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Sunday, October 18, 2009

"The Spirituality of Teaching," with Assoc. Prof Amy Penne, Parkland College

Guest Host Don Nolen

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To whom it may concern, I attended last night's City Council meeting and listened to

A very calm and composed community composed of Afro-American, Caucasian, and people of Latin origin. The people there expressed their grief and exasperation over the loss of the life of a growing young adolescent named Kiwane Carrington. It appeared to me, that there was a general sentiment in the City Council meeting that the minority people living on Champaign's North end were living in fear of the Champaign Police due to repeated incidents of harassment and violence that Afro-American youngsters and teens had experienced on the North end to the point where one could say that these kid's basic human rights were being wantonly disregarded.

I would like to look at where this particular incident fits into the bigger picture of what is happening right now in America. By addressing this larger perspective, I in no way want to minimize this most significant incident involving Kiwane Carrington that stand alone on it's own as a poignant and brutal reminder that we still have a long way to go to achieve equality between the races.

First let me say that it is my opinion as well as the opinion of many leading economic forecasters, is that this country is poised at the precipice of another financial collapse of even greater proportions than the last one. Of course many would adamantly disagree with this assessment, and repeat the constant recitation that if we just "stay the course" the stock market will right itself and all will be merry again for the good old Red, white, and blue. I would ask you to look honestly at the true financial condition of this country without political or party bias.

First, our Stock Market is very fragile, and experts say that it will continue to be fragile and perhaps that it has not even been dealt it's strongest blows to this point.

During the campaign, Sen. Mclain lost credibility when he said that the basic structures of our economy were sound. That was a telltale sign that he was out of touch with the America that was working sixty hours a week, and barely scraping by, and the America that was barely scraping by before the financial crisis hit.

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Currently, leading financial analysts say that a new wave of home mortgage foreclosures is coming down the tunnel and will hit our financial institutions with more force. This time the major group to be affected will be the middle-class, the traditional "working class" of this country that is currently barely propping up our failing industries, corporation, and traditional workplaces.

The government is already strapped for money after the first bailout of the economy's financial and corporate institutions and industry's that form the backbone of our economy. The government is already strapped for money after the first bailouts to banks and "old money" financial institutions that the government insisted were foundational in keeping this country from floating away into a sea of debt. It is important to stop and remember one very important point that our county came to during this time when politicians were arguing for the imperative need to bailout the people who were sucking the working and lower classes dry with easy credit that ended up to have soaring interest rates that put people out of their homes and into the streets. "Into the streets". Doesn't that sound vaguely familiar...people in survival mode, out on the street fighting for economic justice and opportunity while....drum roll....the Nation Guard came out to quell the violence of those fighting for racial equality and equal rights. Once again the government hastily reached a state of panic while insisting that the Senate and Congress approve the bailouts of traditional institutions that President Bush said had to survive. What was the government's threat: Martial Law...the government was actually going to go into a state of martial law if the Senate and House didn't approve the bailout. Now, finally we get back to the shooting of Kiwane Carrington. President Obama repeatedly mentioned the word "Main Street" during his run for the presidency. It was what he had to do. Americans get very irritated these days when potential political leaders mention the poor. The truth is that this financial crisis, like every financial downturn, hurts the lower third of our country's population much more than any other segment. Daniel Mudd, former Fannie CEO says: "When the market goes down, it's the folks who are the closest to the margin who — who get hurt first and longest every time." Where were the newspapers, the television reporters, the political activists with camcorders and rolls of film available to catch the suicides, the family massacres when the Sheriff showed up to evict a poor or minority family from their home and back on the street, where they had to take refuge in tents, abandoned building, the kindness of strangers for a night or two, and the reality that the American Dream was not meant for them and probably never would be. The media failed us! Again! What was the Government so scared of, it was scared of a reality that American citizens have been to believe doesn't exist.

Ask the average American if there is starvation in this country—in Champaign-Urbana. Ask the average citizen if there are homeless families of babies, small toddlers, single mothers wandering the streets at night looking for a place to find refuge from the cold and the police who seem to somehow be intent on harvesting the streets of those "unsightly, desperate souls who are struggling to just stay alive and obtain the basic human necessities to do so. I told my friends and acquaintances once upon a time several years ago that when I was working as a teacher's Aid at Columbia School in Champaign, I saw something that brought me for a second into the reality of the kids that go to school in the Afro-American neighborhoods of Champaign. I was working in the lunch room one day, and I noticed that the school cafeteria worker gave one kid two hamburgers instead of one. I hardly noticed the occurrence, but the woman who was distributing the food for the kids must have thought that I had seen her do this and had known it was against the rules of the school to do this.

She nervously explained to me that she gave the child one more hamburger than the others because she knew the child, and she knew that this was the only meal he would get all day. I told people about the incident, and was consistently met with utter disbelief from everyone I talked to. That is right. A kid going to school everyday in Champaign-Urbana who was basically trying to survive on the lunches he received at school. One wonders what other necessities he lacked in order for him to function successfully at school. Hunger, think about it. Now go back to the government's panicky call for a military state if the bailout deal didn't go through. What did they know that we don't know. Do they know that the pot is about to boil over? Do they know that a people can only be pressed so far before they "take to the street" where violence always begets violence. What effect is television having on us? What effect does the evening news have on us?

What aren't they telling us about how the financial crisis has crushed minority and poor neighborhoods until they are almost decimated with a few families desperately trying to hang on to some kind of normalcy. Do they show us how have the images of African-Americans displayed in movies effected our perceptions of blacks. Why are we so afraid to venture out of technological fortresses and playgrounds to actually "SEE" what is going on in reality played on some radio program that makes us feel so

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comfortable that everything is all right here in the good old U.S. of A. The government knew that a particular segment of the lower classes in this was suffering poverty so bad, that like back in the 60's and 70's the middle simply could not hold anymore.

What does it mean when a whole generation of kids face racial profiling, guns, mace, tasers, and night sticks that have killed so many youth in Chicago. What message does it send to these kids that no one cares or even know what injustices and privations they are suffering every day. When Police Officers are investigated by fellow law enforcement officials that give hand-slaps to each other while a young Afro-American adolescent lies in the cold ground with his weeping mother, and sister, and brothers, standing there in front of the boys grave asking themselves over and over again the question, "Why" Why, we have been sold a bill of goods by the same people pretend to be so heart-felt honest in their compassion for the poor only to find out that their hand is in the till. The poor get the raw end of the deal, even when funds are allocated for their benefit. What is the connection between Police Officers that brazenly take the law into their own hands and those legislators who write up the fraudulent laws that increase the Polices' ability to use violent and abusive force. Is it eventually going to be OK to use violence to quell the anger, desperation, and the cries of suffering from a class that has in effect lost it's status as American citizens while the still get richer and the poor still get poorer? Are the police eventually going to be encouraged to take the law into their own hands as vigilantes of violenc and greed as an entire generation of poor and minorities get caught in the crossfire of those who call them lazy, violent, useless and a people who have lost their right to the American Dream?

Selective perception, that is where it starts. It goes back all the way to the story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible. The Pharisee in the parable looked the other way in the story. Perhaps he too had been conditioned only to see the special people, the beautiful people, the luxuries that people strive for as they go in total denial that people in the same city they are lying in a heap of warmed-over death waiting to happen.

I will tell you a personal story in closing that illustrates my point that there are just certain realities in our country that we are virtually forbidden to see. I was writing a story about the closing of the big, Housing Authority high-rises that lines the south side of route 90-94 through the south end of Chicago. I had seen this area in the daytime and it seemed like a reasonably livable environment. But, to get the whole story in what I was trying to write I wanted to catch a glimpse of this neighborhood at nigh-the dead of night.Well, it was anything but that—dead. In fact the population at this hour swell to about three times as many people who had been there all day sleeping on the street, on benches. On the sidewalk, anyplace they could find refuge. Now, thei9r day began. The people that I didn't even notice during the day, were still there when all the pretty, rich, beautiful people had gone home to the suburbs and the comfort of their TV sets.I di8dn't see them. I honestly did not see these people during the daytime when all the people that I had been "conditioned" to look at were all gone away. I saw a man with a stump of a leg with blood leaking out of it. I saw hundred abd hundred of people pushing shopping carts and carrying two by fours for protection. Where had these people been when I passed by this neighborhood in the day? They had been there all along.....

Posted by Will Clark on 10/22 at 12:50 AM

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