from 69.4 percent to 50.1 percent before slipping to minority status less than a decade later.

While most of the public attention is focused understandably on the phenomenal Latino growth, it's not like African-Americans are doing a disappearing act. The black population will grow from 35.8 million in 2000 to 61.3 million in 2050; it has already reached a record high 40 million. As a share of the total population, the black percentage will rise from 12.7 percent in 2000 to 14.6 percent in 2050.

People of color are projected to have a combined annual spending power of \$3 trillion in 2011, according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia. By then, Hispanic buying power would have jumped from \$212 billion in 1990 to \$1.2 trillion in 2011, a 457 percent increase.

Again, black dollars will be nothing to sneeze at. Black spending power, which stood at \$318 billion in 1990, will rise to \$1.1 trillion in 2011, a 237 percent increase in 22 years. White buying power is expected to grow by only 175 percent over that same period. As a percentage of total buying power, the black share will increase from 7.4 percent in 1990 to 8.7 percent in 2011. That means that within four years, African-American consumers will account for almost nine cents of every dollar spent in the U.S.

Black buying power is even greater in certain states, according to the Selig Center research. From 1990 to 2006, African-Americans represented 31.1 percent of total buying power in the District of Columbia, 24 percent in Mississippi, 22 percent in Maryland, 20.5 percent in Georgia, 20.3 percent in Louisiana, 18.4 percent in South Carolina, 17.3 percent in Alabama, 14.6 percent in Delaware, 14.5 percent in North Carolina and 13.1 percent in Virginia.

The reality is that Latinos are growing faster than any other group. But African-Americans shouldn't fear that spurt. Both our numbers and dollars continue to increase beyond today's level. And if blacks and Latinos really work on mending political fences, both groups would enjoy greater political clout. Combined, the numbers are awesome. Divided, it's still the old divide-and-conquer numbers game.

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GEORGE E. CURRY

Father's day is Sunday and rarely a day goes by when I am not reminded of or think about my dad. He passed away in June 1986. Post reporters interviewed several community people for an article celebrating fathers. Our editor, Herb White, wanted to find out some lessons these individuals had learned from their fathers. I was intrigued with the concept and thought I would weigh in on it myself. Interestingly, the most memorable lessons I learned from my father did not come directly from him attempting to teach me something. They came through observing how he responded in situations.



As I See It
GERALD O. JOHNSON



Bill Johnson

The first lesson occurred when I was in elementary school. A bill collector called to discuss when he could expect a payment on a bill that surmised was overdue. My father picked up the phone, listened for a minute and then started his part of the conversation. "Well Bob, I am going to be a week or so getting that payment to you because..." then a pause from my father. Then with an angry look on his face, he yelled, "Well I am Mr. Johnson to you then" and hung up the phone. He walked away mumbling under his breath. My father was a very kind, even-tempered man that you really did not want to rattle. I know because I rattled him a lot. Trust me, I paid for it.

In less than two minutes Bob called my father back. My father listened for a moment and then said, "That's better. Like I was saying, I can get you your money next week." He hung up the phone and walked away with a grin on his face. I could only hear my father's side of the conversation, but I surmised and my father later confirmed that Bob said, "I am Mr. Thompson to you, Bill."

This episode had a tremendous impact on my maturation. When I was in elementary school, Charlotte was a very segregated community. All the blacks were relegated to the westside. I rarely came into contact with anyone white during my early years. But with their support, Congress has initiated or enhanced several Federal programs this year, designed to expand our nation's STEM talent pool. Research shows that the pipeline to the STEM professions starts breaking down for minorities in the K-12 classroom. Research has shown that a well-trained teacher can make the difference between a student's success and failure in math and science.

Recognizing this, I co-sponsored legislation that seeks to create 10,000 new teachers able to touch 10 million young minds. This bill boosts incentives for college students to pursue math and science teaching degrees and later teach in underserved schools. Ultimately, it aims to increase the number of highly qualified math and science teachers in schools which suffer from a shortage of well-prepared teachers. It also authorizes \$1.5 billion for federal scholarships and continuing education programs for current math and science teachers.

Furthermore, my CBC colleagues and I championed legislation that increases the National Science Foundation's focus on diversity at the collegiate level. A bill recently passed by the House directs federal researchers to report on the participation of under-represented groups in science, math and technology fields. They must also offer an annual plan describing how federal funds will be used to encourage more women and minorities to pursue science careers.

This bill further provides special consideration for minority serving institutions and historically black colleges and universities competing for grants. These colleges and universities produce an impressive number of minority scientists disproportionate to their level of resources. So it is imperative that we help support these institutions that help keep us competitive.

Finally, I have also worked through the Science committee to craft measures that encourage and support new researchers. One act, passed in the House, creates a new grant program for scientists and engineers in the early phases of their careers. These new researchers are the pioneers who discover the new technologies that improve our economy and quality of life. The prospect of steady funding ensures that they will get to see their studies and research through to a successful completion.

By supporting such legislation and conducting outreach, my CBC colleagues and I are striving to make lasting and long-needed progress on this critical Innovation Agenda. In October, Congressman Al Green and I will bring education and technology leaders to my home district of Dallas. There, we will discuss the skills needed for everyone to contribute to and benefit from the innovation-based economy.

Whether investing in research for the future, offering scholarships to tomorrow's teachers or improving K-12 science and math education, we are continually seeking and finding ways to enhance this nation's ability to compete and innovate.

EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. She is Democrat from Dallas, Texas.



A happy Father's Day to you, Dad

As an impressionable kid you observe that this is just how things are without anyone ever specifically telling you any of this. To observe my father in this situation told me a lot about the man I loved hanging around. He was a proud black man who insisted that you show him respect regardless of the situation. It was the observation of this incident that started my understanding that it is not so much about what life throws at you, but more about what you are willing to accept.

The second very memorable lesson occurred when I was in middle school. Billy, my middle brother who is now deceased, came home bragging about having to go upside his girlfriend's head for disrespecting him. He was telling my older brother, Bobby, the story and I just happened to overhear it. Unfortunately for Billy, my father overheard it. My brothers finished having their conversation and everyone went about their business. A little while later, my mother called us all in for dinner. As we gathered around the table preparing to eat, my father came in with a very cold, angry look on his face. Since he had not spoken that much to any of us since he came home, we all feared what the problem could be.

We all sat to eat and my father looked at Billy with that cold look and said "Boy, don't you ever let me hear about you raising your hand to hit a woman." The look on his face and the tone in his voice sent chills through me. This was really odd for me to afraid about this issue because I couldn't beat most of the women I knew. I looked up at Billy and he really wanted to cry, but he was too afraid. Can you imagine being too afraid to cry? Billy didn't get spanked. Nothing else was said on this matter. Nothing else needed to be said. My father made his point. We understood it. I can assure you we all acted accordingly from that day hence.

Happy Father's Day, dad. I miss you.
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