

Rampant Racism in America (2)

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It has been over forty years since the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. Generally it is believed that things have changed a great deal concerning the plight of African-Americans. Affirmative Action has propelled certain African-Americans into the creation of a new middle-class among African-Americans. But the number of new middle-class African-Americans is very limited, and the black underclass suffers from economic depression. In this article white racism, which is the root of all racial and economic problems among blacks, will be explored and a few clues to solutions are suggested.

Key Words : White Racism, Economic Disparity, Class Division, Justice and Equality under Law

1. In the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

In the last issue structural racism was discussed. In this issue structural racism in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the entire city of New Orleans, Louisiana and Long Beach, Mississippi in the summer of 2005, will further be explored. Now it is a known fact from TV reports and various descriptions by newspapers and countless magazines that certain sections of the city, mostly inhabited by poor blacks, were deserted by the city and state as well as by the federal governments. The bare necessities for survival such as food, water and shelter were not provided following the hurricane's landing on the cities. It took more than a week before any substantial help was provided. Tens of thousands of people were packed into the Superdome of the City of New Orleans. One of the biggest issues was that of sanitation, which could have caused epidemics in the area. People of all races rushed to the doors of locked-up supermarkets to get daily necessities. Newspapers and TV reporters focused on the scenes in which people were ransacking the stores for needed items. All hurricane victims were desperate, despite their color. When blacks broke into the supermarkets, the action was described

as 'looting,' while the same action by whites was depicted as something natural and necessary. It only goes to show that the media as an institution was racist-oriented. The September 12, 2005 issue of Time magazine carried a series of photos which showed the scenes of devastation of the entire City of New Orleans and Long Beach, Mississippi - they looked like Hiroshima after being bombed. "A sand castle set on a sponge three meters below sea level. People made music from heartache, and named their drinks as hurricanes and joked that one day you'd be able to tour the City by gondola."¹ It had been known long before Hurricane Katrina hit the area that the City of New Orleans was below sea level and that a hurricane of that magnitude would swallow the city in a flash. Billions of dollars have been poured into various wars in the past, while very little had been done to upgrade the levees along the Mississippi River. Very few people had ever imagined that a hurricane of that magnitude would actually hit the New Orleans area, but geologists and meteorologists had given warnings all along that some day hurricanes of that magnitude would hit the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi and devastate the coastal area. But very few gave heed, especially the federal government, and instead they

1 Nancy Gibbs, Time Magazine, September 12, 2005. PP. 26-27.

believed that hurricanes of such magnitude would never become an actuality. But speculations did become a reality and a nightmare will never be forgotten. "Katrina was in the cards, forewarned, foreseen and yet still dismissed. That so many officials were caught so unprepared was a failure less of imagination than will."² Between 1911 and 2005 there were 63 hurricanes and storms, category 3 or higher and caused more than \$90 billion in damage. The Okeechobee hurricane, Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Andrew together killed well over 3.500 people.³ Even though there have been hurricanes and storms of high categories and natural disasters in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina was quite different from many others: it was of an unimaginable magnitude. It also left so many poor blacks stranded: they were told to flee the city before the storm, but they were not able to do so for lack of transportation. Naturally buses were chartered, but it cost \$40.00 to ride them in order to flee the city. So many blacks had no means to gather up \$40.00 per person to get out of the area. Many had a large family and it could have cost each family anywhere between \$240 and \$400 to get on a bus to leave the city. Why was it that neither the city nor the state covered the cost of transportation in a time of emergency, especially when there were so many poor blacks who had lost everything and could not even afford a bus ride to flee the dangerous city? If the victims had been white, the situation could have been quite different. In fact, the Bush Administration lost no time in responding to the needs of the hurricane victims in Florida, because the majority of them were white and the governor was his own brother. In the case of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, however, the federal government did not move immediately. It took more than a week before any substantial aid arrived, including personnel. The city and state almost begged the federal government to come to extend the needed helping hand, but even then the response was very slow. One can see from various photos how devastated the entire city was. It was one thing that the city was destroyed by a hurricane, but it was quite another that no help was provided to rescue the still living: had help come much sooner, more lives could have been saved. The *New York Times Magazine* carried a special coverage of children of the storm on August 27, 2006, a year after the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina. By order of the Housing Authority of New Orleans no one was allowed to

return to the city: there were so many children with teen-age mothers who were stranded where they had been evacuated. Some returned to New Orleans illegally to live in some apartment which had been ransacked by pitiless looters, but thereafter they were ordered to evacuate the apartment, when they were found to be living there.⁴ Still, many little children lost their fathers and mothers and did not know what to do or where to go. They were simply abandoned. Some died from starvation, malnutrition and lack of pre-natal care. The U.S. is supposed to be one of the most civilized countries in the world, and yet crisis management was one of the worst in its history. The largest number of deserted children were naturally black. Quite a few white children were saved. So a year after the treacherous storm many black children were orphaned and there was no one who was willing to take them in, even though many families were willing to adopt children born between American soldiers and Vietnamese women following the American War in Vietnam.

When American soldiers in Iraq were killed, they were saluted, carried home and buried accordingly. But when all those poor people in New Orleans and elsewhere were killed by the hurricane, no one gave heed: their bodies were found floating in toxic whirlpools or simply abandoned out on the streets. Is there any difference between the soldiers killed in Iraq and those who died in the toxic water? They were the same American citizens with equal human rights. Among the evacuees there were naturally people who needed various kinds of medication: diabetes, high blood-pressure, heart trouble and so on, but care and hospitals were not readily available. So quite a few died from the lack of medication and treatment. President George Bush, in fact, came flying over the City of New Orleans, but went straight back to Washington, D.C. without having any word with the victims. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) was not able to take any action without official sanction from Washington, so it took a long time before any substantial aid reached New Orleans.

It was no news to many Americans that poverty existed in many large cities and New Orleans was certainly no exception. However, the magnitude of devastation in the poor black area shocked the nation. "There are 37 million people in poverty in our nation, 1.1 million of whom fell below the poverty line in 2004. Some of the poorest folk in the nation, people

2 Ibid. P. 48.

3 Ibid.

4 Brenda Ann Kenneally, *The New York Magazine*, August 25, 2006. P. 20.

in the Delta, have been largely ignored, rendered invisible, officially forgotten.”⁵ One of the most tragic facts about poor blacks in New Orleans is that most of them had no access to cars or any other means of transportation. The New Orleans’ black population ranks top in the nation in lacking access to automobiles. So, contrary to many whites’ assertion that blacks should have fled the area prior to Hurricane Katrina’s landing on New Orleans, poor blacks were utterly immobilized. This lack of understanding and awareness is a sheer indication that whites look at blacks only from their own perspective. Whites were able to flee the city, naturally, because they had ample access to automobiles and financial backing to ride buses out of the city, even though they had no access to cars. What was revealed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was not just whites’ ignorance of many poor blacks who had no means of escaping from the Hurricane, but also a false conviction that poor blacks had the ability to choose to stay in or to leave the city. This is one example of innate racism which is ingrained in whites’ mentality.

America is a huge country with multiple geographical features and is often a victim of nature’s fury. In 2008 there had been three major hurricanes - Gustaf, Hana and Ike - which zapped the coastal areas once gain. They barely missed New Orleans but hit other parts of Louisiana and Texas. Devastation was beyond imagination. This time, however, the federal agencies such as FEMA, F.B.I., and various National Guards had been alerted long before the advent of the hurricanes: they were ready to render help and services to potential victims of the hurricanes. Amtrak offered rides to tens of thousands of people out of the City of New Orleans. This time, however, many people opted for staying right in the city at the advent of the hurricanes. Despite the city and state warnings against staying in the city, people gathered in local bars to celebrate. They were determined to “stick it out” to the bitter end. People of New Orleans were spared from the fierce onslaught of the hurricane devastation in the year, 2008. However, a number of hurricanes are born each year and the coastal areas become the breeding ground for their attacks. The Federal Government has not yet seriously considered to raise levees to ease the damages caused by the hurricanes. Since 2005 in the City of New Orleans recovery efforts have been made and order has been restored. They have raised the level of levees to some extent along the Mississippi River to push back Tsunami-like waves, but fundamental facts remain

unchanged. The City of New Orleans is below sea-level. In the aftermath of Katrina burial vaults (in New Orleans because of the geographical nature, burial vaults are raised at least three feet above the ground) were seen floating in the water. It simply means that unless the city itself is raised above sea-level, New Orleans will never cease to become the gravest victim of hurricanes. Considering the fact that three million dollars are expended in Iraq each and every day, something should and could be done to fortify not only the levees but the entire geographical structure of the city. It will take years and years before this may become a reality, but if the nation is serious enough about the plight of New Orleans, it must be done.

2. The Executive Officer’s Responsibility

In the previous article the President’s lack of response and shirking his own responsibility was discussed in detail. In fact, President Bush responded quickly to the disaster in Florida. Why? This question was raised in the minds of many good-willed people. He flew over the City of New Orleans, but went straight back to Washington, D.C. Someone with a compassionate heart and mind and someone with such heavy responsibility would have grounded his helicopter in order to speak to some victims of the disaster. That’s the least he could have done, before any substantial aid arrived on the scene much later. But George Bush did not do that. This is an indication that even though he must have cared about what had happened in New Orleans, the poor black victims may not have been his top priority. But the question remains to be answered: as the top executive officer of the nation, should he not have cared about the poor black victims as much as their white counterparts? It is certain that the situation would have been different, if he had exerted as much energy and care for the poor black victims as for the war in Iraq. And even one-thousandth of expenditures earmarked for Iraq should have been set aside for relief efforts in New Orleans. Another pertinent question needs to be addressed: besides FEMA, why was it that Congress had not acted on releasing emergency relief funds in a time of great need? There was a striking incident which took place in Japan not too long ago: a taxi driver was murdered in Japan and the suspect’s driver’s license was discovered in the taxi cab. The police identified the suspect as an American soldier stationed in Japan. Later on he was arrested on murder charges.

5 Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006). P.4.

It was also revealed that he had acquired American citizenship just prior to coming to Japan. He was an African national before he was sent to Japan. It was further revealed that there were others who had acquired American citizenship and then were shipped off to Iraq. This only goes to show the American policy of granting citizenship to those who wished to have it and then shipping them off to Iraq. It is quite feasible that America would benefit more from sending newly-sworn-in citizens to Iraq than sending American-born citizens. If this were true, then the worth of human life would be weighed according to where one has come from. This clearly goes against the grain of the American creed as spelled out in the Declaration of Independence in which it is stated that every man is created equal. Human lives cannot be weighed according to where people have come from, but according to the way the Federal Government treats newly sworn-in citizens; the lives of American-born citizens are worth more than those of immigrants'. The same attitude prevailed, when African-Americans were first brought to the American Continent as slaves and were not treated as human beings.

In September, 2008, the writer took his fifteen research seminar students who are involved in the studies of African-American history and their long plight of racism, to Ellis Island off New York Harbor. They went through a similar experience that earlier immigrants faced, when they came to Ellis Island before they were allowed to land in New York. There must have been well over five hundred people with the students aboard a ferry and they were all herded like cattle and ordered to go here and there by officials. Wherever they went, they were ordered around. Ellis Island is now an Immigration Museum but until mid 1960's it was actually used as the Immigration Processing Center. If the doctors found any viruses or diseases among the immigrants, they were deported right back to where they had come from. They were even fumigated with disinfectant before they were checked out, even though there was no evidence of that fact shown in the Center. As the people were herded like cattle, the writer could imagine what it was like, when new immigrants had to go through the doctors' check-up like animals. Only those who were labeled as 'healthy' were allowed to go to New York to begin their new life in America. Little did they know that the American Dream they had held for so long turned out to be a series of nightmares: a new life in America was not rosy. It was obvious that the treatment of Western Europeans and Eastern Europeans along with other ethnic minorities from Asia, Africa and South-

Central America was vastly different in the way they were treated at the Immigration processing Center: western Europeans were treated with more dignity than non western Europeans. Somehow the inscription on the front pillar of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., the students witnessed 'Equal Justice Under Law' sounded like an empty cymbal. When will the time come, when every man and woman is treated 'equal' under law?

Even though more than forty years have passed since the hey-day of the Civil Rights Movement and even though civil rights have been granted to African-Americans, the racial situation in America has not changed much. It is one thing for African-Americans to have civil rights granted legally and it is quite another for them to be able to make use of them in their lives. Has there been any significant visible change in the lives of African-Americans? The answer would be an emphatic No. Many whites claim that since African-Americans have achieved some social status already through Affirmative Action, they are not in a position to ask for more: they should be content with what they have got, otherwise they will end up losing what they have acquired. This is in line with the majority thinking. And this is precisely where the Executive Officer needs to exercise his power of authority and responsibility to make sure that every one's life is guaranteed, be it an American-born citizen or not. This is what little the Executive Officer could do to uphold the American ideal of equal justice under law.

The changing of the guards is in the offing, so much so that the guarantee of justice and worth of human life for every one hopefully will be guaranteed.

The office of the Presidency has become cheapened lately. In the 1970's when Richard Nixon was President, he forfeited the dignity of the Office with his callous involvement in the Watergate scandal. But then Jimmie Carter restored order and dignity of the Executive Office with his deep commitment to social justice. In the last eight years the Bush Administration once again has lowered the standard and dignity of the Executive Office. It should be understood that the next President will have to assume greater responsibility in restoring not only the dignity of the Executive Office, but the lost faith of the general public in the Executive Office.

3. Race Still Matters

Since the beginning of the nation, white Americans have suffered from a deep sense of inner uncertainty as to who they really were. "One of the

ways that had been used to simplify the answer was to seize upon the presence of black Americans and use them as a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for the “outsider.” Many whites could look at the social position of blacks and feel that color formed an easy and reliable gauge for determining to what extent one was or was not American.”(Democracy Matters by Cornel West)

Perhaps “that is why one of the first epithets that many European immigrants learned when they got off the boat was the term “nigger” – it made them feel instantly American. But this is a tricky magic. Despite his racial difference and social status, something indisputably American about Negroes not only raised doubts about the white man’s value system but aroused the troubling suspicion that whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black”. (Ralph Ellison, *What America would be like without blacks* as quoted by Cornel West in *Race Matters*: New York: Vintage, 1988)

It has been over forty years since the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement and in the minds of many whites, race matters are a thing of the past. But is it really a thing of the past? Even in this day and age racial matters are run of the mill: blacks are daily subjected to police brutality and thoughtless harassment. So many black males are stopped for questioning and even interrogation for no apparent reasons. It has been pointed out a number of times that seven out of ten black men are in jail, and the police figure that every black man is a potential suspect for drug dealings, theft and murder. So race matters remain not a thing of the past, but are alive and well in the minds and experiences of many people.

In the *Washington Post*, Stephanie Simon told a story of a woman. “Charlotte Griffin was at a restaurant one evening when a white woman complimented her on her children’s behavior. The stranger meant to be kind. But Griffin wondered if she heard a note of condescension-an assumption, perhaps that black kids aren’t usually so polite.” (The *Washington Post*, March 31, 2008, P.11) This is nothing new, because many whites even today feel that black men are lazy and black women are promiscuous and that their children are selling drugs. So how do we navigate this kind of minefield and how do we go about changing these stereotypes? Whites and blacks have been together over two hundred years, but there are still old stereotypical images of blacks held by whites. Barack Obama now is the new President but again there have been bickering and rumors about his behavior. He does not fit the stereotypical image of a black man. It does

not matter to whites if one is a jail-bird or a President - they hold the same images of black men. For a while Obama was in the midst of a controversy over his pastor’s remarks about race. Obama declared that whites must come to understand the black experience in America and blacks must appreciate the white perspective, otherwise we face a grinding racial stalemate. Naturally, Obama was conscious of the potential white voters, and so he was not too highly critical of whites’ behaviors over the centuries in America. He could have stated that part of American history in much stronger terms but he knew he would lose their votes, if he had put it strongly. Since he was elected President, however, there is bleak hope the racial situation which has existed in America over two hundred and fifty years will change significantly. It is true that at least a dialogue between whites and blacks must start somewhere, but “who’s going to put a bell around a cat’s neck?” No one seems to know where to start. Following the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina there could have been a chance to start a national dialogue, but no one took the initiative. It should have been the responsibility of the Executive Officer, or at least he could have involved the House and the Senate in discussion on the national level concerning race matters. He shirked his own responsibility, so one might have to wait until the new President takes some action on this matter. However, a national dialogue on race matters should not be left to the whims of the House, the Senate or even the President. It has to start at the grass roots level. It could start when a white and a black meet in a restaurant, as was the case of Charlotte Griffin mentioned earlier. It is difficult to have a meaningful dialogue, considering the fact that whites and blacks have been living together for hundreds of years and yet they know little about each other, because they are more concerned about themselves and not each other.

Dialogue should be initiated at schools, where there are blacks, whites and other ethnic minority students. To do that, however, teachers must first be sensitized in the matters of race: correct understanding of American history, starting from the wrong description of what Christopher Columbus did or did not do and how whites treated the Native Americans. There were a number of agreements and compacts made between the whites and the Native Americans, most of which were never honored. The near extinction of Native Americans and the institution of slavery must be taught in the right perspective, because it is an undeniable part of American history. One does not need to dwell on that, but nonetheless it has to be made clear.

Then one can search for ways in which to rectify the wrongs done to them. Only then will the means of reparations and atonement become possible. In 1988 the then President Ronald Reagan signed the official declaration and made a public apology on behalf of the nation to Japanese-Americans. More than 110,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans on the West Coast were sent to ten War Relocation Centers in five Western states following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Issei were Japanese nationals but the Nisei were American citizens by birth. However, they were together galvanized within forty-eight hours at local race tracks and waited to be shipped off to concentration camps. This was done by an Executive order without any due process of law. Reagan's apology allowed a mere \$20,000 for each detainee as a small gesture of compensation. Naturally, this could never be enough to compensate for what they had physically lost –much less emotional and spiritual damage caused by this callous treatment. In fact, most of them lost everything they had owned: property, homes, farms, businesses and their livelihood. Most Nisei were in their low teens and were hurt greatly by this illegal decision by the U.S. government. America was at war with Germany and Italy as well, but their descendants were not treated as severely as Japanese-Americans. The significance of this event, however, lies in the fact that the President admitted the wrongs done to Japanese-Americans during WWII and made an official apology to them. One wonders, then, why the same Executive Officer did not make the same public apology to Native-Americans for their annihilation and devastation and also to African-Americans for the legalized institution of slavery and ensuing suffering leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. Public apologies are due from the top Executive Officer of the nation to whoever has suffered unduly. Nothing of this sort can be expected from the present Administration that did not even give heed to the poor black victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. One can only hope that under the leadership of President Barack Obama, there would be hope that proper and needed apologies from the top Executive Officer may be made to all those who made enormous contributions to the building of the American Republic and yet have been neglected and treated rather, as unequal.

It is a human proclivity, however, to ponder one's own sufferings, and not to think about others' suffering. Blacks should not wait until whites initiate a dialogue on race matters; whenever they have a chance, they should take the initiative to start a dialogue. But deep scars left in the minds and bodies

of countless black men and women in the years past can not easily be healed, much less erased. So many of them carry their own sack cloth – burden -within them and they do not wish to show it or bring it out into the open.

The Christian churches as institutions of reconciliation should encourage their parishioners to start a dialogue among themselves. There are distinctly black churches and some racially mixed congregations. Perhaps churches should get together to share their ideas and viewpoints with one another and gradually extend it to others. Obama, in renouncing his pastor's racial remarks, urged blacks and whites to "reach out to one another. He asked blacks to recognize that most working -and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. For whites, he explained that the roots of black anger trace a bitter path from slavery through segregation through legalized discrimination that kept generations of blacks from buying homes and working their way into the middle class." (Los Angeles Times, March 31, 2008) What we should be concerned about is not individual racism, but institutional racism in which discrimination has become legalized and this legalization has kept blacks from going up the ladder of success, no matter how capable they may be. If one is going to start a national dialogue, this is where it should all start, before blacks and whites try to reach out to one another. Institutional racism is precisely the common denominator in reaching out to one another and starting a national dialogue.

4. Class Division Among Blacks

Life of many black Americans has changed in a significant manner in that there has been a sharp rise of a black middle class since Martin Luther King, Jr. was gunned down by the assassin's bullet in 1968. Quite a few middle class blacks enjoy the luxuries of life, while the underclass blacks still suffer from dilapidated housing conditions and joblessness. In Cornel West's words, blacks suffer from the sense of 'hopelessness, meaninglessness and lovelessness.' And this drives many black youths to drug peddling, gang fighting, prisons and attacks on other ethnic minorities who invade their own turf in Harlem and Watts. No one seems to be able to give them any incentive with which to better themselves: black youth themselves have a deep sense of disillusionment, which gives them no desire to go places, because no one is interested in giving them jobs. It is true that many of them cannot hold jobs, even if they are hired, but if they are given a chance

to better themselves, they may be able to continue their jobs. Since they are only given low-paying jobs no one else wants to have, it does not give them a sense of pride and selfhood. Many black youths suffer from self-effacement. It is indeed a vicious cycle and they see no way out of it. Middle-class blacks cannot afford to care so much about the underclass, because they are so busy keeping the fort they have built up around themselves. So there is an ever-widening gap between the middle-class and the underclass blacks. Then what should be done about this situation? Before the gap between the black middle-class and the underclass can be bridged, there has to be a reconciling effort between whites and blacks. To put it bluntly, there has to be an effort to eradicate the black ghettos from the face of the American soil. To do this American society has to transform itself and sacrifice a great deal. Those who enjoy luxuries of life must give up a portion of their wealth and holdings for the underprivileged. Americans are individualistic: they think of themselves before they think of the whole. They will have to alter their thinking and first think of the whole, before they think of themselves. If this becomes a way of life for many Americans, then there is a possibility that the entire society could change. But as long as Americans put themselves first, there is a bleak chance of social transfiguration. To accomplish this, the educational system also has to change: this idea of thinking of the whole has to be instilled in the mind of every school child. In the words of a sociologist 'No one is truly free until every prisoner is freed.' This truism should be worked into school curricula so that the true sense of individualism can be taught and understood. Individualism means that one honors his/her own rights as much he/she honors those of others. Individualism should never be reduced to rampant and rugged selfishness.

But the fact is, as Robert Bella warned us some time ago, American individualism has become self-centered almost to the degree of selfishness. It has been evidenced by the fact that so many Americans do not wish to give up their guns by saying that having guns has been guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, so every man and woman is entitled to having a gun or two. A number of gun-control bills had been placed before the House and the Senate, but each time those bills were killed by the strong pressures of the NRA (National Rifle Association). Considering the fact that some Presidents in the past were members of NRA, there is little hope that gun control will ever be established in America. This is all due to American individualism.

Americans feel they have the right and responsibility to protect themselves because they lack confidence in police protection. But even then knowing what happened at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech or at a number of other gun-related tragedies, one would think that Americans would say that they have had enough of it and move toward gun-control. There is no clear evidence, however, that Americans in general are willing to push gun-control laws forward. Guns will kill! That's all there is to it, but they do not understand this simple truth. Nowadays many young women carry small hand-guns in their purses, thinking that those guns will protect them in the case of their being assaulted. But having guns sometimes gives them a false notion that they can use them and shoot whoever comes at them, even though it may be someone who wants to know a simple direction. So this thinking of the entire society before thinking of themselves seems to be a clue to solving complicated problems of race matters in America. If Americans start thinking of each other, no matter who they are in terms of their ethnic background, America could transform itself. If America would become more aware and mindful of their own shortcomings before they blamed terrorism and weapons of mass destruction on some specific countries, America could change. However, the very recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold the long-debated Second Amendment, extended not only to the militia, but also to every single individual citizen, came out in the split vote of 5 to 4, thus favoring the individual right to own guns for personal use. John Roberts, Bush's appointee to the chair of Chief Justice in the nation's highest court, swayed four other conservative justices in favor of the ruling. One finds it extremely difficult to expect any meaningful outcome or decisions by the Supreme Court. Compared to the decision of the same court on the Voting Rights or other civil rights bills of the 60s, this decision is nothing but a sad commentary on the quality of the nation's highest court. Probably one would not like to give the highest court a bad name, and yet the court could be termed as a racist one, because they condoned the legalization of racial discrimination and segregation in the past and now have given a warped interpretation of the Second Amendment to the Constitution. This kind of ruling will accelerate the production of more hand guns and this in turn will create a wider gap between the whites and blacks; between the middle-class blacks and the underclass blacks. One just wonders how many Americans, with the exceptions of NRA members and those who love to own guns, actually welcomed this Supreme Court ruling. Any one in

their right mind should question this ruling. Before the class division among blacks can be bridged, America should first guarantee every American, regardless of color, equal justice under law. America should also exert an enormous effort to create jobs for the underprivileged. Youth rehabilitation programs should be initiated to give youngsters of ethnic minorities an incentive to work and upgrade themselves. A better sense of selfhood, confidence in who they can become should be instilled in each youngster. Educational reform is much needed to upgrade the quality of education among black students. In order to raise the scholastic level of education among ethnic minority students, dedicated teachers should be trained to relate to children who have lost the sense of confidence and selfhood. Severe punishment is not an effective method of rehabilitating delinquent children. As Cornel West pointed out, they need love, hope and meaning in their lives. When children have found caring love, hope for their future and some meaning in their existence, they will move forward, no matter what the future may bring.

With the crumbling down of the giant financial institutions, which may become another Great Depression of the 1930's, rippling effects of the sub-prime loans to the world, enormous expenditures in Iraqi war, the general public's lack of faith in the federal government, damages from a series of natural disasters, America is in a state of shock and disillusionment. This economic recession divides the white upper middle-class and the underclass. But the division between black middle-class and black underclass is more serious. White upper middle-class and middle-class probably will think of their own benefits and not those of white underclass. In like manner, black middle-class will keep pace with white middle-class and black underclass will be left without any help from either federal or state government. White upper middle-class and middle-class are not pleased with the rise of black middle-class, and therefore they will be chuckling, if black middle-class suffers from economic depression. Black middle-class will be busy in keeping up with white middle-class, and they cannot afford to look after black underclass. Then who will save black underclass? Economically they are in a worse situation than some new immigrants or even refugees. As mentioned earlier, if America is serious about salvaging black underclass, white upper middle-class and middle-class will have to share part of what they have. It all boils down to one simple truth: white upper-middle-class and middle-class have been successful at the expense of black underclass who

has worked as a slave and a cheap laborer for white upper-middle-class and middle-class. Behind the rise and success of black middle-class there has been Affirmative Action. But it is no longer in force at workplace or educational institutions. This has put a period to further rise of black middle-class and accelerated the perpetuation of black underclass. It will take a breath-taking economic policy to shorten the gap between the haves and have-nots. Every one suffers, black, white or otherwise under the current economic policy which brings benefits to the rich and which further divides the rich and the poor. If a new economic policy is truly geared toward helping the underclass, America may be saved from national economic devastation.

5. Where Is America Headed?

America is in serious crisis. Who or what can save America: Federal intervention in supplying a large sum of federal funds to bail out America from the financial crisis? Can the new President pull America up from the rut she is in – Vietnam-war like situation in Iraq: disenfranchisement of economically-devastated ethnic minorities? Can he restore the lost faith of Americans in the federal government? Americans in general hold bleak hope for their own future so much so that the new President has greater responsibility in instilling in them a sense of hope for and faith in what the government can do. Once again, however, Americans should be reminded of the words of John F. Kennedy: "Do not ask what your country can do for you: ask what you can for your country." Probably it is not that kind of time today. People have little faith in and hope for what the federal government can do for them. Each American will have to search for what s/he can do to make their own lives more meaningful: dependency upon the government may cripple them in fulfilling their hopes and dreams for the future.

Racial conflicts between whites and blacks will not disappear easily. But something drastic should be done to alter the status quo of racial stalemate. It really takes fortitude to face reality of racial conflicts. When whites and blacks come together, face to face and admit that they do not really know and understand each other - that will be the beginning of breaking down the cold walls of apathy and irresponsibility.

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