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Burke blasts regression in civil rights

By Kevin Hanken

Former California Congresswoman Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, addressing a small group in the Nebraska Union Ballroom Wednesday night, stressed the existing pattern of achievement, then regression, regarding the civil rights and social status of blacks, women and minorities in this country.

Burke was the opening speaker of the Eighth Annual G.E. Hendricks Symposium, sponsored by UNL's Department of Political Science. The theme for this year's program is "Affirmative Action: Race, Sex and Inequality in America."

UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale, in welcoming Burke and her guests, said he, as a scholar and administrator, sees the symposium as an opportunity, to learn and participate in the Affirmative action program.

Burke, the Los Angeles Times' Woman of the Year, said she began her career with the 1960s' civil rights movement and can remember well the words of Martin Luther King: "Progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability."

"Tonight's subject is one that is indeed challenging, and these are challenging times," Burke said. "We can never assume that even though we have achieved gains in the areas of social rights that that will always be."

Burke cited the history of the black politician as an example. The black politicians of the Reconstruction era were more educated than President Lincoln, she said, but they were forced from the political scene by the "corrupt compromise" of President Hayes and Southern white politicians. Jim crowism, the deterioration of the 14th Amendment and an era without participation of blacks in the political process resulted, she said.

Today, 21 members of Congress are black, Burke said, so the black politician has seen a full cycle, from achievement to regression to achievement.

In 1925, two women served as state governors in the United States, but now women have been removed from the higher levels of the government, she said. Burke's election to Congress in 1972 made her the first female representative from California in 20 years, and the first

black woman representative ever.

Burke said she sees the Reagan administration's recent appointments of women to the government as a means of combating a 51 percent loss in the women's vote it incurred. Reagan is doing the kinds of things that will place women in the lower levels of government.

Burke called the appointments the type of "media campaigning" that top-level government personnel have mastered. The uninformed voter who is undecided at the polls will have access to literature stating that the Reagan administration has had more women in its government than any other government, Burke said, and it's those types of things that are decisive for that voter, not the real issues.

Education probably represents the one place where a closing gap between blacks and whites really exists, Burke said. There have been tremendous increases in the number of minorities entering college, she said. While that statistic has not decreased, there has been a slight reduction in their entrance to the medical and law schools, she added.

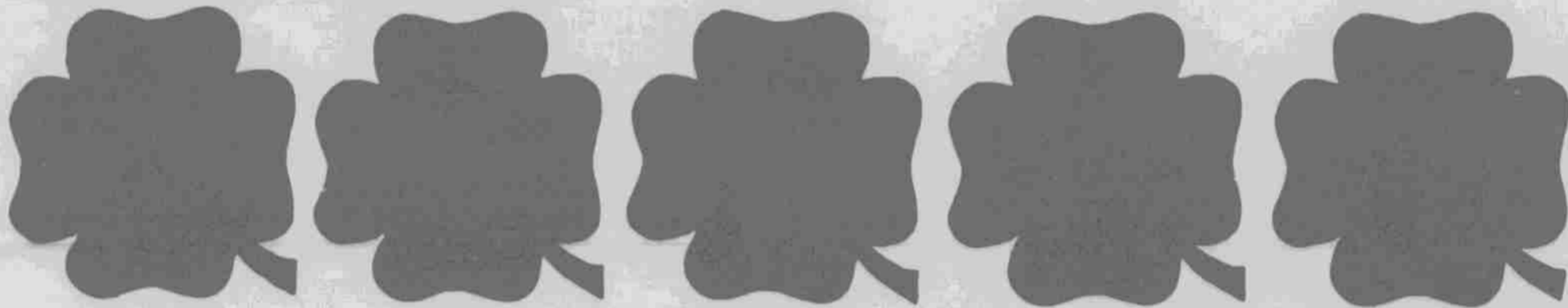
Burke said the economy and the cutbacks in financial aid, as well as the lack of commitment by many institutions to Affirmative Action, are to blame for those decreases.

If a white candidate who has been denied admittance into medical or law college sees a woman or a minority accepted, he blames affirmative action, Burke said. Those impressions hurt the program, she said.

Burke said that the government has a requirement to ensure a certain level of employment. It has the means of stimulating industry, she said, but instead, national tax and trade policies have pulled us away from using the American work forces.

Burke said she felt it was a national disgrace that a 33 percent unemployment rate in the steel industry could exist while the government imports as much steel as it does.

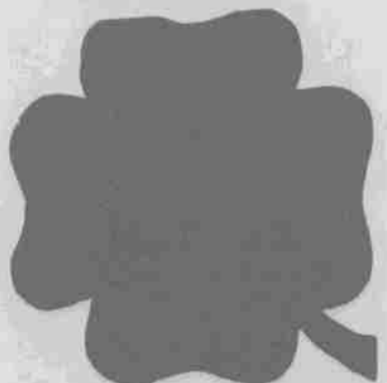
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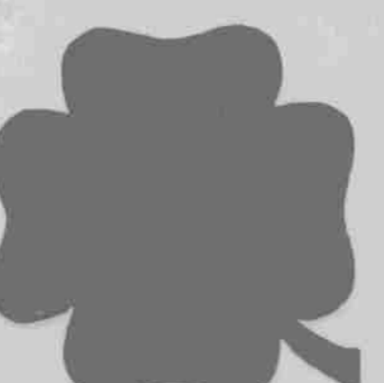
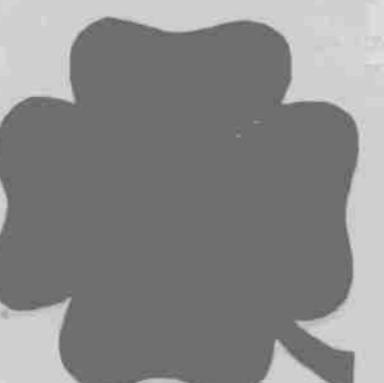
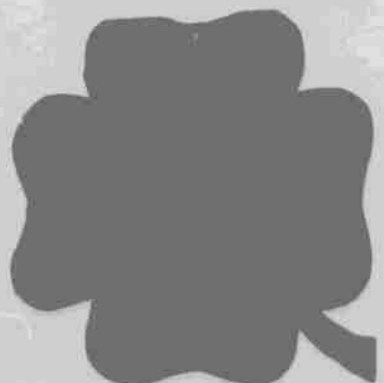
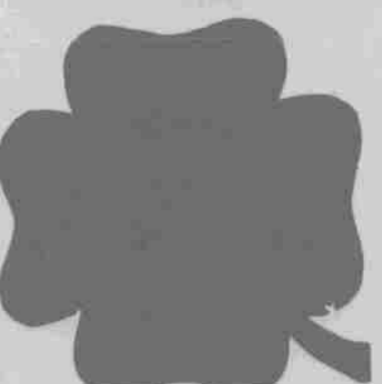
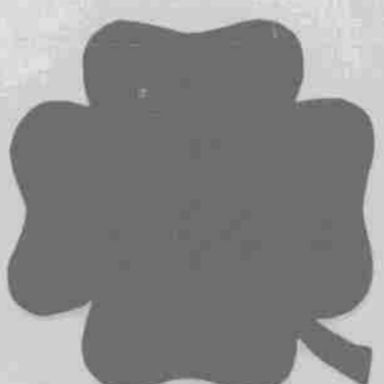
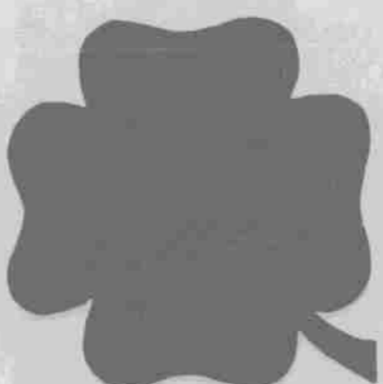
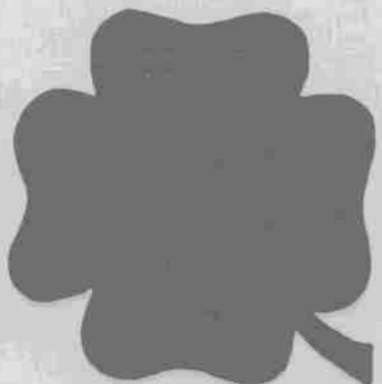
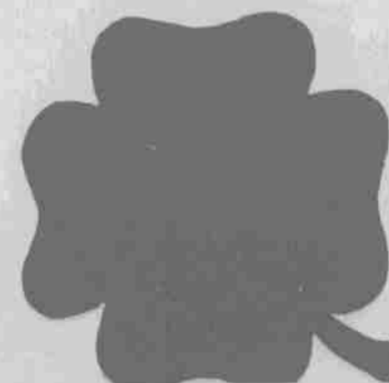
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