

points of view

Holidays spotlight cultural diversity

I LOVE GETTING Christmas cards from the Steins. It reminds me that "culturally diverse" doesn't have to mean "culturally divisive."

OK, so maybe technically it wasn't a "Christmas" card. It showed bundled-up kids skating on a frozen pond and the greeting read: "Wishing you a special holiday season and a bright and happy New Year!"

But it was the thought that counted. Friends' sending greetings to friends at a time of year that is supposed to emphasize good will, no matter what your cultural or religious background.

And in a country that does contain people from so many different backgrounds, there is much to share. It's too bad we can't emphasize that instead of one group trying to pretend that another does not exist.

When the third grader's school had its "International Day" last year, it was a marvelous display of "cultural diversity." Kids dressed in the fashions of their particular ethnic or cultural background operated booths



Jack Gladden

selling foods from India, Japan, The Philippines, the Middle East, China, Germany, Ireland — you name it.

IT WAS A celebration of all the rich traditions that had come together in just that one small school. And everyone who attended had a great time sharing their cultural traditions with people from different backgrounds.

That's a much better approach than what has become an annual rite this time of year — public officials bowing to pressure from divisive elements and refusing to allow a Christmas tree or a menorah anywhere close to a public building.

In New York City this year several people pointed out that the Christmas card that had graced Rocke-

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seller Center for the past three years appeared to be all white and all male. Instead of creating a nuxus, center officials took a second look and agreed.

The corps of six cadets now includes an Asian drummer girl, a blonde drummerette, a Hispanic man and an African drummer. That's much more representative of American society today, but it also doesn't pretend that Christmas is not a part of that society.

IN EAST LANSING a few years ago, our family and our next door

neighbors, the Steins, established our own edible gift exchange. They would bring over a plate of potato latkes from their Hanukkah dinner and we'd deliver a platter of Christmas fruitcake to them. I think we got the better deal.

Some other friends in that liberal community displayed an advent calendar alongside the menorah on their mantel — not because they had been proselytized but because both items were symbolic of what is truly a culturally diverse holiday season in America.

And for Christmas one year, someone gave my son a dreidel, along with a book explaining its history and significance.

In the country like this, with so many rich traditions from which we can learn, it's a shame to focus on separating our differences instead of sharing them. That's why I like getting Christmas cards from the Steins.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Government fails to 'cure' poverty



Tim Richard

"I THOUGHT of you when I saw this," said U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell over coffee the other day.

Pursell, R-Plymouth, gave me a report by the House Wednesday Group, 35 Republicans who join by invitation. Pursell is a member as was his predecessor, Mary Eash. So are two rising members of the Michigan delegation, Paul Henry of Grand Rapids and Fred Upton of St. Joseph.

What made Pursell think of me was my continuing columns starting in late 1982 on the relationship between the growing welfare rolls and the growing proportion of out-of-wedlock births.

In 1986, when Gov. James Blanchard was trumpeting about 600,000 new jobs, I crunched the numbers and made an astounding discovery: About half of those jobs were filled by the officially unemployed, but there was hardly a dent in the number on AFDC or general assistance.

The inescapable conclusion was that the welfare rolls have a life of their own and aren't reduced by prosperity.

FINALLY HOUSE Republicans in Washington are catching up.

"Choices made by individuals — especially regarding marriage and work — are a major contributing factor to poverty rates," said a key conclusion.

In other words, governmental programs and the economy have little to do with it.

Governmental programs failed to cure the problem because: "Between 1980 and 1991, spending in this category increased from \$562 to \$592 billion in constant 1989 dollars, an increase of \$30 billion or nearly 5 percent in 11 years."

And all the while, some folks were saying Reagan cut those programs. My, my.

THE CONNECTION between poverty and out-of-wedlock births is more stunning than even I had imagined, said the Wednesday Group.

"The poverty rate for female-headed families with children has averaged around 44 percent since 1970. By contrast, the poverty rate for married-couple families has hovered around 6 or 7 percent in most years."

"So the risk of being poor is increased by a factor of at least six for persons living in female-headed families. It follows that if relatively more families are headed by females, the poverty rate will increase."

'The timeless injunctions of parents to their children turn out to be the keys to economic success.'

Female-headed families occur when there is (1) divorce and (2) out-of-wedlock births. The latter category is the bigger factor.

Out-of-wedlock birth rates are growing, soaring — for whites, 5.7 percent in 1970, 17.7 percent in 1988; for blacks, 37.6 percent in 1970, 63.5 percent in 1988.

The Wednesday Group is considering a revolutionary policy idea: "Place statutory limits on the length of time a welfare family may receive full benefits."

The costs are greater than just welfare. The Wednesday Group cites some Princeton research:

"On almost every outcome studied so far — delinquency and crime, school achievement, and college attendance — children raised without fathers are worse off than children raised with both parents."

THE RESEARCH on adults' decisions not to work is thicker and heavier going.

It takes various age groups of men in the population, shows how many were either working, going to school or in the military in 1940, then compares that to 1980's returns.

In a nutshell, more men are choosing not to work.

Government programs aren't the answer.

"The timeless injunctions of parents to their children turn out to be the keys to economic success: Stay out of trouble, don't have a baby before marriage, finish high school, get some training or education beyond high school, get married and stay married, and get a job and keep it."

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events.

Teachers mold our future leaders

YOU'VE HEARD THE saying: "Those who can do, those who can't teach." This fallacious saying should truly be: "Those who can't teach can still do almost anything else, because teaching is the world's most challenging job."

Oakland County teacher of the year Carol Cole of Birmingham majestically untaps her students' sense of discovery. Greg Cleveland of Rochester teaches innovative and nationally acclaimed government courses. Lynn Telford, my beleaguered wife, faithfully checks her Warren Consolidated Schools fifth graders' papers until 9 p.m. every night. When I think of them and thousands of other teachers like them, I'm proud to be part of the profession whose mission is to better prepare our future leaders.

Another saying advises: "If you can't teach, become an administrator." Given my background, I want to believe this one's wrong too. But for the sake of any truth it might hold, I'll extend its advice yet further: If you can't administrate, be a professor of education. If you can't profess, consult. If no one hires you, run for public office. If you lose, seek political appointment. If you have insufficient cash or connections



John Telford

to get appointed, run for office again.

AND AGAIN and again. If you're a deal-cutter or fence-sitter with a convenient memory, or the son of a prominent family, or you've dabbled in demagoguery, or you've been a show business personality, or you're rapidly handsome with a slickly packaged image and — above all — you lack relevant qualifications, chances are excellent you'll get elected sooner or later.

Consider the careers of Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, Ted Kennedy, Coleman Young recently, Ronald Reagan, David Duke, David Jaye and Dan Quayle. To knock Quayle is to belabor the obvious, but he's a prime specimen of a candidate chosen to run for the wrong reasons. George Bush should name him a deputy assistant undersecretary of something or other so he doesn't have to run with him again.)

... Preparing better leaders is crucially challenging. . . because in the coming century our schools' success or failure is going to determine the fate of the free world.

Once elected, you can appoint people less qualified or less ethical than you to high positions in your administration. (As precedent, note famous appointees Ken Weiner, John Mitchell, James Watt, Ed Meese, Clarence Thomas and Robert Gates.) Finally, after leaving office you can enter the ranks of those patriotic souls, the lobbyists.

SOMETIMES I'M tempted to nominate my smart and highly moral cat Samantha for the presidency. If elected, she would do as much good as some recent incumbents, and for less harm (except to the over-fed mice in the Capitol's corridors). Also her nomination would strike a blow for feminism and who knows? She might meow the Senate right out of existence and scratch in term limitations for some of our other perennial public servants.

I often think that anyone who covets an office enough to campaign for it should be disqualified on the spot. Maybe we ought to actually draft governmental leaders. But even if we did, they still wouldn't be much good if they were insufficiently educated.

Thus my initial premise: Preparing better leaders is crucially challenging. Greater Detroit and Michigan and all the rest of America must strive much harder to help teachers meet that challenge, because in the coming century our schools' success or failure is going to determine the fate of the free world. John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district.

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