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America's Ethnic Achilles' Heel

By Yuji Aida

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us / To see oursels as others see us! — Robert Burns (1786)

[The editors of the *San Francisco Examiner* gave this brief preface to the article which we second: *This article is indicative of an influential minority viewpoint in Japan which some people may find offensive. We publish it to illustrate what is being said there.*]

TOKYO — Americans are proud of their melting-pot heritage. But as blacks, Hispanics and Asians gradually come to outnumber whites, that ideal will fade. Like the Soviet Union today the United States will have to deal with contentious ethnic groups demanding greater autonomy and even political independence. That could prove to be industrial America's undoing.

Many Americans, however, feign ignorance of the problem, partly because of the official ideology. The United States sees itself as a pluralistic, multiethnic society with a single national identity based on the principles of freedom and democracy. In fact, discrimination is rampant, but the illusion of equality is vital to maintain a sense of unity.

Nonetheless, it is only a matter of time before U.S. minority groups espouse self-determination in some form. When that happens, the country may become ungovernable.

Today, non-white groups are challenging the traditional order. Within the next 100 years, and probably much sooner, most Americans will be people of color. For the first time since the United States came into being, Caucasians will be a minority. Illiteracy may become widespread, and many Americans will not speak standard English.

Japan, too, faces major changes. A graying economic superpower, it may be a society of old people by the early 21st century. Because of our low birth rate, we might have to admit more foreign workers, skilled and unskilled, to provide basic services and keep the factories running. But these problems pale in comparison with the upheaval threatened by America's demographic evolution.

Do blacks and Hispanics, for instance, have the skills and knowledge to run an advanced industrial economy? If the answer is yes, America will maintain its vitality through the next century and beyond. But I'm skeptical.

To compete in a high-tech age dominated by microelectronics requires a disciplined, well-trained labor force. Brilliant inventors and innovative engineers are not enough. Workers themselves must be highly motivated and equipped to meet the stringent norms of standardization imposed by precision-perfect high-tech manufacturing.

Blue-collar employees have to work steadily, day in and day out, at jobs requiring great concentration and manual dexterity. They must continually hone skills and improve personal performance and products through quality control.

Unfortunately, relatively few national groups meet these exacting requirements. I doubt that many African or Latin-American countries, for instance, will become high-tech societies in the foreseeable future.

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The history of industrialization holds important lessons for the United States. As African Americans and Hispanics gradually replace whites in the labor force, management positions and public administration, they will become responsible for corporate America. Do they have the right stuff?

Idealistic Americans say yes. They insist that if scholastic attainment, living standards and social status

improve, blacks, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans will be capable of assuming this burden.

Many Japanese intellectuals appear to agree, either because they believe in equality or are afraid of being labeled racists.

I would like to be optimistic, but frankly, the experience of the last 500 years leaves little room for hope. Blacks and Hispanics will not be able to run a complex industrial society like the United States unless they dramatically raise their sights and standards in the next 40 years.

Burdened with a handicap of this magnitude, how will the United States cope? Personally, I believe America's best bet for continued prosperity is to concentrate on those high-tech industries in which it has comparative advantage and revitalize the economy by developing agriculture.

With its vast human and technological resources, the United States could become a premier agrarian power — a giant version of Denmark, for example — and the breadbasket of the world. ■

The Consequences of Multiculturalism

The Associated Press reported on December 19, 1995 that at Fresno, California a Southeast Asian shaman who had a puppy clubbed to death in the belief the sacrifice would cure his sick wife is fighting animal-cruelty charges on the grounds of religious freedom.

Chia Thai Moua, 46, pleaded no contest to cruelty to animals. However, the Hmong immigrant will be allowed to withdraw the plea if he wins an appeal of a judge's refusal to allow a freedom-of-religion defense.

"The District Attorney conceded this was done for religious purposes, but without that defense we stood little chance in front of a jury," said Moua's lawyer, Richard Ciummo. "If it was a chicken, that would be one thing. But he killed a dog, a puppy. He didn't understand that to Americans, that's like family."

Prosecutor Rhonda Duncan said, "Yes, we have religious freedom in this country, but everything is subject to limitations."

Shamans among the Hmong, who came to this country from the highlands of Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War, believe a dog can use its night vision and keen sense of smell to track down evil spirits and can barter for a sick person's lost soul.

"We love dogs. They are a very dear pet to us, too," said Shur Vangyi, a Fresno deputy city manager for Southeast Asian affairs. "But sometimes we have to kill dogs to cure our souls."

Moua said he had a relative kill the 3-month-old German shepherd on his front porch only after two years of other rituals, including burning of money and sacrificing chickens and a pig, failed to help his wife, a diabetic. The ritual included the chants of the Laotian highlands.

It's not the first sharp cultural difference between the local Hmong community and other residents of Fresno, a conservative farm community.

In 1990, nine Hmong children died of measles after their parents consulted shamans and waited until the children were in cardiac arrest before taking them to a hospital.

That same year, the parents of a 6-year-old Hmong boy ignored court orders to let doctors operate on his club feet. A shaman told the family that the handicap was meant to atone for an ancestor's sins and that surgery would bring those sins on the next generation.

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Do We Really Need Guest Farmworkers?

An Open Letter to Representative Elton Gallegly

By Linda Thom

I understand that you support a guest worker program. I hope to convince you that such a proposal is a bad idea for the people you represent in Ventura County. I do not know much about agriculture but I do know a great deal about immigration and its effects on California. The facts are abundant and clear.

Immigrant agricultural workers are poor. Many have moved here with their families and have a significant negative socio-economic impact on the communities where they work and reside. Your neighboring county to the north, Santa Barbara, is where I live and work. I am a budget analyst in the Office of the Santa Barbara County Administrator. While I do not speak for Santa Barbara County, I do have access to data and I do understand public finance and public programs. This letter contains data on Ventura, Santa Barbara, Monterey and Tulare Counties because they all have large agricultural industries. Obviously I have more data from Santa Barbara County available to me.

Is There a Shortage of Farmworkers?

First, I repeatedly hear that a shortage of farmworkers exists. Perhaps growers in Ventura are telling you that we need a guest worker program because there are not enough farmworkers. There is, in fact, an abundance of farmworkers in Ventura County. Santa Barbara County Job Training Network recently received a Job Training Partnership Act grant of \$511,605. The purpose is to retrain farmworkers for the tri-counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. The application states in part, "Since IRCA was passed in 1986 the ranks of farmworkers has dramatically increased. ...The population eligible to receive these benefits [unemployment

insurance] is estimated to exceed 76,500 workers [in the tri-counties]."

As the grant is for \$511,605 to retrain 84 farmworkers, the cost is \$6,091 per worker. To retrain all 76,500 workers in the three counties would, therefore, cost \$466 million and that is just three counties in the whole nation. I understand from the Center for Immigration Studies that the Department of Labor has \$82 million available nationally to retrain unemployed agricultural workers. If there are 76,500 unemployed farmworkers in three counties and only \$82 million to retrain farmworkers for the whole nation, why would we want to add more guestworkers to the current oversupply of farm labor helping to insure the continued unemployment of the people who already live here?

As you may know, in Santa Barbara County the majority of labor-intensive agriculture is in the Santa Maria Valley, and the biggest employers of seasonal labor are the strawberry growers. Currently, broccoli, strawberries, grapes and avocados are Santa Barbara's top crops. All these crops are labor intensive and most of it is seasonal. In an April 1993 survey of growers conducted by the University of California Cooperative Extension Service and published in *Central Coast Agriculture Highlights*, the harvest rates ranged between \$4.50 and \$5.00 per hour for strawberry pickers. If a worker was employed full time at \$5 per hour, his or her annual earnings would be \$10,400. These workers are not employed full time, however. They are seasonal.

The article on wages also stated, "More important, growers also indicated the labor problems encountered: 1. high turnover (33%); 2. insubordination (22%); 3. higher unemployment tax rates (22%); 4. absenteeism