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Fighting institutionalized racism key, speaker says

BY ERIC RINEER
Staff writer

While the United States has done a great deal to achieve opportunities and equality for minorities, discrimination is still a problem in today's society, a civil rights official said.

Mary Frances Berry, chairwoman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, spoke to an audience in the Nebraska Union Tuesday about institutionalized racism.

One of the most obvious forms of institutionalized racism, Berry said, was school segregation.

Two-thirds of black and Latino school children attend segregated schools in cities like Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., Berry said.

Often, she said, children in these schools study from outdated textbooks.

"We need to do something to change the schools," Berry said.

Berry also touched on other education issues pertaining to institutionalized racism.

A particular concern for Berry, she said, was high schools in poor black neighborhoods that lack necessary resources for students to take advanced placement tests and SATs.

Many times, students apply to universities with high GPAs but are denied admittance because they were never aware of these tests, she said.

"Every state is required to give an adequate education to all kids," Berry said. "There is going to be a great battle in this country about this issue."

Berry said she expected non-whites to constitute the majority of the U.S. population in the 21st century.

Immigration from Asian and Latin American countries would ensure that, she said.

Further evidence of institutionalized racism, Berry said, existed in false statistical accounts concerning minority populations.

Berry said there was a common perception that more blacks were arrested or in jail than whites.

Berry said this was inconceivable because there are far more whites in the United States than blacks.

Another concern, she said, was that blacks ranging in ages from 18 to 34 are often unfairly targeted by police in poor neighborhoods.

"If you live in a high-crime neighborhood, you're more likely to be a target for arrest," she said. "We have to change white perceptions of African-Americans somehow."

Though much of the racism of today is less overt than that of the early part of the century, Berry said, recent examples of hate crimes indicate that racism is still alive and well in the United States.

During her speech, Berry said two examples that "old-fashioned" racism still existed were the recent killings of

Matt Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student, and James Byrd Jr., a black man from Jasper, Texas.

Though the two incidents reflect proof of ongoing racial tension in society, Berry said there was evidence, too, that blacks and whites have made progress in their relationships.

Berry said more blacks and whites are integrating than ever before. For example, she said, there is a major increase in interracial marriages.

But, she said, more work needs to be done to create equality for minorities.

"We always have work to do if we want to create a real opportunity society with liberty and justice for all."

Bryan Glover, a junior exercise major who attended the speech, said although he felt a great amount of racism still existed in the country, discrimination was much lower than in the past.

"I think as we age, we mature in our society," he said. "We become more aware of mistakes we made in the past."

Jeremy Moore, a senior health and physical education major, said, he, too, felt the country was improving race relations, but still needed to further that effort.

"The country is definitely making progress," he said. "But it's taking its sweet old time to do so."

"It's trying to be too politically correct about everything instead of just dealing with the problem head-on."

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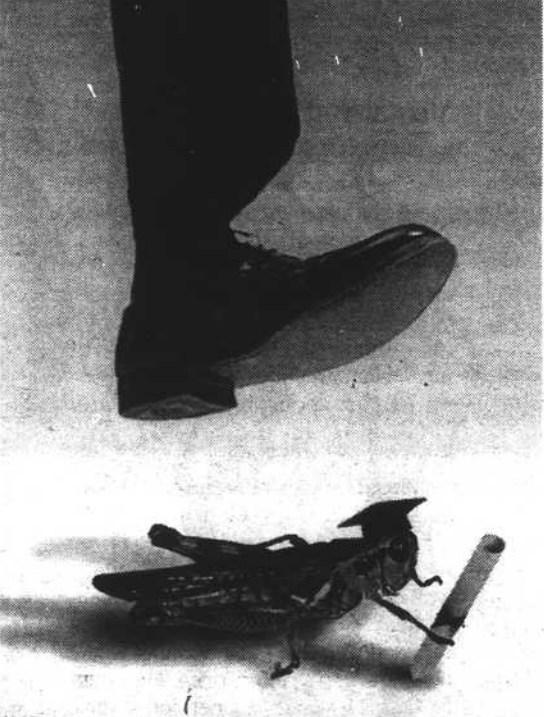
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