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VIEWPOINTS

Help the OP-RF Food Pantry meet the Feinstein challenge
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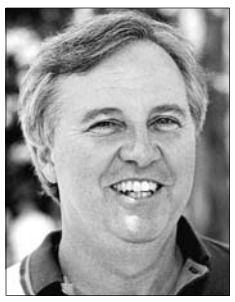
The wrath of God can be seen in slavery's aftermath

I am suffering from Election Fatigue Syndrome (EFS). My passion for the Obama/Clinton Death Cage Match has begun to wane under the daily onslaught of what Elizabeth Drew in the most recent issue of The New York Review of Books aptly described as "molehill politics." A tiny mistake or misstatement by the candidate, or a supporter is spun by the opposition, and then repeated by the braying jackass commentators as further evidence that the candidate is corrupt, stupid, hypocritical, etc. It won't be long before the candidate's dental hygiene will be placed in issue. (Does Obama floss? The full story on Fox at 10.)



JOHN HUBBUCH

But the controversy over the statements by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's pastor for the last 20 years at Trinity United Church of Christ, was fascinating and provides a valuable insight into the sad state of race in our country.

Five years ago, Rev. Wright preached, "The government gives them [blacks] the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law and then wants us to sing 'God Bless America'. No, no, no, Goddamn America, that's in the Bible for killing innocent people. God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human. God damn America for as long as she acts like she is God and she is supreme."

Now Obama initially tried to explain that Rev. Wright is like some crazy, but lovable uncle, but the Clinton camp and the electronic jackals were having none of it, and lucky for all of us, Obama gave a wonderful speech on race in Philadelphia on March 18. If you have not had a chance to read it, please do so. It has to be one of the most serious, objective, yet personal speeches a presidential candidate has ever given on this very complex subject that still so tragically divides us.

Obama makes clear in his speech that "the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow" can directly explain the disparities that exist in the African-American community today, particularly for young black men. Perhaps Rev. Wright had these numbers in mind when he gave his incendiary sermon:

■ Homicide is the number one cause of death for black men between 15 and 29 years of age and has been for decades.

■ Of the roughly 16,000 homicides in this country each year, more than half are committed by black men. A black man is seven times more likely to commit a murder (excluding military actions) than a white man, and six times more likely to be murdered.

■ Ninety-four percent of all black people who are murdered are murdered by other black people.

■ The life expectancy of black men is 69 years compared to 75 for white men, 80 for white women, and 76 for black women.

■ In the past several decades, the suicide rate among young black men has increased more than 100 percent.

■ In some cities, black males have high school drop-out

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Housing is at the center of OP's integration story

The latest installment in our series of community commentaries on anthropologist Jay Ruby's ethnographic study, "Oak Park Stories," focuses on the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. It is written by Paul Hamer, whose family has lived in Oak Park since 1907. Paul has served on the Parking and Traffic Commission, the Cul-de-Sac Commission, the Oak Park Housing Center board, the United Way of OP-RF-FP board, and the Facility Committee for Oak Park and River Forest High School. Paul and his wife Sis, recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. Currently he serves on the board of the Cliff Dwellers Club in Chicago and divides his time between his family's Century Farm in Iowa and his great-grandfather's house on good old Lyman Avenue.

File images

AFFIRMATIVE: *The Oak Park Regional Housing Center has been integral to the village's efforts to maintain stable diversity since the early 1970s.*

I have stayed away from the debate on race in our community, largely for the reason that out of all the communities in the United States, ours is perhaps the only one where the debate is moot.

We are an integrated community comprised of people from every race who have chosen to live here. If we were afraid of other races and wanted our own separate segregated all black or all white community, we would have chosen another area to live. To discuss race in our community is like preaching to the choir: We are here, all of us, and that speaks volumes for our collective commitment to integration.

For nearly 40 years in our grand Oak Park experiment, we have had a nationally recognized history of being in the forefront by first *advocating* for integration, then *creating* the climate for welcoming integration, and finally for *maintaining* integration. With an integrated community, we find the fundamental concept of an American people enduringly alive—that we are all better off together than we are separate.

PAUL HAMER
One View

Jay Ruby's excellent study "Oak Park Regional Housing Center: An Oak Park Story" relates, investigates, correlates, and collates Oak Park's struggles and ultimate success in being America's only truly integrated community. This study is well written and well researched, and it includes thoughts and opinions from all sides of this complex issue. Jay fairly portrays our community to the world, warts and all. He studies other communities' failures, trumpets Oak Park's current success, and warns that while today we can pat ourselves on the back, we need to remain active in ensuring our success into the future.

Jay discusses the people who laid the foundation stones for our success, he interviews the people who have carried on the commitment by building strong structures on those foundations, and he exposes the cracks and wedges that some academic and governmental know-nothings are trying to drive into our foundation in an attempt to destroy it—many from within our own community.

He recognizes the two most important women who were critical to the success of the Housing Center: Bobbie Raymond Larson, the center's founder, and longtime director and Aggie Stempniak, her successor. These courageous women, along with their dedicated staff, volunteers, and supporters became the epicenter of the core group of people who bravely created what one day may well be recognized as the only successful social experiment, ever.

Is integration easy? It is not. Not on either side. However, if I can read into Jay's subtext a bit, I believe, and I think that he believes, it is worthwhile.

Jay has an interesting take on why Oak Park works. He posits that both black and white families approach integration with fear and trepidation and ultimately embrace it only because the alternative of a segregated society is so awful. I'd rather like to think Oak Park's collective embrace of integration is a bit more utilitarian and ultimately more utopian than that, but Jay may be right. That is something for each of us involved here to decide for ourselves.

For those who are not disposed to exercise the eye-

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HAMER
The Housing Center story

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balls by reading, Jay has complemented his wonderful writing style with video clips to help round out his research. He points out, with droll humor, how many research papers in the ethnographic field leave out the very people they are studying. Not so here. For Jay, it's people and ideas, and in studying people, he constantly uncovers the truth that shatters academic ethnographic preconceived concepts.

I was also pleased that he recognized Evan McKenzie, a former Oak Parker, who has also studied our community extensively and has collaborated with Jay on several occasions. Evan McKenzie's Xs-and-Os explanation of segregated communities was an eye-opener for me, and I'm glad Jay included it in this study.

The Housing Center has many ill-informed critics. For them this study is a must-read. For purity of motive and excellence in execution, it doesn't get better than the Oak Park Regional Housing Center.

The future of the Housing Center is not so clearly defined. Just recently someone began advocating for bringing back For Sale signs! Fortunately, longtime housing rights advocate Dan Lauber, a former Housing Center board member, stepped up to accurately defend the practice of not having For Sale signs.

Some village board members question whether the Housing Center needs to exist at all and question Housing Center funding, all while doling out millions of dollars to private developers in questionable real estate deals that immediately enrich the wealthy at the long-term expense of the electorate.

Just as the development mistakes of past village boards in the 1920s and 1960s caused us to create and fund the Housing Center and the Oak Park Residence Corporation, it will be critical for the Housing Center's future that its board and the village board wrap their minds around the negative causes and effects that all aspects of the actions of village government and its influence over local development will have on Oak Park's future.

Their job is to ensure that the millions we spend each year correcting the zoning mistakes of the past don't turn into a billion tomorrow. How expensive will it be for future generations to correct the mistakes we make today? As the women who saved Oak Park might say: Let's stop making mistakes already!

Unfortunately, the mistake-laden, ill-informed, and visionless will always be with us. Fortunately, we have Jay Ruby's study, which validates and underlines the positive efforts of so many Oak Parkers. Jay's study will be the one that people turn to time and time again to get the real story on what happened here.

We owe Jay a collective chorus of thanks. For us, for the future, we can either raise high the roof beam on the solid foundation others have left us or we can sit in our high-backed directors chairs on Monday nights and collectively kick out the cornerstones until there is nothing left to build on. You decide that.

Now if Jay only had a crystal ball ...

Jay Ruby's "Oak Park Stories" is available at the Oak Park Public Library.

HUBBUCH
Slavery's aftermath

from page 25

rates of more than 50 percent.

■ Young black men are twice as likely to be unemployed as white, Hispanic, and Asian men.

■ Although black people make up just 12 percent of the general population, they make up nearly 44 percent of the prison population.

■ At any given time, as many as one in four of all young black men are in the criminal justice system—in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole.

■ By the time they reach their mid-30s, six out of 10 black high school dropouts have spent time in prison.

■ About one-third of the homeless are black men.

(See *Come on People* by Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussant, M.D., pp 8-9.)

Two hundred and fifty years of slavery, that peculiar institution wherein men, women and children are owned and traded like livestock, deeply stained forever the grand American experiment in democracy wherein all men are created equal according to its founding documents. Or maybe Rev. Wright was thinking about America's inner cities.

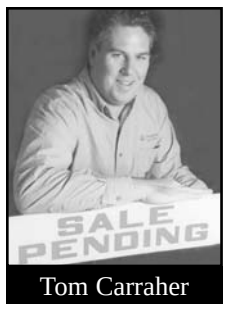
"The social isolation and negative perception of urban ghettos is a leading example of racial stigma at work in America today. These black ghetto dwellers are a people apart, ridiculed for their cultural styles, isolated socially, experiencing an internalized sense of despair, with limited access to communal networks of mutual assistance. The purported criminality, sexual profligacy, and intellectual inadequacy of these people are the frequent objects of public derision. It does not require enormous powers of perception to see how this symbolic degradation ties in with the history of race relations in the United States." (*The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, Loury, Glenn C., p. 77)

Ms. Clinton's response was: "Rev. Wright would not have been my pastor. You don't choose your family, but you choose what church you want to attend." That was better than the right-wing patriots who couldn't believe anyone, let alone a minister, would rhetorically condemn the land of the free and the home of the brave. Both responses were almost laughably pathetic as examples of just how clueless many white Americans are on complex matters concerning race.

Rev. Wright need not have invoked God's wrath on America. God has long damned America for the terrible sin of slavery.

Enthusiasm
(in thoo' ze az m) noun.
Intense interest; zeal; that which promotes unequalled service

TOM CARRAHER
• Success is a Walk in the Park •



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