



The New Front of Racism

by Shekhar Deshpande

Just when we thought we were done dealing with the report on U. S. Immigration Reform (Editorial and Media Column, October 1994), Proposition 187 in California has descended upon us.

In one of the most sweeping measures to restrict the activities and benefits of illegal immigrants, Proposition 187 breaks new ground in legislating racism in this country.

Some of the provisions of the Proposition 187 are draconian. It eliminates educational benefits for children of illegal immigrants. If children are found not to have legal immigration papers on them, they will be expelled from schools. For those who care about human rights, elementary education for children is one of the primary human rights in the 1947 U. N. Declaration and the more recent Declaration on the Rights of Children, loudly pushed by U.S. governments, mind you.

Then there is common sense logic that meets a wall of unreason here. If the immigrants are here illegally, and if their children are in school, it is quite obvious that they have been around here for a while and that their parents must have some income outside of the "inheritance" that they brought with them!

The Conservative Republicans who want to watch over these "generous handouts" are no doubt thinking of creating a bureaucracy. But it is not the kind that collects taxes and promotes general welfare of the poor and the underserved. They have finally found a bureaucracy they like!

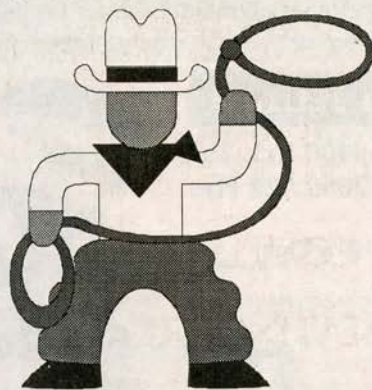
The proposition also denies health care to immigrants without proper documents. Again, this is emergency health care denied to those who absolutely need it. What is easy to watch? The emergency rooms of hospitals, where people are brought in pain and suffering, perhaps unconscious, or the already present mechanisms of employer registries?

In the meantime, the governor of California is riding high on this proposition and the Right is gearing up to learn imitative lessons

from it. The democratic candidate, Kathleen Brown and her co-travelers throughout the country are more concerned with how Pete Wilson forgot the problems associated with illegal immigrants all this time. They have not raised voices about how inhuman and ludicrous this proposition is.

It is the politicians and the members of the class that they hobnob with that need illegal immigrants more than the middle class people who are going to vote against this imaginary ghost. The richest candidate in California's history, Michael Huffington has admitted that he (or was it his wife?) employed a nanny who was living (mind you living here in this country, she was not chased out of her home in Mexico!) illegally.

Oh, well. Just because we don't give her children free elementary education and emergency health care does not mean she can not take care of our children. Come on wiseguys, cough up your hypocrisy and face up to challenges of integrity. Stop the illegal immigration where you must, but don't deny them fundamental human rights once they are here and living amongst you, saving you from IRS and saving your children from the terrifying insecurities of the nannies who are legal and maybe citizens.



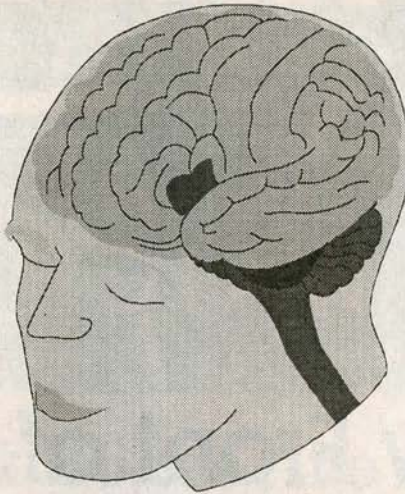
The Bell Curve

It is amusing to watch the Right wing in this country. They serve up some good concrete examples of historical follies and contradictions. Those who advocate free market capitalism and no government interference in the economic lives of the public are intent on swallowing their tongues when it comes to issues of morality and values. They want to legislate everything except the license to kill in economic warfare. And, over the years, they have amassed an army of intellectuals, experts and similar pontificators to endorse the ideas of legislating morality and values.

Take a look at the special issues of newsweeklies, op-ed pages, talk show interviews and other respectable spaces of intellectual discourse these days, and you will discover that race, I.Q. tests and debates on national priorities in education are present everywhere. All of this is thanks to a book by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray called *The Bell Curve*.

While we will discuss the promise (or lack) of the book later in these pages, it is instructive to know now that the book repeats an old nugget of wisdom that I.Q. tests of different races indicate that African Americans (among others) rank lower in intelligence than their smarter white counterparts.

Let us not ask any valid questions now, such as: why I.Q. tests, who devised them, and why are



they applied to different social groups indiscriminately and so on? Let us not doubt the wisdom of these authors in producing such "scholarly" study in an articulate way about an issue that seemed "settled" a while ago in its racist formulations. Let us assume, just for the heck of it, against all the pressures of conscience, that the I.Q. tests of African Americans and white Anglo-Saxons are different and that our African American brothers did not do very well in them.

What are we going to do? Should we repeat again and again that those who did not do very well are not good at it? Or, should we give them the tools to "rise up" to the challenge of doing well on tests that seem to be determined by social groups of their own distinction. Or, should we take away their welfare payments? Should we ask

their children to drop out of school? Should we deny them emergency health care? Should we ask them to "go back to where they came from"? Or lock them up in jail?

What kind of denigration of debate do we have to suffer because some guys come up with a study that instantly becomes a blockbuster in its media coverage. Remember, some equally ingenuous folks came up with a "sex survey" and that was lost in the space and time of coverage of this study of race and intelligence quotient.

The reason this study is getting such wide-spread attention in the media is that it re-presents the anxiety about the poor and "other" in a different, more rational manner. Even two kids playing around the corner from your house know this better. Once you set the rules to make you the winner, it is easy to beat the other guy over and over again. What is going on here is a war over definition of who the "other" race is.

Intelligent Quotient has baked in the minds of the supremacists very quickly. It served up the questions that people wanted to raise about social policy and set the terms so that the other guy would always lose. We will return to the finer points of their study later, for its authors have produced apologies and defenses for exactly such arguments. In the meantime, sharpen your I.Q. and keep your faith in your common sense.