

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



We've lost the way on race

I am greatly disturbed by the increasing ferocity in discussions about race in America. Recent events have surely fanned the flames of bigotry and intolerance, but the conflict has been building for many years.

It would be naive to suggest that any society will ever be completely race-neutral, any more than it could be neutral about other physical characteristics. Substantial evidence exists to document unequal images based on height or hair color, for instance.

There is, I believe, a great difference between discrimination based on those factors and on the color of skin. Many blacks of high achievement say they are frequently stopped by the police or watched closely in stores for the obvious reason that blacks are considered far more likely to be drug pushers or thieves. Even in social settings, black guests are mistaken for waiters or other service employees. As a child of the baby boom generation, I used to think this sort of thing would pass with the years, but now I fear we have slid backwards.

The flames of discord are being fanned today on both sides. Whether it's Rush Limbaugh ridiculing easily-hit targets like Rev. Louis Farrakhan or Farrakhan calling Jews "bloodsuckers," the order of the day is divisiveness, not harmony. This is a far cry from the 60's, when Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. combined firm adherence to nonviolent demonstration with inspiring rhetoric that still brings tears to my eyes. Now the tears are more likely to stem from despair that our society will ever achieve the modest goal of fair treatment for all citizens.

We have not come very far. Requests for a federal commission are being heard after the latest march on Washington called attention to America's racial divide. We have studied this problem since 1919, and each time the findings are about the same; blacks are clearly at a disadvantage in our society, and we haven't done enough to give them a fair chance at success. That's why I believe anti-discrimination laws are still needed, as well as programs that may offer a hand up to people who need it. For all the complaints about favoritism, it is still true that the goal of most government-led efforts is assuring equal opportunity, not outcomes. No finer example exists than General Colin Powell, who was aided in his career by the stern measures begun in our armed forces by Harry Truman, over howls of protest. But the military followed through, and is today perhaps the segment of our society least torn by racism.

There are some who say that liberalism and the "welfare state" have brought us to this point, because enforced equality and easy access to government checks have conspired to weaken blacks while creating bitterness in whites. There may be some truth behind that sentiment, and it would be wise for black leaders to focus on building a sense of initiative among their fellows. But I have seldom if ever spoken to a white person who complained about reverse discrimination from his or her own direct experience.

One thing is certain in my mind; we are becoming a nation of groups, and not individuals, and the basis of many of these groups is fear and distrust. One clear result of groupthink is oversensitivity to any word or action that can be taken as degradation. I'm half Polish, and my surname reflects that part of me, but I can't ever recall being personally offended by the Polish jokes that were so widespread in my youth. Another manifestation is using the group to explain someone's good or bad characteristics, as though all persons of a particular race, religion or color were simply clones of one another.

The truth is that every race includes persons of good and bad character, intelligence and dumbness, ambition and sloth. Each of them must be given the majority of credit or blame for their accomplishments, or lack thereof. But if you happen to be black, the road to achievement is surely going to be steeper and rockier, if only because it's easier to identify you as one of "them."

Perhaps the best proof of that is found in the vicious anti-black comments mouthed by radio talk show host Fred Williams after The Verdict, and seconded by his listeners, most of whom have had very little real contact with black or brown-skinned individuals.

There's the key word — individual. Too many of our citizens have become lazy or disinterested in getting along with anyone new or different to the point that they're happy to accept the negative characterization of others so prominently displayed by self-appointed commentators. Whether someone considers themselves a "dittohead" or an oppressed person, that vantage point guarantees a skewed perspective, usually to the detriment of anyone who isn't a member of your group. My own profession doesn't help, especially when it focuses on extreme behavior or preaches from an ivory tower perch.

I think racism is a sign of weakness, in our nation, and in those who practice it. I think anyone who speaks racist words or takes racist actions is a coward, so lacking confidence in themselves that they must lash out at someone they think will be perceived as weaker than they. The exception is those craven individuals who use racism to further their own ends, and by so doing demonstrate their contempt for the entire human race.

We need to form opinions of one another based on our own experience and not on what we hear or see in the media, from acquaintances or from those with an ax to grind or a profit to be made from discord. But first we must acknowledge that America is nowhere near the mountaintop, and the climb ahead will be long and arduous. But the view will be worth the trek.



Shed behind grove of pine trees, Lehman. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

Support legislation that will make school buses safer

Editor:
I am writing to let your readers know that legislation has been introduced that requires all school buses be equipped or fitted with a walking arm attachment on the front bumper. Senate Bill 718 amends the Vehicle Code, but was

not passed and is currently in the Senate Transportation Committee. I am requesting that readers call or write to legislators and tell them you are in favor of this Senate Bill for the safety of all students who have to ride a bus in Pennsylvania. It will not become a law unless you

let them know you are in favor of this. Senator J. Doyle Corman is the chairman of the Transportation Committee at Box 9, Main Capitol, East Wing, Harrisburg, PA 17120 where you can write and request that Senate Bill 718 be brought out

of committee because you are in favor of it. Thank you for your support for the safety of children who ride a bus.
Marjorie Brown
Kingston Township

Here's where to get an inexpensive crystal radio set

Editor:
The article by Jack Hilsher about crystal radios in the September 20, 1995 issue of the Post brought back memories of the crystal sets that I built and tinkered around with in my youth. Thinking that my grandson might also have fun

building one of these simple radios, I sent for the MIDCO catalog at the address indicated in Mr. Hilsher's article. You might want to share the following information from the MIDCO catalog with your readers - The least expensive of the several

crystal radio kits offered by MIDCO is Catalog No. CSR-1GED-103. The kit costs \$38.00 (plus \$3.75 shipping). It appears that everything needed to build and operate the radio is included in the kit. Unfortunately, MIDCO indicates that this kit (as well as their other kits) is out

of stock until January 1, 1996. For those who want the complete MIDCO catalog, send \$2.00 to: MIDCO, P.O. Box 2288, Hollywood, FL 33022.
Clyde Davis
Dallas

A Case for Conservation

Alene N. Case

I am still reeling from the news that one of our friends from Slovakia fell to his death in Yellowstone National Park last month. It seems that this experienced outdoorsman got so excited about sharing the view with two of his friends and videotaping the experience that he made one misstep and ended up dead at the bottom of a 400 foot cliff. Only three days before, we had shared bread and soup and fine conversation around our kitchen table. His unexpected demise has set me to pondering the fragility of human existence and our relationships to the natural hazards in this world. Won't you join me?
Some natural hazards affect individuals. Such things as cliffs, elephant stampedes, poisonous mushrooms, rip currents or falling trees tend to threaten only those few people directly exposed to the danger. Generally, some local knowledge and caution can help us avert disaster. But, we know

Natural hazards and humans

from the fact that an average of 100 people die in the United States each year after being struck by lightning that many people choose for various reasons to ignore local wisdom and foolishly expose themselves to danger. Then, there are instances of apparently random catastrophes that strike large groups of people quite unexpectedly. One recent example is that of 1,700 villagers being asphyxiated by an unusual release of carbon dioxide from the deep waters of Lake Nyos in Cameroon on August 21, 1986. Two years before, another deep volcanic lake in Cameroon had "fizzed" and killed 37 people. But, aside from the normal dangers of living so close to a relatively active volcanic zone, the local people had not prior knowledge or experience to help them avoid disaster. It was, as the insurance companies rather ironically phrase such things, an "act of God."
In fact, many ancient peoples worshipped gods which either brought such calamity or were thought to prevent it. Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes, comes to mind. Other people have a basically fatalistic attitude about natural hazards — they figure that if their time is up their time is up and there is nothing they can do to stop it.
Others seem to delight in challenging the elements just to see if

they are strong enough to survive. Still others figure that if they have enough insurance or live in a place with sufficient disaster relief they will be OK. It seems that few people actively make decisions about where to live or work based on an analysis of the natural risks present in that location. Since floods are one of the most common and devastating natural disasters (floods account for 39% of the deaths caused by natural hazards followed by hurricanes at 36%), one would think that higher areas in the Wyoming Valley would be prime real estate. Instead, areas of Plains, Courtdale and the Heights in Wilkes-Barre contain some of the poorest housing around here. Fancy homes continue to be built on lots left empty by the flood of 1972. And, businesses continue to be built on the floodplain with no parking deck or other open space underneath. Why do we think we are immune to another Agnes?
And, why do so many people continue to live in California? Earthquakes continue to be very difficult to predict. But, in a place underlain by so many large faults, one can be sure that they will continue to occur there. In China, 650,000 people died in one earthquake in 1976. More than that were killed in 1556. It could happen in California, too. Earthquakes come suddenly and last only a short time, but they can leave long-last-

ing scars on our psyches as well as upon the earth. In 1835, Charles Darwin recorded his thoughts after witnessing a terrible quake in Chile. "A bad earthquake at once destroys our oldest associations; the earth, the very emblem of solidity, has moved beneath our feet like a thin crust over a fluid — one second of time has created in the mind a strange idea of insecurity, which hours of reflection would not have promoted?"
We need to recognize that floods, fires, volcanoes, earthquakes, droughts and storms are all a real part of our natural world. They are only disasters as they affect the lives of human beings. Improved prediction and warning systems have significantly improved the odds of surviving a hurricane or tornado in the United States. But, drought still leads to famine in many areas of the world, especially Africa. And, poor people continue to be the most likely to suffer in any natural disaster. Those of us who have the luxuries of choice and information must take responsibility for improving the odds of those less fortunate.
We must recognize that natural disasters can often be mitigated by adequate preparedness. And, some decisions we make can actually make such disasters more likely and more deadly. It is something to think about.

As I was saying

Jack Hilsher

If you wanted to buy a pet python would you know where? Or, if you wanted to sell an antique Remington upright, would you know how?
There is only one answer to both questions...you should buy a Paper Shop, a unique magazine which bears a passing resemblance to a newspaper classified ad section. That's the staple fare of Paper Shop...classified ads, over 6000 per issue. With a circulation bumping 30,000 in two states, Paper Shop is located in the boon-

Looking for a pet python? Find it here.

docks of Fleetville, north of Clarks Summit. It was founded 27 years ago by John and Joan Craig. They sold it in 1986 to Longfellow Associates, a nebulous entity preferring to remain in the background and let the daily management stuff to its publisher, J.F. Murphy. And manage it he does. A hands-on type, Jim Murphy has held a firm grip for seven years. Young Murphy runs a neat, tight, and obviously profitable operation. Paper Shop has subscriptions but it is also sold for 90¢ at hundreds of locations. Measuring 8 1/2 x 11" it recently hit a record 96 pages; type faces are readable and nothing is jammed in. Except for used cars there are few photos, and paper quality is good.
Coverage is extensive, ranging from Binghamton to Pottsville and from Stroudsburg to Danville. Murphy does this with a staff of nine and 16 circulation reps. There

are almost 50 categories of products advertised, from cameras to computers and toys to TV. Name it - they have it. Condition "E" for excellent to "F" for fair. Many ads are so coded. Many advertisers are "repeaters".
Some ads, like the rentals or help wanted, are paid up front at flat rates, like \$8.50 for 20 words, but most are "commission ads" which means a seller can advertise for free, paying only when the item is sold. A sliding rate is charged based on the actual sales price, which is not necessarily the advertised price. The seller tells the magazine when it is sold.
This "honor system" works, according to Publisher Murphy. "We think most people are basically honest," he says. "We do not sense we are being 'taken' more than once a month, if that. When we do, and they repeat, we simply ask that they pay first."

There are 15 to 20 such publications in the U.S. and dozens of cheaper want ad papers. Murphy's type has its own national association; leaders are in Boston, Troy and Knoxville.
Murphy says, "We try to move with the times. We're on Internet now and are pretty well computerized inside. As a subscriber, we can pull in ads for you from all over. We'll display exactly what you are looking for, say a '67 Chevy at a certain price."
And that Burmese python? Actually, there are two, a boy and a girl, "ready for breeding." Or how about a "Blue and gold Macaw, hand-fed, 6 mos. old, starting to talk, w/cage, \$1300?" Or a pot bellied pig, black, male, litter-trained, loves cats, \$100?"
Now you see why Paper Shop has some readers who have no intention of buying anything - they just like to read the ads!

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