

A new morning of race in America

Written by Joseph C. Phillips

Thursday, 05 November 2009 15:30

On the issue of race in America there is something in the air. Shakespeare's melancholy Dane might say it is the "scent of morning;" our president would call it a "teaching moment."

A lawsuit filed in the district court of East St. Louis alleges that Mayor Alvin Parks and City manager Robert Becks refused to hire Ronald Grimming, a former top commander of the Illinois State Police and former Director of the Florida Highway Patrol as the city's police chief because he is white.

Plaintiffs Wyatt Frazer and Della Murphy, former members of the Police, Fire and Civil Service board, allege that shortly after Parks was elected he let his bias be known rejecting their recommendation of Grimming because in his words, "the city was not ready to hire a white police chief." At Parks' recommendation the city later hired Michael Braxton, a Black candidate with considerably less experience. Braxton resigned earlier this year following allegations that he has mishandled murder cases and engaged in race-based hiring practices.

Frazer and Murphy further claim that for their advocacy of white candidates for other jobs in the municipality they were forced off the board.

The two had better not hold their collective breaths waiting for an invite to the white house for a few brewskies with the President. The Obama administration is decidedly unsympathetic and in fact shares the opinion of the city of East St. Louis that Black interests are best served by Black (and undoubtedly democratic) representation.

Last year voters of Kinston, North Carolina – a city of 23 thousand residents -- voted overwhelmingly to remove party affiliations from ballots in their local elections for offices of mayor and city council. In their continuing effort to demonstrate to cowardly Americans what true racial courage looks like the Obama Justice Department stepped in and over-ruled the voters in mid October.

Registered Black voters in Kinston outnumber whites; however, whites tend to vote in larger numbers. (The Obama election was the exception bringing thousands of Black voters to the polls for the first time.) The justice department therefore argues that Blacks must still be viewed as a minority for "analytical purposes." They further argue that because whites will only vote for Black candidates if they are Democrats the net effect of removing party affiliations is to deny Black voters representation of their choice, which the DOJ believes are only Black and only Democrat.

Irony is apparently a strong suit of this Justice Department. Officials claim to be protecting the free choice of Black voters while tacitly ignoring the choice they made by a 2-1 margin to do away with party affiliations. The decision is more troubling, however, in that it seems to put the United States Government in the position of attempting to guarantee that the "choices" of Black voters win elections. As civil rights commissioner Abigail Thernstrom rightly points out the Civil Rights Act was never intended to be a guarantee that ones choice of candidate would be victorious.

The opinion that only Black Democrats can represent Black people is shared by the Maryland chapter of the NAACP, which has asked that the state legislature strip the Governor of the right

A new morning of race in America

Written by Joseph C. Phillips

Thursday, 05 November 2009 15:30

to name a successor as Mayor of Baltimore should current Baltimore mayor Sheila Dixon be found guilty of any of the nine charges of theft and perjury she faces.

Marvin Cheatham, President of the Baltimore Chapter expressed his concern: "Here you have a predominantly African American city. What if the governor appointed somebody white? ... Would he appoint someone Irish to be the mayor?" Would he indeed?! And will the Obama Justice Department act on behalf of the minority white citizens of Baltimore to ensure that they receive representation of their choice?

The specter of the nation's oldest civil rights organization requesting that the state legislature run interference for them so that they might discriminate based on race should give all of us pause to consider if we have not entered into a Ray Bradbury novel.

We might also consider that if America is ever to move beyond race -- which is to say if the dream of America is ever to become a reality -- we must fully embrace the principle of racial non-discrimination. The way forward does not lie through proportional representation and/or the political use of government power to pick winners and losers.

Yes, there is indeed something in the air. What the new morning brings and whether or not we learn the appropriate lessons remains to be seen.

Joseph C. Phillips is the author of "He Talk Like a White Boy" available where ever books are sold.