



The Free Congress Commentary

The Next Conservatism #31: The Next Conservatism and Race

By Paul M. Weyrich

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The race issue is the elephant in America's living room. We all wish it wasn't there but it's too big to ignore. So what should the next conservatism say about race?

Of course, the cultural Marxism we know as Political Correctness tells us we can't say anything. It argues that only blacks can say anything about the race issue, and even then blacks are only allowed to spout the party line. Political Correctness defines any conservative black as "white." It says the same thing about "women's issues." Only Feminist women are allowed to have a say.

This is baloney. America's race problem affects us all, blacks, whites, Asians and Hispanics. As conservatives, we cannot ignore it. Nor can blacks, who suffer more than anyone else from the failure of past policies.

The next conservatism attempts to look down the road to see where we need to go in the future. I think that on race, our starting point needs to be a realization that the civil rights era is over. The main problem facing American blacks is not white racism or discrimination. In fact, under "affirmative action" it is whites and Asians who are discriminated against. The main problem facing blacks is a cultural breakdown within the urban black community, a breakdown that has had tragic effects in terms of crime, drug use, illegitimacy, abortion and an unwillingness of too many young blacks to get a good education so they can join the American middle class.

Ironically, it is the values preached by the cultural Marxists in the 1960s that are mainly responsible for this breakdown. People like Herbert Marcuse preached a culture of instant gratification: "If it feels good, do it." Middle class white college kids "did it" in college, but then went on to law school and successful lives. In the ghetto, black kids just kept on doing it, resulting in the sort of values we hear in rap music and see in action in our inner cities. It has been an enormous national tragedy, one that has wasted countless lives.

It is important that we, as conservatives, remind ourselves and other Americans that it wasn't always like this. The black inner city of 50 or 60 years ago was not a bad place. Yes, it was largely poor and then blacks did suffer from outright discrimination, which was wrong. But the black community was not disordered. It

was not unsafe. The problems in black schools were the same as in white schools, running in the halls and talking in class. Children were not shot and killed on their way to or from school for their jacket or their shoes. As late as the 1950s, 80% of black children came home from school to a married mother and father. If you were white, you could walk through those neighborhoods in complete safety. The people you met there were friendly to you.

Fortunately, some courageous black leaders are beginning to address the real issue. They are pointing out to other blacks that the black community's current problems are a making of blacks' own behavior. They are addressing the culture of instant gratification that has spread so widely, especially among young blacks. They are telling their own people that they must recover their old culture, a culture where the black church was strong and blacks, like whites, followed solid middle class values, which start with delayed gratification.

This ties in directly with the next conservatism's rejection of multiculturalism. We recognize that America needs to have one common culture. That culture in turn needs to be based on middle class values that start with delayed gratification and include the merit of hard work, education, saving, lifetime marriage and strong families and the importance of God and church. Again, these were values the black community shared with whites only a few decades back. No one has ever known more sincere, self-sacrificing Christians than the black "church ladies" who were the backbone of the old black community.

So it seems to me that the next conservatism's position on race needs two elements. First, we will not fall for the line that America's racial problem is white racism. That was true once but it isn't any more. Most whites wish blacks well.

Second, we need to make it clear that we will support in any way we can the black community's efforts to recover from its own cultural collapse, a collapse springing from the disastrous era of the late 1960s, which of course affected many whites as well. It is vital for blacks and whites alike that blacks, especially black young people, adopt sound, functional middle class values. Again, the same is true for young whites, and Hispanics and Asians (it is precisely these values which enable Asians to do so well.)

Our goal, as conservatives, is the same as the goal of the civil rights movement of the 1940s and 50s: an America where skin color is merely incidental, a country where blacks, whites and everyone else has equal opportunity to live prosperous, safe, middle class lives. It is appropriate that the next conservatism should point out that in order to move forward, we need to look back and recover good things from the past that we have lost. That is true in many areas, for blacks and whites alike.

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