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# NATIONAL REVIEW

## A Feminist Uses Statistics Like A Fish Uses A Bicycle

*Why Feminism's Vital Statistics Are Always Wrong*



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# NATIONAL REVIEW

## West



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## JIM CROW IN LOS ANGELES

SHAWN STEEL

**J**UST OVER a year ago, 250 Latino demonstrators marched into Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas's office and got into a shouting match with the black politician. They contended he had made derogatory remarks about Latinos, who, as it happens, make up a large share of his South Central district. Ridley-Thomas angrily denied the charges.

The confrontation offered vivid commentary on the precarious state of racial and ethnic relations in the 1990s. Decades of quota-oriented "affirmative action" programs have produced the bitter fruit critics have long predicted. The dangers were spelled out a few years back by Morris B. Abrams, then a member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission: "The premier civil rights issue of our day is whether to hold fast to the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection . . . or to sink into the mire of an ethnic spoils system . . . [guaranteed] to keep many ethnic groups locked in perpetual combat." The kind of combat that filled Ridley-Thomas's office with protesters.

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Appropriately, Mr. Ridley-Thomas himself is a quota booster. His most recent blow on behalf of race-fixation came at the L.A. Fire Department. He got the council to hold up all promotions and all new hires on the grounds that, despite aggressive quota programs, affirmative-action wasn't being pursued with enough vigor. Now the City Council is essentially micromanaging every major phase of Fire Department personnel policy—with disastrous results.

Because of the color of their skin, more than 5,000 Caucasian applicants were prohibited from taking L.A.'s firefighter exam earlier this year. Many of them had been waiting since 1987 to take the exam.

"My son has 2,500 volunteer hours with the Fire Department," said Nicole Minitello of Woodland Hills, whose twenty-year-old son, Frank, was barred from taking the test. "He works for an ambulance company and is a certified [emergency medical technician]. He wants to become a firefighter so badly but he can't. He's the wrong race."

Ben Epstein, 23, of Chatsworth, who was prohibited from taking the test, called the focus on race crazy. "If you're in a life-and-death situation you want the best-qualified person for the job. They're taking down thousands of qualified people just because of the color of their skin. Equal opportunity is all we're asking for—straight across the board. If they put someone with the same test scores against me and it's a minority, then fine, hire them. I'm for integration, but I just want the opportunity to go and take the test."

Whites who were locked out this year will be put on the list for the next test. But that could be years away, dashing many career hopes and plans.

The genesis of the new policy was a 1974 consent decree between the city and the Justice Department. Its long-range requirement was that the Fire Department eventually hire half of its recruits from minority groups. Progress has been made in that direction—the proportion of Caucasian firefighters has declined from 93 per cent in the 1970s to 67 per cent today. But not enough for the quota zealots. Thus the reverse discrimination.

Jim Crow is alive and well—and living in Los Angeles. Although with a

dicier job than before. What exactly constitutes a "minority" in this era, in multi-racial Los Angeles? A generation ago, a minority could be a Chicano, a black, or an Asian. Today, with the growing number of intermarriages, the equation is in flux. My Asian wife of 12 years and I have two lovely mixed-race children: Are they officially sanctioned "minorities"?

When I asked a city personnel official how my children ought to identify themselves if they were to apply to become firefighters, the official said they should apply as Asians rather than Caucasians. When I asked if people from Persia were a legitimate minority, the reply was they're considered Caucasian. The city calls Arab-Americans and people from India Caucasian too.

Defining "minority" has become a task requiring the fine touch of a watchmaker and the arbitrariness of an old-style Soviet apparatchik. That's bad news for quotamongers like Ridley-Thomas who are becoming dinosaurs in the evolving Los Angeles, in a California that now produces more interracial marriages than any other state. As ethnic and cultural melding accelerates, the usefulness of racial quotas fades.

Yet reverse discrimination manages

to march on and on. Quotas in college admissions are in full swing in California, with their condescending implication that the supposed beneficiaries aren't up to the challenges of rigorous academic standards. Quotas in public-works contracts are widespread, and equally pernicious, raising costs by limiting competition, and freezing out companies that aren't "racially correct," even if they're financially struggling.

As for the Fire Department, the equitable way to improve recruitment would be to let anyone take the test and judge everyone on merit alone. In a city as heterogeneous as L.A., there will be plenty of minority candidates to guarantee a diverse force.

One of the messages in Mayor Richard Riordan's election last year is that a growing number of voters respond to themes and policies that stretch across ethnic lines, that unite rather than divide, that address individuals as individuals, not as banner carriers for their particular ancestral groups. But the Los Angeles City Council hasn't yet caught up with the times; it should. Otherwise the city's diversity will continue to be more a dividing line than a strength. □

*Mr. Steel is a lawyer in Los Angeles.*

## Clinton v. Nevada

# FOOL'S GOLD

RAFAEL TAMMARIELLO

Nevada doesn't have three more duteous acolytes of the Clinton regime than Governor Bob Miller, Congressman James Bilbray, and Senator Harry Reid, all Democrats, naturally enough.

Yet, in recent weeks, it has dawned on these Silver State FOBs that slavish obedience to the Clintons is no protection against a President on a taxaholic tear.

Reid has kowtowed to the Clintonistas on taxes, on the Brady Bill, and on health care. Bilbray has been four-square in the President's corner on all important matters (with the exception

of NAFTA). And Miller is Nevada's Number One Clinton cheerleader; he spearheaded the Clinton-Gore campaign in the Silver State.

Miller's opponent in the September Democratic primary for the nomination for his seat is Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones, a solidly liberal feminist who—one assumes—would appeal naturally to the diversity-obsessed Clintons, especially Hillary.

But so devoted a Clinton supporter is Governor Miller that, when Hillary

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