



NEW RIGHTS LEGISLATION—"America's Black Forum" host Julian Bond leads discussion on civil rights with Democratic D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton; Michael Baroody, National Association of Manufacturers; Wade Henderson, NAACP D.C. bureau chief; and Steve Gutow, National Jewish Democratic Council. (Photo by D. Fields)

NEA VIEWPOINT

Non-white 'group-norming' is unfair

By William A. Rusher

One of life's grimmest little shocks is the discovery, from time to time, of some stunt the government is pulling that you never heard of before.

Thanks to The New Republic, I have just found out about a new outrage, which I predict is going to create plenty of waves when the general public learns of it. It is called "group-norming," or "race-norming."

It transpires that the Public Employment Service, an agency of the Department of Labor that recommends qualified job applicants (mostly for blue-collar and clerical positions) to private employers on request, has been cooking the figures on its aptitude tests to favor black and Hispanic applicants over whites. The practice began during the Carter administration, and has been going on ever since.

It's done this way. People who register with PES for job opportunities are given an aptitude test. The theory is that an employer can request a prospective employee who scores in (say) the top 25 percent on the test. What white job applicants don't know, however, is that their performance on the test is compared only to that of other whites. It is well established that if Hispanics and blacks were included in the comparison, the average scores of the blacks would be substantially lower, and those of the Hispanics somewhat lower, than those of the whites. So Hispanic and black scores are compared only with those of other

Hispanics and blacks, respectively.

Thus a white job applicant whose test results put in him the top 40 percent of white applicants would be given a rating of 60, while a black applicant whose actual score was substantially lower might nevertheless rank in the top 25 percent of black applicants, and would accordingly be given a rating of 75. The black applicant would be referred to the prospective employer.

PES excuses this built-in bias (when the subject is raised at all, which is rarely) by asserting that aptitude tests are "culturally biased" in favor of whites, and hence the ratings of blacks and Hispanics must be adjusted — upward. But this is nonsense. Asian job applicants do very well on the tests.

This tilting of the pinball machine is so common nowadays that a number of private businesses skew their own aptitude test results the same way. And last year the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("equal opportunity") was on the verge of suing private corporations that didn't follow the same practice. Cooler heads have since prevailed at EEOC.

The cream of the jest is, of course, that the great bulk of the American people simply don't know that this is going on, and that as a result white job applicants are being routinely sidelined in favor of blacks and Hispanics with lower test scores.

No doubt about it, this is a hot issue. And there are, moreover, two sides to

it: If whites take all the decent jobs, what shall America say to its Hispanics and blacks?

The Democrats are scared to death of the subject, dependent as they are on black and Hispanic votes. The Republicans have been shy about taking the side of the whites, lest they be accused of racism. But Sen. Alan Simpson and Rep. Henry Hyde (both Republicans) have now introduced bills to stop the practice of "group-norming," and the fat is in the fire.

My own guess is that group-norming will not survive. America's whites are prepared to help "less advantaged" individuals, but not at the price of surrendering jobs they themselves need and for which aptitude tests establish that they are substantially better qualified.

If America's elite, in both parties, can't understand that viewpoint and accommodate it, we are paving the way for politicians who will make David Duke look like Little Lord Fauntleroy.

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We Just Want A Chance!

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — American minorities just want an opportunity to develop and make a contribution to the country, says the chairman of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Arthur A. Fletcher, who spoke last Friday at a national symposium on race relations, education equity and civil rights, said minorities contribute billions to the economy, but don't own much of the nation's wealth.

"When we insist that we want to participate, we're not asking for welfare. We're not asking for food stamps. We're asking to participate in the society that we pay our tax dollars to," Fletcher said. "If that's discrimination in reverse, so be it. If that's preferential treatment, find me some more."

Fletcher said he was criticized recently for saying America is a racist country. He received numerous telephone calls after

articles appeared in newspapers across the country. Some of his black friends told him they were tired of hearing about racism.

"I'm tired of hearing it too," Fletcher told them. "I'm tired of experiencing it, and I sure don't want my great-granddaughter to."

The civil rights battle isn't about giving preferential treatment to blacks, Hispanics or women, but about keeping the country afloat, he said.


"It is about national security," Fletcher said. "It is about whether we are going to stand a fighting chance."

Fletcher, who said he is charged with being the nation's conscience, demanded candidates running for office in 1992 cease "race baiting" and find another way to win elections.


"I'm tired of campaign strategies and tactics that will divide us," he said.

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